



# BOND STREET THEATRE

peacebuilding, empowerment & healing through theatre



## Spring-Summer Newsletter

Dear Joanna,

*Greetings to all!* In this issue, we visit the Afghanistan you *don't* hear about in the news: enthusiastic young people using their talents and ingenuity to make huge improvements in their communities. *This is the Afghanistan that we know and love!*

- [Creativity in Action](#) - an innovative project that engages youth in designing and leading creative community projects.
- [Creative Arts Prison Project](#) - a theatre program offering emotional support to incarcerated women in the Herat Women's Prison.
- [Peace projects in the works: Myanmar, Kenya, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia](#) - engaging communities in conflict prevention, healing, hope and progress.



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*In the face of global challenges, Bond Street Theatre continues to bring creative, humanitarian assistance to troubled areas around the world... thanks to you! Your support makes our work possible. Please give what you can.*

## Afghan Youth Creating a New Afghanistan

### *Creativity in Action*

This year, we began our ***Creativity in Action*** program. Our team of artist-trainers are working in 25 provinces, identifying **young men and women who are committed to social change and ready to volunteer to make progress a reality**, and giving them the creative training and guidance they need to implement community improvement projects.

Although this program began only 5 months ago, we are already seeing **big results**. Youth from **Logar province** (left) were so excited by their first week of training that they began their community project—cleaning the city streets—even before their next session. Their enthusiasm caught the eye of the local Director of Youth Affairs, who immediately stepped up the city's clean-up efforts.



The youth in **Balkh** set up a **Child Protection Tent** where child-laborers (right) can learn their rights and new skills. The group in **Kunar** started a campaign against illegal logging that has caused soil erosion and polluted rivers, and another exposing the violence against women that goes unseen.

Each group first creates a *Community Profile* that displays what they love about their community and the problems that need correction. The workshops utilize theatre and visual arts exercises to help explore the issues and find dynamic activities to resolve them.

***"I never thought about my responsibilities as a resident of a province. After this training, I see my community in a new way and I am motivated to be a change agent."*** - Zekhria from Kunar

Next, we bring groups together from two different provinces—often representing different ethnicities and languages—for a week-long brainstorming session in community development, advocacy, and proposal writing. In a country divided by ethnic, linguistic, and customary differences, **these exchanges build a sense of community and cohesion across regional boundaries.**

The project is proving very popular. Youth want their voices heard and their vision for their country regarded. Again and again we are told that our workshops are effective because they are engaging, physical, and creative, rather than delivered in a passive or lecture format. Most important, we are helping to generate a **culture of volunteerism** in Afghanistan.

We have completed trainings in six out of twenty-five provinces. Stay posted for more stories!

***"BST is the first organization we have met that is thinking about sustainability by truly empowering youth. Other organizations are just completing projects."*** - Kazim from Logar

***"It is the first time I am seeing a training that is effective and, in fact, really works!"***  
- Director of Youth and Culture in Kandahar

# Behind the Barbed Wire

## *Creative Arts in the Women's Prison*

In another corner of Afghanistan, the young women from **Simorgh Theatre** are pioneering a program in **Herat Women's Prison** that addresses the emotional and motivational needs of women in prison. This program is the **first of its kind** in the Afghan prisons and will serve as a model for other prisons across Afghanistan. We thank [Dining for Women](#) for the funding to initiate the program.

We first worked with Simorgh Theatre in Herat four years ago. Now, we have returned to provide the group with specific training for working in the prison environment. The dauntless group of young women has accepted a tremendous challenge.



To start the project at the Herat Women's Prison, the actors presented a play about forced marriage and the importance of education to the women. The topic resonated with the incarcerated women.

At the end of the show, the audience was invited to take the stage and address a character of their choice. One woman railed against the abusive father in the play who was "selling" his 13-year old daughter in marriage to a rich man. He (the actress portraying the father) answers, *"Everyone in my family got married at 13... what's the problem?"* to which the woman retorted, *"That's why we're all here!"* gesturing to the cheering audience of women.

In fact, most of the women had been in forced marriages and were in prison for escaping abusive family life. Women can be imprisoned for violating social or religious norms, including sex outside of marriage, being raped, or running away from abusive homes. Abused women have startlingly few options in Afghanistan. **Many of the women were only looking for safety or a chance at a better life.**

Our program gives them much-needed psychological support and the basic life skills to ease their reentry into society. The Simorgh actors are leading a series of confidence-building and problem-solving workshops at the prison with the goal of forming an ongoing drama club in the prison as an outlet for the women to tell their stories and express their hopes for the future.

In addition to the Herat Women's Prison, we are conducting workshops at the **Juvenile Correction Center**, the **Child Support Center** (for children of the women in prison), and the **OMID Women's Shelter**. Our workshops allow the women to experience their own power and voice, and express themselves in new ways. We will be reporting on their progress over the next year.

## Other Projects in the Works...

**We continue to seek support to further these projects:**

**Myanmar:** We plan to continue our Youth Engagement project with **Thukhuma Khayeethe**, one of Myanmar's most outstanding theatre companies. Burmese youth are facing a critical juncture as they come of age in a changing political environment and a surge of inter-ethnic violence.

**Kenya:** Following the groundwork by intern Jessica Hodder, we will continue the projects in refugee camps, with former sex workers and street-working children, and other underserved communities.

**Lebanon, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia:**

In each area, we are initiating new projects and awaiting funding. We welcome supporters and collaborators for each innovative venture.

**A Decade in Afghanistan:**

Our beautiful photo book is available on our website: [www.bondst.org](http://www.bondst.org). Edited by Nick Corda, the collection reflects our vision of Afghanistan over the last 10 years as photographed by Bond Street artists.



## And in the USA...

**Awards:** Following our 2015 **Otto Award for Political Theatre**, Bond Street Theatre was given an **Inspiration Award** from the group *Soul Inscribed* at the famous Blue Note Jazz Club.

**Amelia:** Our Young Audience show, **Amelia and her Paper Tigers**, about Amelia Earhart, received rave reviews at the Midtown International Theatre festival from kids, parents, and industry folks alike.

**Le Velo Rouge** and the **Shinbone Alley Stilt Band:** Look for our giant red tricycle and our famous jazz band on stilts in the streets and parks of New York City. Follow our [Twitter](#) feed for locations.

## Bond Street Theatre



[Bond Street Theatre](#) initiates theatre-based projects for education, conflict resolution, and healing in areas of conflict and poverty globally.

**Please support our work around the world.**

Bond Street Theatre is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization, and NGO in association with the UN-DPI.

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