



## PRESS RELEASE

### PHAME Academy Moves Educational Programming 100% Online During the Covid-19 Outbreak

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School is in session at PHAME Academy, a nonprofit that empowers adults with developmental disabilities through arts education and performance. PHAME has launched a nine-week term of online classes amidst the Covid-19 outbreak—classes which cover a wide range of subjects including theatre, visual art, and music. All courses will be offered by PHAME’s roster of professional teaching artists, and include such topics as songwriting, radio drama, voice-over acting, and mindfulness. As Oregonians shelter in place to slow the spread of the virus, PHAME hopes that online classes will help its students maintain a feeling of connection—and creativity—in this isolating time.

When businesses began shutting their doors in early March, PHAME’s Executive Director, Jenny Stadler, worried that the only option was to close PHAME for the foreseeable future. Closing the school would increase the isolation and loneliness that already disproportionately affect the lives of people with developmental disabilities, and would also impact PHAME’s teaching artists, who rely on PHAME for income. After conversations with several PHAME community members, Stadler believed that there was another way. “I realized we could do this. We could take it all online and maintain those connections and opportunities for learning that our students rely on.”

PHAME’s administrative team and teaching artists worked together to cancel the originally planned Spring Term, which was set to begin on March 30, and to create a new list of 17 classes tailored to the online teaching process. Knowing that accommodation is not one-size-fits-all, PHAME reached out to every recent PHAME student individually by phone to find out how they were doing, what technology they had access to, and what questions they might have about PHAME’s plan. This individualized approach was necessary, Stadler stresses, in order to make the messaging equitable for students with varying levels of literacy and technology use. After conducting four Zoom training sessions for students to test out the software, PHAME began classes on April 7, just one week after opening registration. “We’re really running at lightning speed,” Stadler says. “We did what normally takes a few months in a matter of weeks. And we know it won’t be perfect. It won’t be the same as meeting on our campus and seeing each other face to face. But we asked our students if they wanted this, and what we heard was a resounding yes, so we’re going to give it our all.”

PHAME students are thrilled to have school online, and to have overcome initial fears about their comfort with online learning. “It was my first time being on Zoom [and] I was a little bit nervous,” says PHAME student Kate, but “I was proud of myself doing it.”

**PHAME Academy** is a fine and performing arts nonprofit serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Offering three ten-week terms of arts-based classes each year, as well as a rigorous performance program, PHAME empowers students to learn new skills, take artistic risks, and build lasting relationships with people who share their experience of having a disability.

PHAME is built upon the belief that art is for everyone, and that our community is stronger when it champions opportunities for all. With that in mind, PHAME brings passion, joy, and rigor to arts education and performance.

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