University at Buffalo
Student Life

The Anne Frank Project
1300 Elmwood Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14222

June 26, 2019

Dear Selection Committee:

I am writing to support **Susan Moser's** application for the Social Justice Festival. While I am accustomed to writing formal letters of reference, I would like to write this letter from a less formal storytelling perspective as that seems more in line with the Anne Frank Project's goals of helping people to connect.

A few years ago, I attended a keynote workshop by Drew Kahn at the College Counseling Centers of NY conference held at Buffalo State College. I felt incredibly moved by hearing about the work of the Anne Frank Project. Soon after Drew started speaking, I was literally moving. I got out of my seat and engaged in activities where I connected with others and told stories through movement. At that time, I was reminded of Susan and her work, and I have thought that she would be an amazing fit for the Social Justice Festival. I am very excited that she is submitting a proposal.

I met Susan in 2001 when I interviewed to become a tap teacher åt her dance studio. I walked in equipped with my tap shoes and the videos of my work. Instead, we connected easily by talking about philosophies of dance and dance education. She spoke about how "everyone can dance" and her work with children with special needs. Susan discussed the power of creativity in a way that made me want to be more creative in my life. At the time, I was a graduate student in clinical psychology and quickly realized that I had a lot to learn from Susan. She understood what was important to her students, from young children to older adults, and I realized that it would be a great opportunity to focus on kinesthetic learning and connection while I spent most of my time in the classroom and learning talk therapy. Well, I got the job! More importantly, I left the interview feeling loved. Loved, at a job interview! When I left, I called my husband from the parking lot and cried tears of joy. I knew I had met someone special, and I felt special just being with Susan. What I learned through working with Susan is that everyone feels this sense of love and connection when they work with her. She helps people feel good about themselves.

Susan introduced me to the world of modern dance and the Cincinnati dance community, which allowed me to feel connected in a broader creative sense. I also attended some of her improv classes where we did sensory studies. We felt, smelled, saw, and tasted various foods and created movement phrases from our experiences. Then, we danced our phrase with at least one other dancer. I remember a powerful moment when I started my beloved lemon phrase while another dancer fit his phrase perfectly into mine. As a student studying therapy, I learned about this powerful way of connecting through movement rather than through words.

Counseling Services

120 Richmond Quad, Buffalo, NY 14261-0053
716.645.2720 (F) 716.645.2175
couns-ctr@buffalo.edu
www.buffalo.edu

Susan and I have stayed in contact over the 16 years since I left the Cincinnati area where she and her family live. She has continued to dance and connect people. She is currently teaching movement courses to opera and acting students at University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. We have talked over the years about how her goals for these students is for them to find ways to be comfortable in their bodies so that they are able to embody another character. I also think of that as fostering empathy. She also wants them to find ways to connect with each other that helps them to grow as people and as artists. She is also extremely concerned with safety and trust of her students. She helps them to connect in ways that are simultaneously challenging while valuing the limits that they set.

Susan's innate ability to connect with others and to foster connection makes her a perfect fit for the Social Justice Festival. Her work and her way of being fits well with the theme of Engage for Change. I have already spoken about her ability to connect, but she is also able to do so in a way that brings about change. For example, she often spoke about a project that she did before we even met that was called "Pages from my Diary" where adolescent students had shared snippets of their diary entries anonymously. These were read aloud, and she choreographed to the spoken text. Sharing, talking, connecting, and moving to these words provided a forum to reduce the shame of mental health concerns as well as typical adolescent struggles, and she did this nearly 20 years ago when stigma was still high. Additionally, she has done amazingly creative outreach work. She has done a project in the prisons where inmates created art as a way to heal and share with other inmates and the general public. She also engaged in a program which helped racially diverse college students to connect using creativity. This was so successful that a campus has adopted this program into their regular curriculum!

A few years ago, one of Susan's students made a documentary about her, and I would like to take a few quotes from the documentary to show how others see Susan. It is really lovely, and her students and other faculty speak about the things I mentioned. Richard Hess, the Chair of CCM Acting, said, "Susan is a wise old soul, and wise old souls always make a person feel like a better version of themselves." Her students mostly talk about feeling loved. Here is a quote from one of her students, "The word I would use instantly is love. You never feel unloved when you are around Susan Moser. She just pours out caring and compassion and safety."

I hope that I have provided support that I think that Susan's work would be a great fit for the festival. She would get people moving and connecting with others in a way that can bring about internal and social change. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at ap89@buffalo.edu or 716-645-2720.

Finally, I would like to end with a quote by someone who is important to the Anne Frank Project. In his Tony Award acceptance speech recently, André de Shields enumerated three rules of sustainability and longevity. The first was "Surround yourself with people whose eyes light up

when they see you coming." Susan's eyes light up when she sees me, and I also know they light up when she sees her students, her colleagues, and most especially, her family. She shines on everyone and knows how to make people connect, work together, feel loved, and feel good in the process. This makes her a great fit for the Social Justice Festival.

Sincerely,

Amberly Panepinto
Licensed Clinical Psychologist