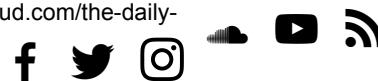




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The Actors Gymnasium launches circus learning pods



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Courtesy of Beth Tipton

Circus pod classes are often hosted in one of the participating families' backyards. Photo courtesy of Beth Tipton

Ellen O'Brien, Reporter

October 12, 2020

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After only offering virtual classes this summer, the Actors Gymnasium, a local circus training and performing arts center, is offering in-person circus pod classes to local students this fall.

Instructors teach pod classes in a participating family's backyard or at a local park. Statistics Prof. Beth Tipton, whose children attend the classes, said her family was already part of a neighborhood pod with other participating families.

"We've been looking for activities for them to do after school together, trying to find something fun

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since they've been on screens all day long," Tipton said. "I was really delighted to see this was an option."

Due to the more intimate nature of the classes, the instructors tailor the classes to the students' interests. For the first session, the instructor brought a large mat for tumbling exercises, but there are plans for later sessions to bring in circus equipment for activities such as a tightrope, Tipton said.

Mollie Bass, whose daughter, Clara, is currently participating in a circus pod, said Clara became interested in contortion during quarantine and started taking virtual classes with the Gym in the spring.

Bass said she liked how the Gym came up with a creative way to offer classes safely during COVID-19. At this point, Bass said she wouldn't feel comfortable with her daughter participating in a class indoors.

"The girls are just happy to be together," Bass said. "It's great that they have the chance to talk, move their bodies and be together."

Communication senior Autumn Thelander is an instructor for the Gym's circus pod classes.

Thelander said she began taking classes at the Gym as a student herself last year and soon became the choreographer and dance instructor for the Gym's 2019 summer camp.

Thelander, who is currently leading two pods, said she was intrigued when she first learned about the



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circus pods. After not seeing her students for an extended period of time, she said she was happy to return to teaching in person.

“The thing I’m most trying to do is keep the kids engaged, give them something that gets their heart rate going and is also exciting,” Thelander said. “I like to do a good mix of tumbling, conditioning and theater games and activities because that’s my major.”

One thing that differentiates the circus pods from regular classes is that the kids already all know and are friends with each other. Thelander said it can sometimes be challenging to try and navigate these preexisting relationships as an outside instructor.

Recently, one of her students finally mastered his handstand. The student was reluctant to participate earlier in the class session, but started to become more involved and comfortable as class continued, Thelander said.

“All of his friends who had been borderline making fun of him earlier were just completely amazed and so excited for him,” Thelander said. “I was really happy that he managed to find a little success and excitement in that time.”

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