

FINAL Video Kadon Douglas

[00:00:00] Thanks for having me. So I'm Kadon Douglas. I'm the executive director of BIPOC TV and film. Um, we're based in Toronto, but serve Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour working in the film and television industry across Canada.

Um, BIPOC TV and Film started in 2012 as the brain child of Nathalie Younglai, um, who's a writer, producer, um, located here in Toronto as well. Nathalie, Nathalie is an Asian, Caribbean, um, individual and has a very, um, interesting and colourful heritage as well, being of an Asian background but with family roots in the Caribbean, Trinidad to be specific. And so Nathalie and a group of her [00:01:00] colleagues decided to form a collective, um, that... to support, to amplify, to recognize BIPOC individuals, um, working within film and television in, um, in Toronto. So that's how I started in 2012 and since then the organization has really grown, and grown into quite a, quite a force, um, creating, creating space for ourselves that, in terms of safe spaces where we could share experiences, but also opportunities for us to share our learnings, um, to share tips of survival in the industry and also to collaborate with each other. So a lot of that has come out of the organization over, over the years. Um, the main pillars that we work on are advocacy, um, advocacy work, outreach, um, education and mentoring, and then a lot of networking. Um, because of the way in which our industry is set up, [00:02:00] it's very relationship focused. So, and that determines who has access, who knows what's happening in terms of opportunities as well, and also who's funded.

And so a lot of our work focuses on that type of work specifically in increasing, increasing representation of diverse crew, creative talent, um, in front of, and behind the screen. Um, in last year, the organization took quite a leap, um, coming out of last year, what we saw coming up to the surface was anti-Asian racism, anti-Indigenous racism and anti-Black racism that was festering and had been festering for decades. Um, but that was a real... Last year, in terms of the death of George Floyd, that was a real catalyst to the movement. Um, and it's [00:03:00] funny because sometimes I say that a lot of what we're seeing now in terms of the changes, in terms of the initiatives, is born out of the murder of a Black man, but it's deeper than that because if we were not in a pandemic, would, would it have received such, um, such notoriety.

So last year was a really unique time, um, for communities and then for the organization as well. So what we saw, we, the organization moved on to get nonprofit status. Uh, we were getting a flood of donations coming in and people wanting to support BIPOC artists, um, and professionals, and we also launched Hire BIPOC, which is our online staffing database.

It was busy as usual. Um, what I've learned. Um, so up until 2019, I was in the visioning committee, which is now the board. Um, but I focused more on [00:04:00] industry relations as opposed to my colleagues who did a lot of work around programs and events. Um, one of the unique things that came out of last year was, um, during the summer, we put out a call out for people to donate towards the fund to purchase, um, to purchase screenwriting software for Black creators. Um, out of that we raised an enormous amount of money, um, for that. Um, and then Final Draft came in and donate—Final Draft came in and I think Movie

Magic came in to, to actually offer that to us, offer us some licenses that we could share with the community. So we decided to use the funds that were donated then towards a drama writing intensive for the Black and Indigenous, Indigenous community.

And so that's the program that we're running right now, which goes on till April. Um, so for that program, [00:05:00] that's one of the things that came out of last year. What came out of it too, is companies and so on coming directly to us asking "How can we support? What kind of real change can we, can we affect here?" Um, and one of them, one company in particular came forward, Hollywood Suite, and supported us in getting our nonprofit status.

Um, getting nonprofit status was a huge game changer for the organization, because now we can access, um, provincial and federal funding. We could, we could start chatting, we could start, um, negotiations, sponsorships, and financial partnerships as well. And so in terms of the doors that it opened up for us, and part of it too, was with the Canadian, with the Canada Media Fund and the, um, the Black and POC Fund that was created by them to support our organizations in terms of capacity building, so that we could do the work that we need to do for the next [00:06:00] few years. And that's really one of the ways in which BIPOC TV and Film was able to hire staff. And for now that's me as Executive Director, coming out of that. And so what we saw were huge commitments being made, um, but the difference, the difference was that it was done in consultation with the community. And that's what's been missing for such a long time in terms of programs, initiatives, being created for us without our input. Um, that many times these things are created as a publicity, as a publicity stunt. They're a marketing effort. Um, they're... That the benefit is greater for the company who is, who is supporting that as opposed to the communities. And so that was a huge difference that we saw. And, um, my hope is that continues. Um, I often say that, [00:07:00] right now, we're not accepting anything for us without us. If you want to make change, you have to, we have to be at that table too. You know, it's going to impact our lives, our futures. And so I think last year really, really provided us the platform to speak through our grief, to speak through our trauma and to finally be heard. Um, so that's why it was such a watershed, watershed moment for us. Um, and I hope to see that, hope to see that continue, you know. We want lasting change.

