



2020 Interim Program Report: January 1 - July 31, 2020 [Podcast accompaniment](#)

Introduction

2020, this most unparalleled year, has been so many things: challenging, rewarding, appalling, hopeful. In the midst of the pandemic and the racial injustice around us, the Circus Project has remained committed to our vision of using circus as a catalyst for personal and collective transformation.

In light of COVID-19 we closed our studio effective March 15th, and quickly pivoted to virtual programming. We transitioned our classes, training companies, and community partner programming to Zoom. We started offering free drop in classes every week night. We continue to support our community to stay active and connected during a time of extreme anxiety and isolation.

Now, in the waning days of summer, we're beginning the slow, phased process of opening our studio for private lessons and small group classes. Like so many organizations, businesses, and individuals, we're learning to adapt as we go. January innocence is long gone, and we're approaching the second half of the year guided by grit and passion. We will continue moving our bodies, making art, connecting our community, and supporting our students. We will continue to foster exuberant joy at a time when we need it most.

"The Circus Project is not just a place. It's a group of people, a culture, a collective movement. And it can be accessed anywhere. My healing can, and will, continue online until I can return."

— Student

Classes

When the studio closed, we initially transferred all of our classes to a virtual studio. Our administrative team and our coaching staff quickly learned what did and didn't work. We recognized the need to be nimble.

"A lot of us had roles that [used to be] pretty clearly defined... And now we need to be agile. That need to adapt really quickly has created all these like gray space needs. And so we're filling in those gray spaces together."

—Gwen O'Brien, Education Manager

We reformulated our online class roster, focusing on what worked -- ground disciplines and aerial theory classes. We phased out tumbling and many of the youth classes, due to screen burnout. We added new, virtual-specific classes, including youth contortion expansions and a juggling class.

Virtual classes had unique challenges and limitations, and raised a lot of questions:

- How do we stay connected as a community while we're online?
- How can we continue to be creative collaborators across the screen?
- How do we hold attention -- especially youth attention -- online?
- How can we ensure students have access to the space they need to participate in classes?
- What could we not see? What needs weren't being addressed?

And of course, there were technology issues to work through.

Moving to a virtual format also presented some exciting opportunities:

- We created new kinds of access to Circus Project classes -- we welcomed students from across the country & world into our virtual space (We now have students from Finland, Malaysia, Arizona, California, and more)!
- We found Innovative ways to collaborate, including telephone charades w/ kids, breakout room sequence building, parent-child partner acrobatics.

"I feel so fortunate that we were able to find you and that you've offered these classes this summer. It has made such an enormous difference for (my daughter) as we continue to hunker down and stay home as much as possible here in Arizona."

— Parent of "Circus Fitness for Kids" student

Enrollment

Totals

	Private lessons	Series Classes	Drop ins
January 1- March 15	328	104	48
March 16-July 31	231	104	63
Total	559	208 series. 1,248 total individual classes	111

Virtual class enrollment by payment tiers, May-July

	Youth	Adult
Tier 1 (\$20/\$35)	29%	38%

Tier 2 (\$40/\$75)	26%	24%
Tier 3 (\$60/\$115)	20%	20%
Tier 4 (\$80/\$175)	25%	18%
Total enrollments	80	282

Total unique students served:

Children: 110

Adults: 200

Seniors: 5

Pathways Partner programming

During winter term, Pathways offered programming at James John Elementary School through the Self Enhancement Inc (SEI) SUN program. When the pandemic started, we worked to move community partnerships online. In April, we continued online programming with SEI families through the SUN program. In March, and again in August, we did outside, socially distanced in-person circus demonstration and activities at NAYA Generations¹.

Total unique participants: 82

Partners: SEI, NAYA

Total students served in schools: 22

Total hours of programming in schools (winter term in person + spring term online): 18 hours

“[Pathways] offers a really unique kind of enrichment and that's really important for people's mental health. And it's important to make sure people still have access to that.”

— Rhen Miles, Pathways Manager

Scholarships

We offer scholarships for public classes and training companies. Voice Project private lessons and group classes, and additional Pathways private lessons are offered tuition-free. January - July scholarships are detailed below:

¹ NAYA Generations is an intergenerational, cooperative community designed to support families of foster children by promoting permanency, community and caring relationships, while offering a safe and meaningful purpose in the daily lives of older adults

Programming	Scholarships
Public series classes, in-person and then virtual	\$30,680
Pathways private lessons	\$1,440
Voice Project private lessons	\$9,600
Voice Project group classes	\$10,800
Elements	\$3,150
Brio	\$9,090
YSI	\$350
TOTAL	\$65,110

The Voice Project

In January, the Voice Project launched its second year. The first several months of the program are strongly rooted in developing group dynamics and norms. In March, when the pandemic started, Uprise Collective had just facilitated a conversation around activism and liberation, and what it looks like in the context of participants’ own identities. The group had created their own set of agreements for navigating these conversations. This groundwork was fuel for group connection, and served to support the healing process as well as to influence the artistic process. When the pandemic started, participants experienced exacerbated challenges around the change in schedule, the lack of consistency, and the loss of employment. The group has continued to meet and train; and is exploring new ways of collaboration and engagement.

