

December 2nd, 2019

Dear Google Impact Challenge Review Panel :

My name is JP Gurnett and I am the creative director and co-founder of Queer Nite, a LGBTQ+ inclusive event based out of Omaha, NE. Our events have found a home in the Benson community where LGBTQ representation and presence continues to grow! Our success would not be possible without the support of BFF. The community of artists and advocates that comprise the BFF team have helped improve the cultural and economic vitality of a neighborhood that was ready for change.

BFF's main mission is to bring accessible art to the Benson community. Their flagship program is Benson First Friday. This is a monthly event where galleries, bars, retailers and everyone in between come together to celebrate art and creativity. You can find art openings, performance art, lectures, and a plethora of other experiences! If you can think of it, it's been done at Benson First Friday. If it were not for this monthly celebration, the success that I've had with my organization would not have been possible. BFF has an incredible reach and always uses its platform to amplify the voices of others.

This past year, BFF has expanded its programming to move beyond the Benson neighborhood. This was made possible with the help of the Mayflower Mobile Gallery. Our first official collaboration was for the Lincoln Calling music festival. Queer Nite hosted an 'on-the-street' drag show. We had no idea what we were doing, but the BFF team was there to support us every step of the way! These collaborations have blossomed into an amazing creative partnership. We've turned the Mayflower Mobile Gallery into a fully interactive experience complete with performers, musicians, and visual artists. The spirit of BFF is one of inclusivity and fun!

While BFF's work can stand on its own. I do want to share a testimonial. I recently was in Benson and began a conversation with a stranger. We talked about how great Benson is and then they remarked, "I also love Benson First Friday. That's what got me to come to this neighborhood. I've always felt like a weirdo and never knew where I belonged. I love knowing that I can look and see what BFF is doing and they will have something that speaks to people like me."

I am very excited to continue working with BFF in any capacity possible. For instance, we'd love to take the Mayflower Mobile Art Gallery to smaller towns in Nebraska so that we can bring culture and inclusivity to as many people as we can. With a team of BFFs, I know that anything is possible.

John-Paul Gurnett