

Dear Legacy Committee,

We started in 2016 because puppetry has been practiced around the world since ancient times, but in the United States, including Minnesota, the contemporary field is largely White, reflected in puppet theaters/companies: staff, board, performers and audience. It's hard to have a point of entry when you don't see yourself reflected. Puppetry is a transformative art form and we believe all artists should have access to using this artform to tell their stories.

In the Twin Cities, while there is a large puppetry community, before Monkeybear, you could count the number of Native, Black, Asian, Latine, SWANA professional puppet artists on one hand. The question we asked in 2016 was, how do we make the puppet theater community more representative of all our communities and foster a wider breadth of puppet theater aesthetics? The answer was very clear: encourage and support Native, Black, IPOC artists practicing other arts disciplines, to dive into a journey through puppetry, which gives them the experience to take part in the Minnesota and national puppetry community and have a new tool to tell their stories.

We train artists through our free workshops and free weeklong Performance Intensive and those who complete the Intensive get mentorship to create puppet theater pieces, which gives them the experience to access other opportunities in the arts community. We've served over 100 artists, with over 40 artists creating puppet theater pieces and moving on to create puppet work for other arts institutions and puppet theaters/companies.

As a small organization with a staff of one, funding through the Legacy funds would help us grow in our ability to support participants by providing even more learning opportunities, the ability to hire more mentors to support them in creating work, have more supplies, materials and equipment for our participants to work, and support the day to day running of our organization. Demand has outgrown the work that me, the Executive + Artistic Director, can do on my own, so we are excited to grow as we provide access to this powerful artform!

Sincerely,

Chamindika Wanduragala, Executive + Artistic Director
Monkeybear's Harmolodic Workshop