Um, so prior to, prior to the last, well, when I started this year, BIPOC TV and Film has been, for [00:08:00] almost 10 years, a 100% volunteer run organization. Um, the, the members of our visioning committee slash board and all of our other committees, they're all, and all of our volunteers, they're all creatives working in the sector. They are professionals working at different levels within the sector as well. Um, so for a long time, it was people giving their time for that. And I think that's one of the great, um, thus one of our greatest assets is that we are community first. Um, that we have created that. So before it was like voluntary, um, people just volunteering your time. And I remember when I was on the visioning committee, one of the things I loved was, um, people were so moved to action. So it feels like, okay, wow, we want to do this. [00:09:00] Let's go see how we can do it. You know? So really, a really mobilized community. That's what, that's what supported the organization for all these years.

Now, with me on, as, um, as Executive Director, we're making like a slight transition without completely abandoning our roots. Um, so, even like a typical day for me is even just like setting up meetings with different partners and sponsors, um, meeting with, meeting with community members as well, because as much as I'm, I'm taking funders and non-BIPOC organizations to task, as in nothing for us without us, I'm also using that with our relationship with the community. Um, so right in terms of our programming, we are running two programs right now. Um, we have a kids TV [00:10:00] writing bootcamp. They meet twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and that program's been running since January. We have about 25 people participating in that. Um, we also have a drama writing intensive that came from that fund last year. Um, so we have eight screenwriters, um, in that program right now, all matched with mentors who are showrunners or experienced writers in the industry. Um, and our goal is to, our goal is to find paid opportunities for at least two of those writers. Um, what we, a big thing for us and I really think for me, for me too, and a cause that I will, that I will really push and be very annoying about is, um, paid opportunities, advancement opportunities.

When I did a fellowship at Hot Docs, um, and out of that, we got a chance to [00:11:00] interview for internships with production companies. I went on eight interviews, got called back for all of them, but only one offered to pay me. Um, and I took it not just because they offered to pay, which for me also, that was a big part of the decision, um, but it's also what that shows. That commitment, that respect for my professional skills. I am bringing something to the table when I come into that space. And it wasn't a lot, like I really just got paid \$600 for a six week internship. But out of that, um, I got, ended up getting a full-time role with the company and I stayed there for a couple of years in that role. I was mentored daily. So I got a chance to learn about documentary, documentary research and editing, um, producing, directing. I got [00:12:00] to, it was like being in film school for that time. Um, that initial, that initial investment in my professional development means so much. Um, meant so much to me. And that allowed me to be able to fully participate in that at the time. I'm a single mother and that \$600, that was enough for me to buy some groceries and pay for a bus pass, you know, and that made such a difference because then I could participate fully, you know, without having to juggle a whole bunch of other roles at the same time. Um, So I think sometimes just like, even a little bit goes a long way with it as well, but we really need to start thinking about what kind of, what kind of further injustices we feed into with unpaid, with unpaid opportunities. Um, [00:13:00] too often we get held back into this... in, in entry level roles. We get held, we get held into this label of emerging, um, and that creates further inequity in our industry. You know, because if you're not able to advance, then you're not able to increase your income. If you cannot increase your income, you end up getting stuck in a rut. You know, um, then you can't meet, you can't meet your needs.

It also affects what types of decisions you make for yourself and or your family. So it's my thing. I want people to get paid positions. Um, I want people to also have opportunity for career growth as well. And so these are things that are very, very important to us. Um, ultimately people who've done the kids' TV writing programs, so many got their first writing credit [00:14:00] from it. Um, there was a young man who was featured in, on CBC recently. I believe he did a segment with Sesame Street. Um, he did our kids TV writing program a couple of years ago. Um, um, people getting, because what we provide is not just the

learning, but it's the networking part of it, bringing people with experience, with decision-making powers, into the room as well so, so our communities get access to that. Um, so even, so that's what's happening in terms of programming right now. Um, and then we're just going to build over the next few months. Um, I wish I could give like a regular in terms of like, 'What does a day look like?' Um, but it does get, um, we're just going kind of going with the flow of it, but building strategically, simultaneously.

