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## **About Pongo Poetry Project**

Pongo Poetry Project (Pongo) was founded 26 years ago to help people who had experienced trauma heal through writing poetry. We are a small, nonprofit arts organization poised for growth and are looking for a passionate, skilled Executive Director to help steer us on that journey.

Our mission is to engage youth in writing poetry to inspire healing and growth. To that end, we use personal poetry to facilitate healing among youth coping with devastating traumas, such as abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence. At the heart of our program is the Pongo Method, a uniquely successful trauma-informed technique for teaching poetry, created with the support and advice of prominent community psychiatrists from the University of Washington.

Our direct service work entails implementing therapeutic poetry writing workshops inside detention centers, psychiatric hospitals, and other sites frequented by youth with histories of trauma. Specifically, we have offered our poetry mentorship programming at King County Juvenile Detention and the Child Study & Treatment Center for 25 and 20 years respectively, which speaks to the enduring impact of our program.

Offering a space for healing and recovery is crucial to the healthy emotional development of all youth, but especially those we serve, who exist at the intersection of racial injustice and economic hardship. Our approach helps youth write about painful life experiences – often for the first time – in a way that promotes insight and healing.

To date, Pongo has mentored poetry with over 6,500 people. Our evaluation results demonstrate that Pongo provides significant therapeutic benefits for youth, helping them find relief, derive creative joy, and experience growth through poetry writing. In addition to our mentorship program, we also review and respond to poetry submitted on our website.

Based on the success of our direct service work, Pongo established a program to train individuals and organizations on the Pongo Method. In 2014, we codified our methodology in the book “Writing with At-Risk Youth: The Pongo Teen Writing Method,” using it as the teaching text to conduct 84 regional and national trainings on our approach. Our training program has spurred the creation of 87 projects based on our model. Pongo’s strategic vision is to become a best practice in the application of expressive arts to heal trauma, and we are in the process of creating a business plan to realize this vision.

Through our publishing program, Pongo has published 16 anthologies featuring work produced by youth at our poetry mentorship sites. These volumes describe profound tragedy and sorrow, but also capture the self-discovery and healing that creative expression can bring. We have donated over 17,000 copies of these collections to youth and program providers during our history. Our publishing program inspires confidence in the youth we serve, demonstrating that their creative output has artistic merit and value. Furthermore, it connects our youth authors with the wider community, raising awareness about their trauma, the conditions that give rise to it, and the resilience they demonstrate in response.

Pongo currently has four part-time staff (two of whom report directly to the Executive Director), a few dozen volunteers and an annual budget of over \$200,000. Our revenue comes from a variety of sources including fee for service, individual donors, an annual event, foundations, training fees and book sales.

After leading the organization for 25 years, the founding executive director retired from Pongo in July 2020. Since that time, Pongo has been led by a seasoned interim executive director who has helped create the infrastructure needed for growth planned over the next several years. In addition, we have recently engaged in board development and recruitment and have clarified board roles and responsibilities, offered training and increased the number of board members.

### **Executive Director Job Description**

The Executive Director (ED) reports to the board of directors and has overall responsibility for Pongo's staff, operations, programs, expansion, and implementation of its mission.

### **Responsibilities**

#### **Strategic Leadership & Organizational Growth**

- Lead Pongo in its journey to become an anti-racist organization and promote and instill diversity, equity and inclusion in all we do
- Implement the national expansion
- Present at national and regional conferences and organizations to promote Pongo
- Begin to build partnerships in new markets, establishing relationships with practitioners and funders, and political and community leaders at each expansion site
- Serve as an external local and national spokesperson who communicates program results with an emphasis on the successes of the local program as a model for regional and national replication
- Build board capacity and involvement with strategic direction for both ongoing local operations as well as for the national expansion

### **Fundraising & Communications:**

- In collaboration with the Development Manager, expand revenue generating and fundraising activities to support existing program operations and national expansion
- Deepen and refine all aspects of communications—from web presence to external relations with the goal of creating a stronger brand
- Use external presence and relationships to garner new opportunities for growth

### **Management & Operations:**

- Work with staff to ensure ongoing programmatic excellence and consistent quality of finance and administration, programs, fundraising, communications, and systems
- Create and maintain a collaborative environment in which all staff are valued and have opportunities for personal and professional growth
- Actively engage and energize Pongo staff, volunteers, board members, committees, partnering organizations, and funders
- Develop, maintain, and support a strong and diverse Board of Directors; serve as ex-officio of select committees
- Develop effective systems to track scaling progress, and regularly evaluate program components to measure successes that can be effectively communicated to the board, funders, and other constituents

### **Qualifications**

The ED must be thoroughly committed to Pongo's mission. Candidates will be considered based on the range of their lived and learned experiences, professional background, and direct and transferable skills. Pongo seeks candidates with a compelling combination of demonstrated experience and skills.

Required Qualifications include:

- At least 5 years of senior management experience; track record of effective leadership and growing a nonprofit organization regionally and/or nationally; ability to point to specific examples of having developed and operationalized strategies that have taken an organization to the next stage of growth and impact
- Excellence in staff management with the ability to create and maintain a collaborative work environment in which everyone feels valued
- Demonstrated fundraising experience including strategy, a track record of having achieved increased financial support, donor stewardship and retention, and major donor solicitation
- Commitment to anti-racism and experience helping an organization move forward in its anti-racism journey
- Experience working with diverse communities

- Strong written and verbal communication skills; a persuasive and passionate communicator with excellent interpersonal and multidisciplinary project skills
- Experience in providing financial administration including developing and monitoring a budget and providing relevant reports to board and staff

Preferred Qualifications include:

- Appreciation for poetry and the role of expressive arts in healing
- Past success working with a Board of Directors with the ability to cultivate existing board member relationships
- Strong marketing and public relations experience with the ability to engage a wide range of stakeholders and cultures

Our ideal candidate will be:

- Action-oriented, collaborative, entrepreneurial, adaptable, and innovative
- Passionate, positive, mission-driven, and self-directed

**Compensation and Benefits:**

This is a full-time position. Salary range is \$75,000 to \$85,000 DOE plus benefits. The position starts on or around January 4, 2022.

Benefits include health insurance stipend, paid time off, 9 paid holidays, a one-week winter break and a flexible work schedule.

**To Apply:**

The position will be open until filled. Applicant review will begin in late summer. Offer will be made in November.

Please submit a resume and cover letter addressed to:

[executivedirector@pongoteenwriting.org](mailto:executivedirector@pongoteenwriting.org)

Pongo Poetry Project is an equal opportunity employer. All people who add to our diverse community are encouraged to apply.