

Tuesday October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Written Submission for the House of Commons'  
STUDY OF THE CANADA SUMMER JOBS  
PROGRAM**

**By: Alma Sarai**

**Associate Producer for Tottering Biped Theatre  
Inc.**

## List of Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** The notification of approval or disapproval for the Canada Summer Jobs program occur at an earlier date.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the process for submission and final report for the Canada Summer Jobs program be simplified.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the term lengths for Canada Summer Jobs be flexible, in terms of number of weeks, and start and end dates.

To begin, thank you to The House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for undertaking this study of the Canada Summer Jobs wage subsidy program, and inquiring into ways it could be modified to improve funding and flexibility for applicants. The study follows a motion sponsored by Louise Chabot (Member of Parliament for Thérèse-De Blainville) and adopted by the Committee on Friday, June 2, 2023. The brief below outlines the Tottering Biped witness experience with the program as well as our recommendations for the program moving forward.

Tottering Biped Theatre (TBT) was founded in 2009 as a social justice inspired theatre company. We devise contemporary pieces through a workshop process spanning several years to create highly physical works of artistic excellence during the Fall/Winter. We also tour 'Liquid Lead' gender neutral partner dance talks and workshops. During the summer, we create contemporary, highly physical interpretations of Shakespeare. Our works have addressed poverty, Israeli-Palestinian relations, same sex marriage, violence against women, and mental health. Our mandate is to promote conscious evolution through Theatre, emphasizing themes of social justice. We are a small but mighty team of two, year-round, and it is in collaborations with others that the company thrives.

TBT has toured to/been presented by regional professional theatres (Hamilton's Theatre Aquarius, London's Grand Theatre, and Kitchener's MT Space), performing arts centres (Burlington, Oakville, Guelph, Brampton, Hamilton, Mississauga, Richmond Hill), and theatre festivals (IMPACT, Undercurrents, In the Soil) as well as internationally (New York, Virginia, and North Carolina - USA; Dublin, Ireland; Tirana, Albania). In recognition of our work, TBT has been supported by the Ontario Arts Council, the Trillium Foundation, and the Canada Council for the Arts, and our work has been featured in over 15 publications including CBC, the Canadian Theatre Review, Dance International, Whole Note, and TED.com.

Summer Shakespeare began with a simple idea: that audiences and local artists do not need to quench their creative thirsts in Toronto or elsewhere; that beautiful and captivating work can be done right here in our own Hamilton and Burlington backyards. Each year our many sold-out and critically acclaimed productions have connected audiences all over the region with dynamic interpretations of Shakespearean Theatre at an outdoor, historical venue. In the past it has been the Royal Botanical Garden's newly renovated Rock Gardens, and since 2020 we have shifted to Hamilton's historic Dundurn Castle. Our productions feature local actors, designers, and directors. We interpret Shakespeare through the lens of social justice issues and ensure diversity in casting and process. This work is enabling our talented artists – who we often lose to Toronto and New York - to stay local and to give their creativity back to our own communities. TBT, Dundurn castle, this area's best emerging talent, and English Theatre's greatest playwright are going into our seventh year of creating paid work for this arts and culture community, a major piece of the local, cultural scene with a clear legacy into the future.

Due to the contracted nature of this programming, and the size of the project; since our inaugural year in 2016, the Canada Summer Jobs funding contribution has been integral to its success. Because of it we have been able to bring on as many as thirteen emerging artists and technicians that are eager to begin their career in the arts and culture sector. TBT and the youth involved in each year's projects have benefitted greatly from the support and the experience. I was a Canada Summer jobs hire in 2016 and

2017 before becoming the project coordinator for the project as well as the associate producer for the company in 2018. I am grateful for the start that TBT and CSJ gave me and my fellow colleagues. Which is why this past summer, after seven consecutive years of support, with a job start date in July, and after patiently waiting for the notification, we were informed in June 2023 that we would not be receiving any support from the program at all.

This situation leads to our first recommendation that the notification of contributions occur sooner in the application process. In our annual summer project budget, we prepare an ideal layout nearly a year in advance as we begin the application processes. After receiving the final decision so close to the start date, we were forced to alter the project budget and the programming as well as the staff and hiring entirely.

Such a late notification did not come without numerous inquiries as to the final decision for the Hamilton constituency, and despite the emails and the phone calls, the information was such as this, that “there is no decision made yet, but you will be notified either way.” Or “we understand the wait is inconvenient, but we don’t have the approval information at this time.” Both of those points, I can appreciate since there are an unimaginable number of applicants. But to have some applicants receive their confirmation in April or May and then have others wait until June or later seems highly unfair. If the application is successful, the applicant could be informed as soon as possible so they are able to best continue with their programming schedule and budget. If the application is unsuccessful, the applicant could be informed sooner rather than later so they are able to adjust and adapt the plan the programming budget and schedule as needed.

As many other witnesses have stated, the process for submitting the application as well as the final report can be tedious. Particularly the final reports. However, I also recognize that ease of understanding comes with years of practice in applying. Throughout our seven years of benefitting from this program, there has never been an application that was submitted without something being amiss. We recommend that the process could be simplified.

Our final recommendation comes from an eagerness to have more flexible contracts for our employed artists. With the average timeframe being eight weeks, this allows for a four-week rehearsal period and a four-week performance period. There is no room to account for the work that comes before and after these processes. Empowering youth to be part of the production process (pre-show) and the debrief process (post-show) are also invaluable experiences in the arts and culture industry. During the pandemic, we were grateful to receive the contributions even though the project as planned was not able to proceed due to lockdowns. At the time, contracts could start later in the calendar year, enabling us to hire youth and emerging artists for virtual projects, adaptations, graphic design work, etc. that we could produce under stay-at-home orders. Having a contract start in May or end in September or October could be hugely beneficial to the project and the organization and could help lead to higher retention of artists both for the summer project as well as the year-round ones. Flexibility in contract term lengths could help us retain the youth that we hire for short term projects and at least bridge the gap between the long-term projects and give the hires more experience in the career path of their choice.

In conclusion, the Canada Summer Jobs contributions have been an integral part of our summer programming; having grown our legacy project each year and having provided a solid foundation for the hiring and payment of youth as a non-profit theatre organization. We are grateful for the program, and we have benefitted for many years. The project's continual success is due in part to the extraordinary opportunity of young and emerging artists. The possibilities that CSJ can provide for those young people is something that TBT wants to champion with these recommendations, along with our other applicants and witnesses, to help improve the Canada Summer Jobs program. This past summer was difficult after not receiving the same support, but if we had received notification sooner, had more flexible terms and a less tedious application process, we would have been more prepared to adjust our plan of action.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Alma Sarai

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alma Sarai", written over a horizontal line.