

## Agency for Change Podcast: Britta Wheeler, Executive Director, Children's Institute of Fashion Arts

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### **Britta Wheeler:**

If you're a mom of a spirited child, it's challenging. And the more you can help them foster themselves and become independent and follow their own path, the better they're going to be.

### **Announcer:**

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

Years ago it was fairly common for students to take home economics or family consumer sciences courses in school, which focused on things like how to manage finances in a home, how to decorate, the basics of cooking and baking and cleaning. Another thing you could learn was how to run a sewing machine, and important skills for creating clothing items or completing craft projects or even repairing damaged pieces like a ripped pair of jeans or a shirt. While home economics courses have fallen by the wayside in schools, one organization in New York City is teaching kids sewing as a means of encouraging creativity, developing valuable skills, and using math in a practical application.

Today you're going to hear from the former Nebraska resident who saw a need in the world and created a nonprofit to fill the gap for kids in her community.

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president and chief strategist at KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change Podcast. Today's guest is Dr. Britta Wheeler, founder and executive director of the Children's Institute of Fashion Arts, which is devoted to expansive education in the culture and craft of clothing. Britta, welcome to the podcast.

### **Britta Wheeler:**

Hi, Lyn. Wow, this is so fantastic. Thanks for having me.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

Absolutely. I have really been looking forward to this conversation. Britta, we talked a bit in the intro about the work that you're doing, but could you tell us more for those of us who aren't familiar with the Children's Institute of Fashion Arts, what do you do and who do you help?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Sure. Well, let's see, so we are a New York City nonprofit arts education organization. I founded the organization in 2017, and we've been running after school programs in the New York City public schools. Brooklyn, actually, at a family shelter in Brooklyn, in Manhattan, Queens, around. And that whole landscape is kind of varied, so you have to kind of navigate and figure out how you're going to do it. But that's really how we've been earning our money, and then we've also received an ongoing grant from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council to run our main program, which is called the Fashion Arts Workshop. And that consists of a four-week program where we invite children.

So our key group is children because we're the Children's Institute of Fashion Arts. The core demographic are kids age seven to 12, 13, maybe. Yeah, they're just on fire with making stuff and learning how to use a needle and thread. And some of the most simple kinds of practices are just so important for them to feel empowered. And so that's our core demographic. And this program, the Fashion Arts Workshop, is four sessions. So we teach them hand sewing, and we make a little takeaway project from felt day one. And then days two and three, we just bring in all these fabrics, we get donated fabrics, and I have a group of teachers, the kids just start to play with the fabric and talk to the teachers and figure out what they want to make. Then in week four, we have a fashion show.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh Britta, sounds like so much fun.

**Britta Wheeler:**

It's so much fun. It's really amazing to see the transformation of the kids coming in. Most of them don't really know another student in there, or maybe they bring one friend, and then they basically get to have their ideas come alive. And then the fourth week at the show, we teach them how to walk and show their garment. It's not about beauty, it's not about popularity, it's about feeling confident, walking, showing the project that you made. We haven't blasted it out to a million people, it's just really family and friends and you can feel the love in the room, and the kids are just beaming and excited and taking it in. It's amazing. And then I have some professional photographers that come and we have music, and it's usually in a different event space than the workshop. So it just really gives the kids an idea that they can do something.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That sounds so empowering and so much fun. Okay, so as you explain it, I'm thinking in my mind, Project Runway for kids without the mean judges.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Without the competition, kind of like that. But the kids don't know how to sew most of them. Well, some of them had a little bit here and there. But yeah, it's kind of like that.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah. So Britta, as I think about what you're doing, it takes me back. I've been on the earth for quite a while now. I remember a time when I was a child, my mother and my grandmother sewed, knitted or crocheted, literally everything in my wardrobe. I've never owned a sewing machine, which I'm feeling kind of out of it right now, but I did learn how to, I'm really good at sewing a button on. I can hem a pair of pants kind things, but I'm not sure I ever taught those skills to any of my kids. So in three generations we've gone from sewing everything to me knowing a little bit to, I'm not sure if my kids know how to sew a button on or hem slacks or not.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Well, if you think about it, and I'm probably at the same age as you, but if you think about it in that span of time, it's really when the fashion industry, the garment industry, outsourced to other countries and there were a lot of government deregulation put in place that allowed cheap imports to come into this country. And I've spoken to people in our age range who used to sew their own clothes and their children's clothes, but then everything became so inexpensive and disposable that you didn't have to learn those skills. But in some ways, I think learning those skills is completely central to having the idea that you can do something in life.