It's so funny, like being [00:15:00] interviewed by Mass Culture now because your executive director, Robin Sokolowski, she was my boss back in 2011 when she was E.D. of Playwrights' Guild of Canada. Um, and that again was somebody taking a chance on me. Um, that job I applied to be communications coordinator. I knew, I had never worked in that capacity before. Um, my background was more in arts outreach and administration. Um, but took that opportunity. And I remember the first time she was just like, "Oh, you have to write a press release." And I'm like, "Oh, okay then," and googled how to write a press release, you know, and put something together.

Also had to learn how to use MailChimp. Um, that was also very early days of businesses using social media to do their outreach and engagement too. Um, but I found myself in a very nurturing environment in a [00:16:00] safe space. Um, And then coming, coming out of that, that's really when I made a decision that I have a full commitment to working in the arts sector, in the arts and cultural sector. Um, cause I got to see firsthand, um, how it works, best practices for managing, managing an arts organization. I also got to learn about the different arts councils, funding and funding opportunities too. So coming out of that, I mean, it started to shape the type of future that I was building.

One of the biggest things, um, with that opportunity is that it gave me a lot of, it gave me an opportunity to grow in my outreach work. Um, and then I saw, well, where do I see myself in the industry? And I knew I'm not an artist per se, but I'm more of a facilitator for artists and more of a supporter for them. Um, so [00:17:00] coming out of that, I did for a short time, a networking, uh, networking series, um, called Barter, and did that and put it together. That was all like completely self-funded, you know, buying, buying fruits and veggies and chopping them up, um, buying them in Chinatown and doing that type of work. Um, And then just using the power of social media to reach out to people and say, "Hey, I'm doing this" and negotiating with speakers. Um, even the AGO offered me free space, um, to host these. So a really great opportunity, really good opportunity for me. And it's not until after that, like in 2012, that's when I started pursuing a career in film and television. Um, so I did a program with Manifesto. Um, that one was, I believe it was a 12 week program for aspiring filmmakers. [00:18:00] Uh, so I did that one. So many people who I met then as instructors, I know them, I know them better now. Uh, I've been following their work for years. Um, some of them I'll happily call colleagues as we may have collaborated in some way. Um, and out of that opportunity, that's when, um, it was through, it was through a partnership with Manifesto that Hot Docs created a Doc Accelerator. And that was my first, that was my first fellowship and where that internship came from. And I tell people all the time, like my first job in the film and television industry was as a social media intern. You know, it was my first, that was my first job in it. You know, I was coming into it with so much experience in terms of community outreach, which is essential in documentary. I had a background in nonprofit, in

the nonprofit sector. Again, that's a very useful, useful skill, um, useful skill in documentary, [00:19:00] along with grant writing. So I had to take a really good look at what skills was, what skills I am, what skills I was bringing into into the sector. Um, so I did that, did that for a couple of years, um, did a lot of professional development, a lot, a lot a lot a lot of that, and went out to everything, networked. Um, I'm better at networking online because honestly I'm very, I'm more much more of an introvert in-person. Um, so online allows you to create your own persona, you know, and engage on your own terms. So I'm very fortunate to be growing into the industry at this time in, uh, in the digital age. Um, and I think after that, after I did all of that work, um, I freelanced for a while, did some documentary research, [00:20:00] um, and a lot of work into the digital marketing, um, digital audience engagement.

Um, so just bringing, just marrying all of those skills, um, and creating something of value to the, to the industry. Um, and, and I always tell people to look out for opportunities and trends. And that's one of my, I think that's one of my super powers, being able to spot trends, because coming into the industry the year that I did, starting as a social media intern, that was when the Canada media fund made it mandatory for English documentary films to have a digital media component. So it was, uh, it was a high, it was a skill that was high in demand but low in supply. Um, so I was able to position myself in that way. Um, so I worked in [00:21:00] documentary up until 2016 until I started working at, um, Women in Film and Television. Um, and that's where I was until, until last year, um, before I took a break from the industry and went to Ryerson University to work as a manager of marketing and communications.

