



News Release

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**KNORR-BREMSE GLOBAL CARE NORTH AMERICA AWARDS GRANT TO PUBLIC
THEATRE OF KENTUCKY TO SUPPORT PERFORMING ARTS CAMP FOR STUDENTS ON
THE AUTISM SPECTRUM AND THEIR PEERS**

*\$30,000 Grant Has Allowed the Theater to Develop Its Inaugural
Summer Intensive Program and Create a Safe Space for Students*

AVON, Ohio – April 28, 2022 – This year, Public Theatre of Kentucky (PTK), located in Bowling Green, is adding an inclusive summer camp to its roster of programs. In July, the theater will host the inaugural session of “Special Stages: Theatre Therapy Summer Intensive,” a performing arts and theater program designed for both students on the autism spectrum as well as their neurotypical and neurodiverse peers.

It’s a unique “theater as therapy” program that has earned the financial support of Knorr-Bremse Global Care North America (KBGCNA), the U.S.-based arm of a philanthropic entity operated by Knorr-Bremse, based in Munich, Germany. The organization awarded the theater \$30,000 in grant support to help fund the creation of the Summer Intensive program, make related facility updates, and support future theater initiatives.

Knorr-Bremse is the global market leader for braking systems and a leading supplier of other safety-critical rail and commercial vehicle systems. It’s also the parent company of Bendix Commercial Vehicle Systems, whose Bowling Green manufacturing plant is a major employer in the region.

KBGCNA centers its investments on initiatives supporting youth, education, and underprivileged populations in the surrounding communities of Knorr-Bremse's three largest North American companies: Bendix; Watertown, New York-based New York Air Brake; and Westminster, Maryland-based Knorr Brake Company.

"Awarding grant support to Public Theatre of Kentucky and its new Summer Intensive performing arts program is a project that promises to enrich the Bowling Green community in so many ways," said Maria Gutierrez, president of KBGCNA and director of corporate responsibility and sustainability at Bendix. "This program will add needed resources and educational options for children who are on the autism spectrum as well as their neurotypical peers. This opens doors and gives students more experiences and opportunities to learn about the performing arts, and we're very proud to offer our support toward this mission."

An Immersive Performing Arts Camp

The new Summer Intensive program joins existing educational programs at the theater, including its spring break camp for children on the autism spectrum, and a long-running summer camp program for neurotypical students.

Beginning in July and over the course of three weeks, up to 25 students participating in PTK's Summer Intensive program will work with volunteers and performing arts professionals to learn, create, and perform a full theater production. The production and camp, for students in fifth through 12th grades, will take place at the Phoenix Theatre in Bowling Green, where PTK is based.

The Summer Intensive program is unique in that it represents the theater's first such program in which both neurotypical students and those on the autism spectrum will cooperate to produce and perform a theatrical production.

Amber Turner, producing artistic director at PTK, said the program was created in conjunction with the Kelly Autism Program at Western Kentucky University's Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex. The complex works with the university and community agencies to enhance skills and quality of life for individuals and families impacted by autism spectrum disorder and developmental delays and disabilities.

"Through the Summer Intensive program, children on the autism spectrum will join neurotypical peers in a day-camp experience where they will contribute as the cast and crew members in a theater production," Turner said. "Campers will have the opportunity to participate in auditions, rehearsals, and performances. In so doing they will also experience and learn vital

social skills and cues, such as developing patience for peers, memorizing lines, and speaking in front of an audience.”

The project is designed to use drama and the entire theater process to help children on the autism spectrum achieve their therapeutic goals, such as emotional and physical integration with peers. Their neurotypical peers will also benefit through improved interpersonal communication and mentorship skills. In addition, the project is designed to build a stronger sense of community, cultivate increased enjoyment of the performing arts, and promote equality for all people with disabilities.

Developing an Inclusive Program

Turner said the theater has been working to develop the Summer Intensive program since 2018, though the process took longer than expected because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The idea initially unfolded as an offshoot of the theater’s spring break program created in 2018 for children on the autism spectrum. That program itself evolved from the theater’s existing summer camp program, after a graduate student established training tools designed for a student on the autism spectrum.

“Out of the work we did for that student, we realized we could do so much more for others,” Turner said. “Learning from one student showed us that we have a lot to offer children of all abilities.”

The idea to expand the program to create an inclusive summer camp that would also include neurotypical peers gained backing and support from educators at the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex, who helped to develop the Special Stages program for PTK, contributing their own resources and volunteers.

Turner says the resulting program is designed to instill valuable life skills in all of the students who participate.

“This program will give the students a taste of what we do during an actual show, and I think it will build their confidence outside of the theater, in school, and help with their relational and speaking skills,” Turner observed. “I believe it will really affect them in all areas.”

Pursuing Grant Support

The theater first learned about the opportunity to apply for grant support from KBGCNA through John Walker, IT lead for Bendix in Bowling Green, who now serves as project champion for this KBGCNA effort. Walker helped to encourage the theater to apply for funding after

learning about the Summer Intensive program through his daughter, who has been a longtime student and volunteer at PTK.

“As an employee of Bendix, I knew of our mission to assist community support organizations, and PTK was one of the first organizations that came to mind. So I reached out to the theater with regard to the Special Stages program as well as some of the needed enhancements that could benefit the theater over the long term.”

KBGCNA approved and awarded the grant funding for the PTK program in late 2020, allowing the theater to begin making plans for its upcoming program. Half of the funds were used to support the development of the Summer Intensive program, while the other half were used to remodel the dressing room at the theater – transforming it into an accessible safe space equipped with resources and aids especially for students on the autism spectrum.

A New Educational Summer Camp Option

Turner said there are few other programs and resources in the surrounding 10-county region designed specifically for students on the autism spectrum. She hopes to expand the program to partner with schools and to become fully inclusive.

“To my knowledge, there’s really no other program like ours,” she said. “While there are other programs for students on the autism spectrum, they’re not theater programs like this one.”

Turner is still in awe of the KBGCNA award the theater received.

“Without this award, we wouldn’t have been able to create a safe space for the students who attend our camps, nor would we have been able to launch our Summer Intensive program this quickly,” she said. “To finally see it getting off the ground is really amazing. This is going to have an incredible impact on the community, so I feel that KBGCNA has done a wonderful thing in supporting this program.”

About Knorr-Bremse Global Care North America

Knorr-Bremse Global Care North America Inc. (KBGCNA) is an independent organization operating as the North American arm of a global nonprofit organization – Knorr-Bremse Global Care. With an aim to address local social challenges more effectively, KBGCNA investments are centered in the surrounding communities of Knorr-Bremse’s three largest North American companies: Avon, Ohio-based Bendix Commercial Vehicle Systems LLC; Westminster, Maryland-based Knorr Brake Company; and Watertown, New York-based New York Air Brake LLC. Funding activities are championed and supported by the employees of each of the three local companies. Follow us on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/company/knorr-bremse-global-care-north-america-inc](https://www.linkedin.com/company/knorr-bremse-global-care-north-america-inc).

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