**Lyn Wineman:**

It's empowering for sure.

**Britta Wheeler:**

I mean, I remember when I was a kid feeling I didn't know how things were made, how does this happen? And I wanted to know so badly. And then I was blessed because I had a mom and grandmas that sewed and were doing it, and my mom was an artist. And so I got to really see how and learn from them how things were made. And I guess the other thing I wanted to just throw in here over the years, I wasn't exactly sure, you know how in marketing they always tell you who is your perfect market?

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yes.

**Britta Wheeler:**

It's only in the last several months that I've been able to really identify, I'm really interested in those spirited kids who they're alive, they want to know, they are active, they're emotional, they're creative, they want to get their hands in it and do something. And we just don't have a lot of room for that kind of individuality, that kind of expression. And so that would be my key demographic in terms of the kind of kid that I was.

**Lyn Wineman:**

And me too.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yeah. The kind of world I want to create room for those kids.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Britta, I love that so much because you think about after school sports or maybe music clubs or different clubs, they are looking for kids that maybe fit a mold. And you have painted the picture of kids that are outside of that mold, that are really looking for an outlet for their creativity. Probably that could really benefit from some positive confidence building.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Part of what we do in the classrooms are to foster this authenticity that, you just don't have a lot of room for that in these other kinds of groups, especially in school, if you're different, which I was, all the friends were, if you're a little different it's just really hard to feel like you can have your own tribe. Yeah. I mean, you do whatever, an island of misfits.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yes. I identify with that so much.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Right. But there is room in this world for people to have their own vision. And I think as a grownup, there's not a lot of people really moving forward... Well, I don't know, this could be argued, but with their own creative vision for things. So, I have a collection of books you can see behind me and others on the shelves out there. But there have been collecting books about the creative spirit and innovation and all of these things get codified now, especially in our internet world. Everything's kind of packaged already. For the kids, especially now, the ones growing up who are not just digital natives, but smartphone natives, they're really channeled into these games and these learning methods. And you're supposed to have outcomes and plop out all the same and ready to work in your corporate America or whatever. And I'm just trying to foster the idea that there's room, there's a lot of freedom to choose and make your own choices and follow your own path. It's not always easy for people to understand, especially kids in this world.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Fantastic. Since you mentioned your bookshelf, I do want to just tell for people who aren't watching, who are just listening, Britta's bookshelf is color coded. So right behind her are the pink books and then the blue books and above them are the white books, and below are the black books. I love that way of organizing your bookshelf, Britta. It's cool.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Well, I organized it because I started this podcast, well, it's a YouTube show called Fashion Library Review. So this is my fashion library behind me and I started to just talk about books that I love. And so that you can find that on our website.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Fantastic. Britta, we'll make sure to link the Fashion Library Review YouTube link in our show notes as well for people who want to see it and who want to see your super cool bookshelf.

So just to be clear that we've talked a lot about kids and empowering kids and for marketing people, you painted that great picture, the persona of who your target audience is. But I understand you provide an outlet for adults as well. Is that true?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Well, I'm an adult. We have teachers that we train, and I'm brainstorming new programs. We recently moved into an office space sponsored by another nonprofit organization, Chashama, here in New York City. If you're familiar with what's happening in the city right now, not all the office workers are back in midtown-

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yes. So it kind of seems like not the same hustle and bustle that was there before the pandemic.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Exactly. And so we're fortunate to receive this beautiful office space where we can hold some programs. So we're trying to brainstorm and think about how we might have intergenerational classes or a group, but this is something that I'm dreaming of. The real vision for the CIFA has been to build a maker museum in the garment district.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh, I love that.