So that's, that's my resume for you, but it's... what I even say, like for the opportunities that I've had, um, there, something that connects all of them is relationships. It's, it's that. Um, because when I started, when I started applying for different documentary freelance jobs, um, and people would see who I've worked with before, you know, that increased their trust level in terms of bringing me on, then the relationship that I would build on that place, it could, it opened me up to another opportunity. I [00:22:00] remember when I was at, I was working with one with one director. While I was working with her, another colleague of hers took me on to work, to work on their project. And then while I was there, another colleague of that person contacted me to come and take on a three month, a three month contract. Um, and then even at Women in Film and Television, I'd already been a member for at least two years before I joined the staff, um, and had good relationships with staff members with the community too.

Um, and I think that's something that I bring to, that I bring to this role. Um, in my past, in the last few years, what I bring is a really wide network. Um, and it's something that I, I hold, I really value. Um, and then lastly, I remember a couple years ago, one bit of advice my aunt gave me was, um, [00:23:00] be careful of what you sign your name to, and how important reputation is.

Um, so I've tried to be very mindful of that. I haven't always been, I haven't been perfect at it, um, but really try my best to build and maintain authentic relationships. And that's, that's my voice also when I'm doing social media work, which I don't have to do anymore.

I think what's always so powerful are visuals. Um, and very important is people seeing themselves reflected, seeing their experiences reflected. Um, those are things that are, you can't buy that, you know, you can't, you can't buy that [00:24:00] feeling. You can't even manufacture, like really manufacture that feeling.

Um, also in terms of giving, giving organizations or our arts service, um, our arts service organizations a platform, a space, um, a space in which to share, to share their voice and their experiences, I think that that will resonate with people. Um, and one thing as a disclaimer, I actually encountered a project when I was working at Ryerson, um, because of the professor there, who's involved in it. Um, we had the, at the time I was writing an article about her, about her involvement in this project. So how everything just comes back, um, and was so excited to see it. Um, because so many times we're so isolated as arts and culture organizations. Um, sometimes we're so [00:25:00] buried in our work. Um, we're overwhelmed, we're short-staffed, um, we're facing all of this, so we don't really get a chance to connect and to gather. Um, and the whole concept of gathering as arts and cultural workers, especially with the communities that we serve, it's, it refuels us, you know? Um, and that's one thing we missed this year, missed this past year. We haven't had a chance to gather, um, to share in person, you know, where you could glance across the room and exchange looks with someone and you know that they fully understand how you're feeling in that moment. Um, when I was working at, yeah, when I was working at the Playwrights' Guild... No I think it was after, sorry, my brain now. I think it was after that I remember going to, [00:26:00] um, a gathering retreat with different arts and cultural workers. Um, and I think we had some, yeah, it was mainly arts and culture workers. Um, and what a beautiful moment that was, you know, for all of us to be in that space and for us to just relax our shoulders, you know, and, and find comfort in solidarity. And I think this is what projects like this do. Um, because all I saw like a couple months ago was the mapping aspect of it. I'm like, this is so cool. Honestly, show me an interactive graph and you've got me. I'm not so hard to please. Um, but I thought it was so beautiful and even some of the data that you were able to extrapolate at that time, you know, how impactful that could be, you know, but, um, I think, I think the biggest impact would be [00:27:00] for the organizations who feel so isolated to, to feel a sense of community.

The future of our sector? Um, it is diverse, it's inclusive. Um, it centers wellness and community. Um, it's impactful on many levels, economical, cultural, um, social as well. Um, we're, we're a vital part of the economy, you know, think about last year, what people found refuge in, it was in the arts. That was the escape. They found it in, in artists, in cultural work. [00:28:00] Um, that's what binds us as a community of people. And I speak about community a lot because that's, that's my foundation with that. I was so blessed, so much, so many aunties and uncles, and they're like, "Oh, so that's your mom's sister?" And I'm like, "No." And they're like, "So that's your dad's sister?" "No." "Where are they even from?" I'm like, "This other country on the other side of the world." "Then how are you a family?" No, they're my aunties and my uncles because that's, that's what I grew up in. Um, I'm so proud to have been embraced by so many, by so many people. Um, so there are like huge shifts happening in our industry in terms of conversations around precarity, the gig economy, how we treat workers within our sector. How do we, how do we keep people employed, um, and [00:29:00] also give them space for their creative practice? Um, how do we not to, how do

