

Franklin Tomorrow
Exemplary Community Volunteer Awards
October 18, 2021

Dear Mindy,

It is my pleasure to nominate Brenda Arnold for Franklin Tomorrow's Volunteer Spirit Award.

Since her arrival in 2019, Brenda has made and continues to make a tremendous difference in the lives of students and staff members at Backlight Productions. At Backlight, we provide adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities the opportunity to play starring roles in integrated theatrical performances and learn about the arts for them to grow in confidence on and off the stage.

Brenda has served as an aide for one of our wheelchair bound students. Brenda has become her, affectionately nicknamed, "Wheels" and also has helped with prompting the student's lines during school performances. For some of our students, memorizing a line as seemingly simple as "Where did you go?" can take months to master. In our Theatre 1 Program, Brenda patiently sits with each one of our students and works with them every week (for as long as it takes) to see them succeed. Many students have been able to deliver lines independently because of Brenda's faith in their ability and her willingness to put the time in.

As the saying goes, Brenda is often "the first to arrive and the last to leave". Brenda's weekly attendance has led to a personally verified 95 hours of rehearsal in 2021 alone. With performances added in (being onstage and backstage in the dressing rooms before and after the shows), Brenda has volunteered a minimum total of 119 hours this past year.

But Brenda doesn't just volunteer her time. This past month, Brenda brought in her keyboard from home for our students and staff to use after our keyboard broke. She brought in folding chairs when our growing student population needed more seats to sit in during rehearsals. She has provided transportation for students who would not have been able to attend without her help. During the pandemic when we were simply trying to survive to see a 2021-22 season, Brenda personally donated money to our fundraising efforts. On top of that, Brenda is also very involved in the special needs community in Williamson County, having volunteered with the Best Buddies Program, Friends Life, and Cross Point Church as well.

Finally, it's Brenda's heart that stands out most. Last year, one of our students lost her father and specifically sought out Brenda to pray with her. It is not uncommon for our students (and staff) to seek the refuge of "Ms. Brenda". During the pandemic, I stepped into a leadership role with our company. There were times that I doubted myself, but the words of affirmation from Brenda encouraged me so much and gave me strength to continue.

In the theatre, the "Backlight" is the light used to keep a performer from fading into the background. Brenda doesn't just use her talents, time, and resources to shine a light on people in the special needs community but on *everyone* she comes into contact with! Brenda has given so much to our organization and has never asked or expected anything in return. It would be such a joy to, this time, shine the spotlight on her. She is so deserving of it. Therefore, we strongly hope that you'll consider honoring Brenda Arnold as one of the recipients of the Franklin Tomorrow's Volunteer Spirit Award.

Sincerely,

Jordan Scott
Program Director
Backlight Productions