**Britta Wheeler:**

And that would, of course, be for families. We would want to have all kinds of maker labs, wet and dry, fabric and other materials, tech, high and low tech, the machines are so fascinating. And then also commemorate the history of the garment district. Any immigrant group coming through America has started in that field. And then that whole district and industry created the American middle class in the 20th century. And as you know, I'm a sociologist, so I was researching some of that and this course I was teaching at New York Institute of Technology. And so I basically researched the history of the garment district and how the field started. The industry really started with the Civil War, and the North won the Civil War because they had good uniforms.

**Lyn Wineman:**

They could stay warm-

**Britta Wheeler:**

They identified the rank of each individual and they all felt part of the same team. So that would boost a morale and a confidence that maybe the Southern States didn't have. And it was all because of the Port of New York City and the immigrant labor that made the garments.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's amazing. So since we're on the topic of fashion and you're obviously an expert in this area, is there anything that people typically get wrong about fashion, Britta?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Well, oh my goodness. Fashion is a whole can of worms. When I was growing up, there was a lot of kind of more democratic ideals surrounding fashion. It was the era of women's sportswear. You didn't have to have icons and logos. It wasn't so much about status, it was really just looking good and being professional or having the right garment to wear for the right event. In the last number of years, it's

really changed and turned into the status, more increasingly a high status venture and luxury is being touted as the reason for fashion. I disagree with that. I think there's room for other things. Fashion for a lot of people that grow up in poverty or in other difficult circumstances, fashion can be a way to build their own status and present themselves in a way that makes sense and can grow into a different level. A lot of right now I feel is about pretense. You don't have to pretend to be something you're not to have confidence. So, that's one issue.

I mean, it's interesting because I grew up in Nebraska, my peers are native Nebraskans. I graduated from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, having studied textiles and clothing design at the East Campus, UNL. And fashion has a bad name. I think in America, especially because we're so pragmatic that a lot of people see fashion as extravagant, wasteful, putting on an act. And so it doesn't always align with basic American values of hard work diligence, making the world a better place for people. I mean, there's a stigma that goes along with it, along with women's issues, women's work, sewing has been denigrated and outsourced and underpaid. We're seeing a lot of changes happening now in the world. We'll see. I mean, so many changes.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah, that's right. That's right.

**Britta Wheeler:**

But there is an effort in New York state, Kirsten Gillibrand just propose a bill that would ensure fair labor pay for workers. We'll see, because, of course, like I mentioned before, a lot of the industry has been outsourced for cheaper labor around the world. But there is an effort right now, especially with our current crises, with our working classes, to restore American labor, to restore the industries that were left behind. I mean, the southern states were key in textiles and manufacturing, and same in New York, but a lot of those jobs have left and they were good jobs. So we'll see how that goes.

I know there are some efforts in Detroit. They're working on building a manufacturing center there, and I know there are some people in the south who are working to develop other industry avenues down there as well. So let's just see, I'm hoping that that's true.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah, it would be great to see the resurgence of that work coming back to the States and the quality of the craftsmanship returning and having a good, strong lifestyle for the people who are in the industry as well.

**Britta Wheeler:**

People will have to get used to paying more higher price, probably, and then they'll have to shift their consumption practices accordingly and maybe not buy such trendy clothes that they'll just throw away or they will get rid of-

**Lyn Wineman:**

But more classics, right? Yes.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Possibly. Possibly. Yeah. I think that if all those changes occur, people will then be paying attention to the environmental issues involved. So we're concerned about that. And sustainability, of course, is a

buzzword in the industry. There's been a lot of, "Greenwashing." Advertising and the marketing says, oh, we're so great. But then really, okay. And there was news a few years ago now that fashion industry globally is one of the main polluters in the world. Fashion people don't want to be seen as evil. They're portrayed like that in kids cartoons.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That is true. It is an industry that gets a bad rap in fiction, I think. Yeah.