we not replicate the toxicity of corporate culture? Um, like these are the things that I'm constantly, that I'm currently thinking of. Um, so that's what I think in terms of... The future is going to look so different, even in terms of how funding works. That's going to shift dramatically, um, because so many people are like, we're critiquing the current systems. I think this time that we're in is a Renaissance. Um, so that's what I have in terms of the future of the arts and cultural sector. Um, and maybe, maybe we will do away with some colonial practices as well. That's part of it. We need to, we really need to decolonize our sector, um, and also de-centre, um, [00:30:00] to dismantle white supremacy within it as well.

Um, now I go to the nice part of advice for people who are coming up in it. Um, I would say be authentic and build, build real relationships with people, you know? Um, and remember at the end of the day, um, it's people who you're serving, who you're interacting with as well. So, uh, having and showing a great sense of humanity will bring you a long way. Um, and also just do, do the work that you can to find your voice in the sector too, you know. Um, And I think just let, let it happen organically. Really and truly it's that [00:31:00] even, um, just, just doing that work and thinking about it, thinking about where you want to be, what you have to do to get there. I would say... 2013 I wrote down my goals. Um, one of them was, I wanted credits on feature documentary films. I wanted a management position at an arts and cultural organization, and I want to be an executive director. Um, and my next one is to be a management, a management consultant in the arts. And from 2013 to now I've like crossed off all of those because I looked at it and I did the work along the way. So I say to, to write down your goals. Write them down, like, and so that's what I do. I write it and I put it away somewhere, you know, I put it away and, [00:32:00] and it's, um, and it's also because that's my personality. I plan a lot. So strategic planning is something I enjoy. I even use the business model canvas for my life planning. I have a problem. Um, but I would say too, my big thing is to be authentic and also immerse yourself in the arts. You can't represent artists, you can't work for these organizations if you don't interact with the art that's being created, and you don't just have to think about the one that you represent. Um, like I love, I love all forms of art, you know? Um, and that includes books and movies and paintings and fashion and everything. Cause you're going to find inspiration anywhere, you know, and come back to your organization and be like, "Whoa, let me tell you what this museum is doing in Italy," you know, [00:33:00] and here's how we can do it. Um, so I think it's just to immerse yourselves in the, in the world of culture as well, you know. I have like all of this behind me. Like this, this blanket, my best friend made it. This piece of art, my cousin made it. And all of the books and everything. But it's just to... let it consume you. And I tell people all the time, like, your resume, they already read your resume. So they've already decided that you most likely qualify for the role. So you're not going in there to prove that, um, you're going in to see what the culture is like. Um, and then... Cause that's what they're assessing with you is to see how you would fit in with the team. Um, [00:34:00] so don't worry so much about your skills when you're in the interview. Unless they put in like some silly test, which I hate. They'll just put like some kind of test in the interview. Um, but just, just be yourself through it. I've gone to interviews and I've been like, they would be crazy not to hire me. Walk in with that, walk in with that attitude. At my WIFT interview I told them exactly how, exactly what the public perception of the organization was, and it was not pretty, you know. And at first I thought like, "Oh my God, they're not going to hire me" because I told them about themselves. But I

was, I was standing in my truth and nobody could take that away from me. And also interview them. Do that. Ask them questions.

I wish I knew about a program like [00:35:00] this years ago, I would have done it. Um, I would have really, really done that. I think it's amazing, and almost anybody that ever hired from an arts and cultural program, they've been my best hires because they understand. Um, I would say to just, um, just keep, just keep doing the work, you know. The art sector needs, needs young people in leadership roles. I'll be very clear on that. It's not just young people to do the grunt work of the organization, but need them in leadership roles. If there's an opportunity for, even for you to even get experience on boards, do it. If there's an opportunity for you to be part of a board committee, get in. Like that is huge, huge experience to get so you can grow as a leader [00:36:00] and you can be part of these conversations.

And like, oh my gosh, go on vacation.