



The Performing Arts Provides Sense of Belonging for Young Performer



Kate performing at a UPAF Workplace Giving Campaign.

Kate Ketelhohn, an actor and playwright, finds a sense of belonging and support within the performing arts as she faces battles with her health throughout her life.

As an infant, Kate contracted a Strep A Bacterial Blood infection. People of any age can die from this, but she survived with plenty of scars, partial feet, a missing left hand and no fingertips on her right hand. To help correct damage done by the infection, Kate has endured 49 surgeries and has three prosthetics.

As she navigates through these challenges, her involvement in the performing arts has connected Kate with peers who provide much-needed support. "Wherever I go, people usually stare at me because of my unique arm or my leg prosthetics, but my friends in the performing arts don't care," said Kate. "I could take off my arm or feet and they wouldn't even bat an eye at my amputations. **The acceptance I've found in the performing arts community has really helped me feel comfortable in my own skin.**"

Kate's parents are incredibly grateful that the performing arts have provided her with a place where differences are celebrated and she can be her most authentic self. Her mom Julie shares, "as a triple amputee, Kate had plenty of challenges with people (both kids and adults) gawking at her and she had a hard time keeping up with other kids physically. **The mindset in theater is that 'it is okay to be yourself,' and that has helped Kate become a much stronger person.** First Stage in particular has always stressed the importance of accepting everyone, an attitude that we are very thankful for."

"Theaters have never let Kate being in a wheelchair or having a crutch during classes or performances be an obstacle either," said Julie. "Ramps have been added to stages or an extra place was found for Kate to sit on stage. She was

ecstatic the first time she was encouraged to wear her more useful 'hook' instead of her non-moving prosthetic left hand in the show *Henry V* at First Stage."

When asked what her favorite part of the performing arts is, Kate points to the people. **"You will never find such a loving and supporting community anywhere else.** They are always the first people to ask you about an audition, to celebrate a role with you, to cry with you or to reach out when they miss you. Some of my favorite memories have been the ordinary moments spent with casts of First Stage Young Company or summer performance classes. From going out to lunch or playing card games together and chatting, activities that seem like mundane moments at the time are the memories I cherish most."

Kate is currently a junior at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School and continues to add to her impressive resume as an actress, performing with countless theater organizations in the Greater Milwaukee Area including the Milwaukee Repertory Theater and First Stage. She also is an award-winning young playwright; most recently her play *Echo* was named one of the Top Ten Distinguished Plays of 2019 in Milwaukee Chamber Theatre's Young Playwrights Festival.



Kate performing at First Stage.
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