**Britta Wheeler:**

In every industry there's good people, so they're taking it seriously. And there are now many practices in industry, no waste practices and no extra water. In fact, I was at a talk at a conference a few years ago before the pandemic, and there was a company there who was working in, I think it was Pakistan. It was a dye company, and they were talking about the wastewater from the area and actually filtered it through their factory and then produced clean water on the other side. So, that gives me hope.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And I think just as a consumer, the whole practice of buying garments that are going to last you so that you want to know how to sew on a button and make some basic repairs, because you want that piece to last you for a long time.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Exactly.

**Lyn Wineman**

Hey, Britta, I want to take a quick break here to share a message from one of our favorite podcast partners.

**Mark:**

As a podcast listener, you already know the power of the human voice to take messages from the ear, to the brain, to the heart. I'm Mark, a creative coach, dedicated to the study of what motivates people to take action. In my podcast, I chat with leaders who think beyond marketing, who are building long lasting connections with people who will pay them lots of money to do the important work the world needs. You can follow the podcast and check out previous episodes at [earbrainheart.com](http://earbrainheart.com). That's [earbrainheart.com](http://earbrainheart.com).

**Lyn Wineman**

All right, everyone, you are listening to Agency for Change, and we are jumping back into our conversation with Britta Wheeler of the Children's Institute of Fashion Arts.

**Lyn Wineman:**

So Britta, when you founded CIFA in 2017, I'm curious what gave you this idea? What was the gap in the world that you were looking to fill?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Wow. Okay. So here's some of the backstory. I like how you're asking a question.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I always love the backstory.

**Britta Wheeler:**

So as I've said, I was a spirited child and I grew up playing piano, playing guitar, sewing, knitting, crocheting-

**Lyn Wineman:**

You're very artsy. Very artsy.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yeah, very artsy. Like I said, my mom was an artist, and my dad was a sociologist at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I grew up in Omaha after having lived in Rolston for many years as a child, we moved to Omaha and I went to Omaha Central. I ventured forth in my life thinking I was going to be a fashion designer. I got discouraged when I realized business end of things, and I couldn't quite see myself doing that. Then I moved to Minneapolis, I'll make the long story short, I played in bands. I worked as a pastry chef and kind of just tried to find myself. And eventually I went back to school for sociology. This was in the mid '80s. And then I decided to go and get a PhD in sociology. So I moved to California, did my PhD out there. But I was trying to piece together the relationship between art and society and having these parents in Nebraska. Nebraskan parents-

**Lyn Wineman:**

Which tends to be we all picture life in Nebraska is somewhat conservative, maybe a bit more agrarian.

**Britta Wheeler:**

So my parents were very independent, interesting people that didn't fit the mold. So I kind of had it in the back of my head that I needed to figure this out. What is this story between art and society? So I ended up writing a PhD dissertation as a sociologist about the institutionalization of performance art.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yeah, I know. Talk about specialized.

So I kind of took a deep dive in the intellectual realm and read all about the history of the avant-garde. And then as a sociology professor, which then I was teaching classes that included that discussion of art in America, what is culture in America, American culture, questions about elitism versus popular culture. So I was able to really piece all those things together. I had a job at the time. Well, I moved to New York. I got a postdoc at NYU as the Art World's professor in the Draper Interdisciplinary Master's program for Social Thought and Humanities.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow. That sounds very big.

**Britta Wheeler:**

It was good. It was interesting. And of course, I felt out of place being a homegirl from Nebraska. But I managed, I put on the act. And then I actually was there at 9/11, so I was living downtown at 9/11, and-

**Lyn Wineman:**

I bet we could do a whole episode just on what that must have been like.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Oh my goodness. Yeah, that's a whole other story. And then I did end up landing at the Art Institute of New York City, and I taught there for 13 years. And I had classes in both the Fashion Design department and the general education where I taught sociology. And so doing that, and the students that went there were very much urban. It was a for-profit college, and so they had open admissions. And so basically, I got really good at being a foreman in the good clothing production lab. I've written some stuff on that. Hopefully I'll have that book at some point.

