
2025 IMPACT REPORT



BROWNBODY

LIBERATING BLACK ARTISTRY

Blackness is the source. Not the struggle. The liberation we are speaking of is not an escape from something. It is a return. A return to what Black people have always carried in the body: the knowing of beauty, of rhythm, of form, of spirit. That genius was never lost. It was sometimes buried, sometimes stolen, sometimes performed for rooms that could not hold its full meaning. But it was always there. **It has always been here.**

Brownbody affirms, celebrates, and grounds:

To affirm Black art is to affirm the whole of Black life. Not the resilience alone. Not only the survival. The joy. The complexity. The vulnerability and the magic. When Black artists create without translation, without shrinking, without performance for outside eyes, they are doing what Ida demanded this country reckon with. They are living what Langston refused to stop asking. The dream does not defer forever. It moves. It finds its form. It multiplies in the hands of every generation that picked it back up.

The sacred was never absent. It is in our journey and our histories. In the spirituals that carried liberation inside their lyrics, the double meaning, hidden road. It is in the Harlem Renaissance insisting that Black beauty belonged on the canvas, in the verse, in the center of the room. It is in the Black Arts Movement refusing to beg for a seat at a table it had already outgrown. It is in every body that stepped onto stage or ice or into a studio, and said: We are here. We have always been here. We belong here. We are whole.

Liberation, then, is not a destination. It is a practice of remembrance. It is the ongoing, embodied act of returning to what has always been true: that Black artistry is not only a response to pain. It is the full expression of a people whose humanity, whose joy, whose spiritual depth, whose aesthetic brilliance has been sacred from the very beginning.

At Brownbody, we practice this through original performance, the development of artistic work for the ice and the stage, and the cultivation of opportunities for Black movement artists to deepen their craft.

We also practice this by creating pathways for growth, on the ice, in our communities, and for Brownbody's future. Through our community - through you - we build the resources needed to sustain accessible programming and bold artistic work. Thank you!

With Gratitude,



Deneane Richburg
Brownbody Foundation & Artistic/Executive Director

A YEAR OF MOVEMENT, JOY, BELONGING

In 2025, Brownbody continued building spaces where Black and Brown communities could experience joy, artistry, and belonging, on and off the ice.

Through performances, public programs, Learn to Skate sessions, and local and national community engagement, we deepened our commitment to centering Blackness in ice arts while expanding access for a new generation of skaters.

2025 was marked by powerful artistic expression, growing community partnerships, and continued investment in our apprentice artists and Learn to Skate students.

From Philadelphia to Minnesota, Brownbody brought together families, audiences, and artists to reimagine who belongs in winter spaces.

In 2026, we are excited for new performances, stronger partnerships, and even more opportunities to bring joy and create belonging on the ice.

Together, we are building more than skating skills.

We are building confidence. We are building community. We are building belonging.

Together, we are building a future where everyone belongs on the ice.

Brownbody's Mission:

Brownbody exists to liberate Black artistry through dance, theater, and figure skating.

We believe that the stories of Blackness – past, present, and future – deserve to be told with nuance, power, and beauty.

Through movement, sound, and storytelling, we create original works that uplift, challenge, and transform.

Brownbody is a home for the humanity and artistry of Black people.

On the ice and the stage, we are a reliable national and international resource for igniting the liberation of Black life.



ARTISTIC WORK

Infinite Slow Drive/Obsidians in the Wild

Brownbody's newest work in progress, *Infinite Slow Drive/Obsidians in the Wild*, is choreographed by Lela Aisha Jones, Brownbody's Associate Artistic Director, and translated for the ice in collaboration with Artistic/Executive Director, Deneane Richburg.

The work explores vehicle augmentation, sonic cultures, and Black movement legacies through park gatherings, parades, and processional slow stroll traditions rooted in Black cultural spaces.



This year, we received a National Performance Network Creation Fund grant and confirmed co-commissioners The Painted Bride (Philadelphia) and Springboard for the Arts (St. Paul) to support production and community engagement activities in 2026 and 2027.

Artistic and Technical Residencies

In July, we held artistic and technical residencies for the project, supported in part by a Best Buy Capital grant. These residencies gave our artists time and space to deepen their practice, strengthen collaboration, and prepare for future performance work both on and off the ice.

The work will premiere in the Twin Cities and tour alongside a remounting of Richburg's *Tracing Sacred Steps*.

**This investment in artistry is central to our mission:
when Black movement artists are fully supported,
new futures become visible.**

EMPOWERING A NEW GENERATION

Apprenticeship Program

Brownbody apprentices learn to advance their artistry, deepen their skating and movement skills, and are mentored by Brownbody company members.

In 2025, apprentices performed at community events across the Twin Cities, modeling excellence and possibility for younger skaters while continuing their own artistic development.