Total Voice Project programming hours

	Private lessons	Group classes
January-March	72 hours	48 hours
April-July	48 hours	24 hours
TOTAL	120 hours	72 hours

Total unique students: 6

“Circus is the thing that’s holding me together right now.”

— Voice Project student

Elements

Elements is the Circus Project’s adult training company. In February, Elements head Coach Nicolo Kerhwald transitioned away from the Circus Project to pursue a new career. Jack StockLynn took on the Elements Manager role through the completion of the program in June.

Typically, Elements has a culminating performance in June, but in the pandemic context, it wasn’t safe or possible to do so. In its place, the program culminating experience was a series of professional development workshops designed to give students guidance about how to develop a circus career. The speaker lineup included:

- Elsie Smith, one of the founders of the New England Center for Circus Arts (NECCA), presented her own professional circus career.
- Four sessions with a Pacific Northwest Physical Therapist on body mechanics and optimal movement patterns.
- Jacki Ward Kerhwald, Circus Project Communications Manager, spoke about building a professional website.
- A professional photographer presented on how to model, and did a socially distanced photo shoot.
- Jack StockLynn presented on stage makeup.

“There were humorous moments of pets showing up. One of the students had a cat and sometimes he would walk around and quietly judge from the corner...”

—Jack StockLynn, Elements Manager

Jack also started connecting with students one-on-one outside of class to support challenges of the virtual format, and to help reframe forced time away from the studio as something that every professional circus artist has to adapt to (injuries and time away from equipment being common reasons outside of a pandemic where an artists would have to rethink their training).

	# of students	Group training	Privates lessons + additional public classes	Total programming
January-March (in-person)	8	6 hours/week	3-10 hours	10-16 hours/week/student
March-June (virtual)	When programming	4 hours/week. 56 total hours of	Public classes went from 90	7-10 hours/week/student

	went online, two students dropped out because of lack of access to technology. In the final weeks of the program, two more students dropped out because of family emergencies and moving. By the program's end, there were 4 students.	online group training.	minutes to 45 minutes.	t
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Brio

Brio is the Circus Project's youth training company. For the 2019-2020 program, there were 12 returning members and 4 new members. Youth trained intensively through group classes, public classes, and one-on-one private lessons. When the studio closed because of the coronavirus, Brio moved to an online format. In-person to virtual training transition challenges included:

- Understanding and navigating the technology, both for students and coaches
- Learning how to interact with each other on Zoom, when only one person can speak at a time.
- There's no spotting!
- Being on camera was stressful for some students

In lieu of the annual June show, Brio students made a video. Although it wasn't as all encompassing as a live-performance, it was a fun culmination to the program.

Youth Summer Intensive (YSI)

YSI is the Youth Summer Intensive, which was the online version of our Summer Performance Intensive for committed youth. YSI had 10 participants this summer -- 4 Brio students, 2 returning summer students, and 4 new students.

YSI 2020 included:

- 1 weekly group class that includes rotating coaches, plus a perk, such as a virtual studio tour, a pro performer interview, or an anatomy and physiology session with the Circus Doc, physical therapist Emily Scherb.
- Each student chooses 3 additional weekly classes from our online class offerings
- Each student received a team tank top

“There's so much meaning to circus right now...I think it's a great outlet...I think it's giving people hope.”
— Kari Hunter, Brio and YSI Manager

Looking ahead

The Circus Project has initiated a cautious, methodical re-opening of the studio for socially distanced, masked, one-on-one private lessons and small group classes.

Training company managers have created templates for three types of upcoming programming: in person, online, and hybrid. In September, training company students may elect to do in-person private lessons. New options and opportunities will be decided on and made available on a monthly basis, pending the status of the pandemic.

We are exercising extreme caution, being several degrees more conservative with studio safety than is required. We've received feedback from coaches and cleaning staff that they feel safe. Students and administrative staff have communicated that they appreciate how much time has gone into dialing in all the protocols, and that they trust the organization to look out for everyone who enters the studio space.

As we reinvent our future, we're holding close our identity as a circus community. Stretching the limits of imagination, risk, and possibility has always been what we do. Challenge is core to our craft.