But piecing all those things together led me to be thinking about the fashion design and fashion industry from a sociological point of view. But I never was able to let go of the art. And so the school that I was teaching at was seeking to be able to offer a bachelor's program, which then, even though I had a master's and PhD in sociology, they said, well, in order to keep teaching in fashion, you need to have a design master's.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh my goodness. Did you go back and get another degree?

**Britta Wheeler:**

I did. I did. I love school, so it was great.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I can tell curiosity, your passion for learning. I can completely understand that.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Oh my goodness. And so I was able to find an interdisciplinary art program in Vermont. It was low residency program, and I could go up twice a year and then do the work I needed to do... so from that program, I developed this performance art character named Belinda Powell.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love it.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Who was a home sewer, played ukulele and sang. As a feminist and a sociologist, I was trying to express this shift in popular cultural identity and what was understood as the right kind of person in the world. I'm a blonde, I'm a Nebraskan, and so I was expressing this kind of 20th century character type, but in

the 21st century, I was like, okay, my parents always raised me to be smart and not rely on my looks because that was temporary.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That was a cop out, right?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Right, right. Your parents too?

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yes. My parents too. Being smart was where it was at, yep.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Exactly. Exactly. And so I got to create this character. I did that character for five years. I wrote some songs, played ukulele, made some videos, wore pink.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love it.

**Britta Wheeler:**

And then it was through that character, I was like, well, I don't really want to be an entertainer. What is this? Where's it going to go? And so I had this idea for the CIFA.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

**Britta Wheeler:**

I know. It's kind of an artistic way.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Why I love to hear people's back stories is, it's fascinating to me how the tapestry of your life comes together to just land you at the perfect place. All of those things come together.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yeah. Well, and that's the thing, as a child, I mean, sometimes we have an idea in our head about where we're going and what we need to do, but the path is never straight. You're always like, well, let me try over here. Oh, is that right? Oh, over here. And I mean, I had a lot of doors closed, and then I had to refigure it out. So far, the CIFA has been good because doors keep opening.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's amazing.

**Britta Wheeler:**

We're not the massive organization that I might envision, but I was enlivened and made more confident by a receiving grants. From the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and then this year we received our first New York State Council on the Arts grant as well.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I'm really curious, Britta. You started in 2017. It's now 2022. I mean, the pandemic happened fairly early in the creation of this program. How did the pandemic impact your work?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Well, it's interesting because everyone and their grandma got online in the pandemic.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yes, yes. Even grandmas. Even grandmas got online.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yeah, we did too. We did too.

But March 2020, that was a pivotal moment. And all our afterschool programs closed. But I was fortunate because I was still working as a college professor, and I hadn't really tapped the CIFA or gotten an income yet and I was just doing it as a passion project. And so we had some money in the bank, and so I was able to just continue to work. And that's actually when we developed a lot of our online programs. We actually have a whole curriculum for online classes, and I've developed some strategies for teaching online. And I mean, who could think that you could teach sewing online? But had a successful 2020, October 2020, we ran our complete fashion arts workshop online. We sent packages of materials and supplies all over the country. We did the whole thing online. We did a lot of live online teaching. We had videos, et cetera.

And then that's also when I created the Fashion Library Review YouTube show, and thank gosh we survived. And I think we're a little stronger because of it, and think that's what's going to help us kind of expand and then to the media landscape in a more direct way. Because it was almost like, I mean, I think people might feel this way too. Go to your room and figure it out. No problem.

**Lyn Wineman:**

And don't come out.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yeah, don't come out.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love it. So you're primarily in New York City now. Do you see a nationwide expansion, a global expansion?

