



BOND STREET THEATRE

peacebuilding, empowerment & healing through theatre

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New Creative Programs for Youth and Women in Afghanistan

Bond Street Theatre initiates two innovative programs: a youth-led community improvement project and help for incarcerated women.

New York, NY, January 2015 - While other organizations are pulling up stakes, Bond Street Theatre is stepping up its activities in Afghanistan with two new programs addressing youth and women. With 64% of the population under the age of 24, Afghanistan's future rests on its youth. One half of those youth are young women who face a justice system based on local customs rather than rule of law. This winter, Bond Street begins a two-year program motivating youth to design and lead community improvement projects, and introduces creative programming into Afghanistan's women's prisons and juvenile correction centers.

Creative programs engage youthful energy and imagination

Building Community through Creativity in Action provides 375 youth across Afghanistan with the mentorship and tools to design and implement volunteer projects that will directly improve their communities. Facing a watershed moment in their country's history, Afghan youth need stimulating and practical programs that can help them realize their potential as active agents for positive change in their communities.

With an emphasis on at-risk and marginalized youth, the program selects 15 young men and women in each of 25 provinces to participate in the community action program. Based on Bond Street's decade-long experience initiating youth-led programming in Afghanistan, the project guides young men and women through community needs analysis and leadership training, and provides them with the organizational skills to develop realistic action plans to address local problems.

The program culminates in a nationally televised presentation featuring the best community improvement projects as models of local cooperation and youth-led initiative. With winners decided by audience vote, the program will provide a source of inspiration for youth nationwide.

The goal of the program is to bring together youth across ethnic, religious, and gender lines to give the widest selection of individuals a sense of agency and self-confidence, create new bonds across ancient divisions, and form a productive network of young leaders. The program builds on Bond Street's twelve years of experience in Afghanistan.

Providing a voice for incarcerated women

The *Psychosocial Care Program* incorporates theatre-based methods into the rehabilitative process for women in the Afghan justice system, providing them with emotional support while incarcerated and helping to ease reentry into society. The first of its kind, the program addresses the emotional and psychological needs of imprisoned women and their children, and provides them with much-needed outlets for self-expression. The program will be initiated in the Herat Women's Prison.

Despite the dramatic improvement in human rights since the fall of the Taliban, Afghan women continue to suffer severe social and economic inequalities. This is especially pronounced in the justice system, which imprisons women for violating social and religious norms, including rape and fleeing abusive domestic situations. According to Human Rights Watch, 95% of girls imprisoned in Afghanistan are serving time for moral or *zina* crimes, as are 50% of incarcerated adult women.

Working in partnership with Simorgh Theatre of Herat, an all-female theatre troupe, the Psychosocial Care Program gives women who have been deeply debilitated by violence and injustice a safe environment to discuss problems, learn their legal rights, and develop the communication skills and confidence to speak out.

Young children are often incarcerated with their mothers. Although this proximity is emotionally beneficial to mother and child, prison can have lasting traumatic effects on children, including poor socialization skills, lack of cohesive family identity, and diminished self-esteem. The project provides an active, creative play process necessary for children's proper development.

The goal is to create a self-sustaining drama and storytelling group in the prison, run by the women themselves. The program will be conducted in the Herat Women's Prison, the second largest in the country, and will serve as a model, encouraging similar activities in women's prisons throughout Afghanistan.

The Program is made possible through generous support from [Dining for Women](#), an organization working to impact the lives of women and girls worldwide.

Bond Street Theatre has been initiating creative projects for peace in conflict zones globally since 1984, and working in Afghanistan since 2003. The company conducts a variety of workshops, trains all-female theatre troupes that reach isolated women, and builds the capacity of local organizations to design and implement programs for social development. Bond Street's recent Voter Education & Fraud Mitigation Project reached over 200,000 Afghan voters.

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[Bond Street Theatre](#), founded in 1978, initiates theatre-based projects for education, conflict resolution, and healing in areas of conflict and poverty globally. The company collaborates with local artists to enjoy the benefits of artistic exchange and promotes the value of the arts in shaping a peaceful future. Recipient of a MacArthur Award, the company has also received support from the Trust for Mutual Understanding, Theatre Communications Group, Mellon Foundation, Ford Foundation, Association for Performing Arts Presenters, ArtsLink, Asian Cultural Council, US Institute for Peace, US Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs, NEA, US Embassies, and other organizations.

Bond Street Theatre is a non-profit organization, and an NGO in association with the United Nations.