

In response to the open letter that the group ReAct has been circulating with regards to diversity at the Jessie Awards, the board of directors would like to state its full and enthusiastic desire to enter into a dialogue about these issues. We value diversity highly and recognize the importance of concrete action, not just words, in creating equal opportunities. In fact, our "big picture" focus for the coming season is already set to be diversity: the primary agenda item for our upcoming summer retreat is the make up of our board and juries, setting goals, actions, and standards to increase diversity on both fronts, and at the coming AGM/Town Hall Meeting we intend to bring this conversation to our membership and the community at large.

At the start of this season we also formalized our jury selection process, allowing people to self-nominate. This removed some of the "ad hoc" nature of jury selection in the past, something we hoped would prevent those interested in serving on the board from falling through the cracks. We seek to attract jury members that represent diversity with respect to gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, and theatre practice, and so far it seems that the formalized process has helped: almost all of our juries have seen an increase in visible diversity. We plan to set measures in place to continue this trend.

Of course, we know that there is more we can do. We had not been contacted directly by ReAct prior to the letter being circulated, but as soon as we heard about it we contacted a representative of the group who also sits on a jury to let them know we are keen to enter into discussions. On top of our commitment to taking firm action to increase diversity on the board and juries this year, we look forward to deeper conversations and consultations about other potential barriers to access and what the Jessies can be doing to encourage and reward diversity in the community.

We look forward to entering into discussion with ReAct, and anyone else who would like to join. As a not-for-profit board made up entirely of volunteers, we welcome constructive discussion and help and urge any of the signatories to become more involved in the Jessies.

If you would like to be kept informed of public dialogues, have a specific concern or idea, or would like to enquire about positions on the board of directors (there are current openings), please contact Board President Andrea Loewen at info@jessies.ca.

Sincerely,

Andrea Loewen, Diane Brown, Evan Frayne, Steven Greenfield, Lois Dawson, Shawn Sorenson, Meredith Elliott, Mike Mackenzie, Kathleen Duborg, Alyssa Kostello, Marijka Asbeek-Brusse, and Ava Forsyth,
The Board of Directors for the Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards Society