Apprentices performed during **Springboard on Ice** on January 25 and February 8, showcasing the power of culturally grounded skating performance. For many in our community, seeing our apprentices on the ice is their first experience imagining themselves there.

2025 Apprentice Pieces,
all choreography by Deneane Richburg:

Title: *What Lies Beneath*

Apprentice Artist: Eugene Sandel

Music: *Sandcastles* by Beyonce

Costume: Trevor Bowen

Title: *Where We Meet/Where We Wander*

Apprentice Artist: Laila Imihy

Music: *Saturn* by SZA

Costume: Monica Lash and Deneane Richburg

Title: *I Want My People to be Free*

Apprentice Artists: Eugene Sandel, Eli Stende, Avery Lash, Josie Ranaivosoa, Bahati Stalheim

Music: *Umi Says* by Yasiin Bey

Costumes: Monica Lash and Zamora Simmons



Technical Artist Residency Program

Funded by the Knight Foundation, our Technical Artist Residency Program (TARP) continues to thrive. In 2025, a three-week residency brought together TARP artists, Brownbody movement artists, choreographer and Associate Artistic Director, Lela Aisha Jones, and Brownbody Founder & Artistic/Executive Director, Deneane Richburg for collaborative artistic development and technical exploration.

This work strengthens not only performance quality, but also the behind-the-scenes creative leadership needed to sustain innovative movement work.

LEARN TO SKATE

Brownbody Learn to Skate reimagines a traditional skating class by intentionally rooting instruction in joy and belonging.

Centering Blackness in our curriculum, we provide affordable instruction and access to equipment, ensuring students develop movement skills, confidence, and strong community relationships that will support them beyond the program.

For many participants, this is their first experience skating and their first time feeling they truly belong in an arena.

Skaters build resilience, confidence, and self-expression through our unique curriculum. Families witness what is possible when access meets opportunity. And, our team of Instructors and junior instructors grow as mentors and leaders.

Our Learn to Skate program is about more than simply learning skating skills, it is about reclaiming space, building confidence, and experiencing joy through motion.

By the numbers:

- Welcomed 149 skaters to the ice, many for the very first time.
- Provided affordable access, with more than 75% of skaters receiving low- or no-cost scholarships.
- Trained 11 instructors and assistant instructors, building leadership and teaching skills while strengthening their own identities as skaters and artists.
- Engaged 1,000+ students, families, audience members, and supporters throughout the year



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Building community is at the heart of Brownbody's work. We believe that access, belonging, and joy are created through shared experiences – on the ice, in community, and across generations.

Community Partnerships

In 2025, we continued building community through partnerships, neighborhood-based programming, and gatherings that welcomed new skaters and strengthened relationships with returning families. These moments of connection remind us that skating can be a powerful tool for visibility, celebration, and collective care.



In January, we partnered with **Springboard for the Arts** for the fourth year in a row with two “mini Learn to Skate lessons” and a performance by our apprentices. Through this partnership, Brownbody is fortunate to connect with members of the Frogtown Midway community. In August, we partnered with **Brooklyn Park Parks & Rec** bringing our Learn to Skate to the West Metro, expanding our scope geographically, and deepening relationships within this community. We closed the year in **Hopkins** with Learn to Skate sessions on December 7 and 21, both featuring apprentice performances.

Skate Parties

While Learn to Skate was on a temporary hiatus for recalibration and revisioning, our community continued gathering through a series of Skate Parties. With music, dancing, and apprentice performances, these gatherings emphasized skating as joyful, accessible, rooted in community.

Each Skate Party was a unique event designed to demonstrate what is possible on the ice as well as to reinforce that skating is not only about skill-building, it is also about celebration and belonging. Our final event of the spring brought together all the elements of a good Brownbody party: performances by our apprentices and our professional movement artists as well as free time on the ice with DJing by board member, Alsa Bruno of Brass Solidarity.

WITH GRATITUDE

Brownbody Staff

We are deeply grateful for our creative, administrative and operating staff who work year-round to breathe creative life into all that we do:

Deneane Richburg, Founder & Artistic/Executive Director

Lela Aisha Jones, Associate Artistic Director

Karyn Wilson, Admin/Ops Coordinator & Learn to Skate Director

Lingling Yang, Interim Managing Director and Grant Writer

Sandra Richardson, Undoing Racism, Healing, and Organizational Consultant

Wendy Johnson, Learn to Skate Coordinator

Our Funders

We are also deeply grateful for the support we received throughout 2025. From foundations and local businesses, to individual donors and community members, every contribution helped sustain and strengthen Brownbody's work. While we have a policy of protecting the privacy of our individual donors, we do want to recognize the foundations supporting our work. **Thank you for believing in our mission!**