**Britta Wheeler:**

I would love that. I think it would serve our population, and kids would be enlivened and communities would be enlivened if people were more productive and interested in producing. I think we could help foster a better world. I'm kind of thinking about how can we mend the social fabric?

**Lyn Wineman:**

Right. Wow, that's a big undertaking. Maybe this is the idea that will do it, right?

**Britta Wheeler:**

One stitch at a time.

**Lyn Wineman:**

One stitch at a time. That's fantastic. There's your tagline right there. Mending the social fabric, one stitch at a time.

So Britta, I'm curious, when you do the virtual programs, do kids have access to sewing machines or do you just do some of the things that are not involved with sewing machines when you're virtual?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yeah, we have a class called Sewing Machine Basics. So if kids have a machine, a lot of kids do, we don't recommend getting the kid machines. We recommend getting the good, simple home sewing machines. They'll do great. They'll last for forever if you treat them. But I love hand sewing. I think hand sewing is so great. It's grounding. You can really do a lot with it, and you can see the progress. But the kids love the machine. They don't have the patience. They don't have the patience, they want a sewing machine.

**Lyn Wineman:**

They want to get that machine going until they get their thread all balled up and then it's ah. That's what I remember about sewing. So actually, Britta, your website talks about the importance of knowing how to sew. I'm curious, what kind of life lessons does sewing teach kids?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Wow, that's a great question. Well, there's a lot of emphasis these days in New York City about mindfulness, I suppose it's everywhere. Mindfulness and taking time to calm down. Certainly sewing is a good way to be grounded, I've always had a project based lifestyle myself. So instead of getting on my phone and doom scrolling-

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah, doom scrolling. Nobody needs to do more of that.

**Britta Wheeler:**

No, it's depressing. And so if you can just shift your attention over to what's my project? What am I making now? Then for me, it just provides a lot of hopefulness. When I have a project that I'm dreaming of wearing and where am I going to wear it and what am I going to do with it? Who am I going to give it to? That's a useful skill to have something to look forward to, because I think these days a lot of people are pretty depressed. It's in our interest to be hopeful, honestly. And so as far as life skills, I'm a big proponent of sewing is knowing.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Nice. Nice.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Sewing is knowing. And materials, so getting off the screen, understanding materials. Sewing and clothing and fabric and textiles. That's the link between the natural world and human culture. So the four natural fibers: cotton, linen, wool and silk, those all have different properties. And so you can become a scientist about how those fibers and fabrics work, the process of weaving is also from the natural environment to the human culture. And so there's a lot of stuff to learn and all of those things. And also just the other thing, and maybe this is getting to a higher level of learning, is really about design thinking.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Such a big topic right now in our world of marketing is designed thinking.

**Britta Wheeler:**

That's a conversation to have. Yeah, design thinking. And so as a designer, as an artist, just to get the kids understanding sequence, how does one thing fit together with another thing? I mean, we have a program we've had for five years now, we're all back in the schools as of last year. So we're back in the schools now. But we have a program in Chinatown. And a lot of the kids there are new immigrants or their families, first generation. But I had a child down there, a boy, who it's clear to me he's going to be an engineer or some kind of scientist but he took to the sewing so incredibly. He basically was inventing things and there was funny, weird things like a bag with zippers on both sides that he would unzip and put on his head and had a pocket in it. And then he was making this weird frog thing. It was just like, yeah, that's how people learn is through play and creativity. And if you give kids the tools for easily doing it, then they can go in any direction. They can use it to invent like he was, and he was fantastic.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love that. I love that Britta. That's a great story. I mean, you are obviously making an impact on the community, on kids, on families. So what's next? What's next for CIFA? Are there any big goals that you're working towards?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yeah. Well, I do finally have a team.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Congratulations. That is a monumental step in the evolution of a nonprofit or a for profit. So, congratulations to you.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Thank you. The life of an entrepreneur, right?

**Lyn Wineman:**

Right.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Wearing lots of hats, doing everything. So, I finally have a team just as of the last several months, and they're very excited. And that's how I knew this was a good project, this is the other part of the core audience, the excitement that people have. Not everybody. There's always that-

**Lyn Wineman:**

You also don't need everybody. You need to find your people. I think any entrepreneur, you need to find your people. The people who are so excited about what you're doing, that they want to take the leap and be on your team or the people who you're going to serve with your mission. Find your people.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Exactly. And I knew it was okay, and I had a group of people because I saw that excitement, and so that excitement and just like that girl energy of like, ah.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yes. I think we're having it right here, actually.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Exactly. And so I have team members that are in that. They get it and they're excited and they want it to build. So we're just in the process right now of retooling after our fifth fashion arts workshop. And now we have this space that we can begin to run some programs in. And we're thinking in the new year, 2023, that will begin to offer some weekend programs. And then we'd love to continue to build and make connections with people and build towards this maker museum idea that have. As New York City rebounds and gets itself in order we'll have a place where kids and families can come to learn more about the making process and the fashion industry.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I want to see CIFA makers labs across the country. Britta, could we work towards that?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yes. Let's do it.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love it. I'm going to switch gears and ask you my favorite question, because I feel honored that I get to talk with so many interesting people like yourself and I am inspired by motivational quotes. And so what I am curious, can you give us an original Dr. Britta Wheeler quote that will inspire our listeners?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Oh my goodness. No pressure.

**Lyn Wineman:**

No pressure at all. I know. Honestly, I feel like you've said about a dozen things since we've started this, but so many good things. Yeah.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Well, I guess sewing is knowing.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love it.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Skills pay the bills. That's a good one.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Those are great.

**Britta Wheeler:**

I mean, the ones that are kind of, I don't know if I rely on quotes so much, but I just always have to follow my own path. And it's not easy because I want people to like me, I want to be on the team. What's a way to say it? Authenticity is key.

**Lyn Wineman:**

For sure.

**Britta Wheeler:**

And maintain your sense of humor, even in spite of yourself.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love it. That is a great life coping mechanism, for sure. Very good. Well, you've just rattled off, I think, five, five inspirational quotes there. So thank you for all of those.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Thank you.

**Lyn Wineman:**

So we've talked about your website a couple of times, but for our listeners who would like to learn more, what's the best way to find out about CIFA?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yeah. Well, we're on social media at the CIFAorg. Our website is [www.theCIFA.org](http://www.theCIFA.org), whatever it is.

**Lyn Wineman:**

We'll have that linked in the show notes for anyone.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Yeah, that's the best way. We have everything pretty much there on the website. You can follow us on Facebook, Instagram. I'm always available to talk with people or email. We're small enough, I can still do that.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's fantastic.

**Britta Wheeler:**

And we will have programs in person in New York City going forward and hopefully elsewhere too.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's great. Fantastic. So Britta, this has been such a fun conversation. As we wrap up today, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

**Britta Wheeler:**

Well, thank you. Yes. I think for parents who have spirited kids, there is a lot of material online. There's a great book by a woman, Kurcink, whoa made her career writing about the psychology of spirited kids. But if you're a mom of a spirited child, it's challenging. And the more you can help them foster themselves and become independent and follow their own path, the better they're going to be in life. If you can find other kids who are also more individual, maybe don't follow the mainstream norm, you can foster that. And so I guess for specifically for the CIFA though, I mean the work we're doing is to help the world. We'd like to get kids off the screen and onto the runway, or just into their own projects. Project based life can lead you a long way. And it doesn't have to be for sale, it can be from the heart. It can be for your own edification, it can be art.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah. Britta, I just love how you have combined your passion and your background and your knowledge of teaching and fashion into this great nonprofit. So thank you so much for joining us today. And I'm going to say I truly believe the world needs more people like you and more nonprofits. Thank you.

**Britta Wheeler:**

Thank you so much, Lyn. It was a pleasure to talk with you.

**Announcer:**

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