

# McDaniel College Profiles

## Britt Burr '11

Registered Drama Therapist Britt Burr '11 cofounded a nonprofit serving adults with disabilities through expressive arts.



When Britt Burr '11 was in high school, she was a bit shy and apprehensive about pursuing one of her interests. She finally put on a brave face to audition for a play her junior year and she was soon hooked on theater. At that time, however, she probably never could've imagined a way to turn that love into a career.

"I knew I wanted to major in [Psychology](#) and I knew I liked [Theater](#), but I didn't think I could do anything career-wise with theater in a way that would satisfy me," Burr says.

Then came a course called Drama Therapy, taught by former professor Ron Miller, which earned her credit for her Psychology and Theater majors — and changed the course of her life. "I was very closed-off and much more introverted than I am now," Burr recalls. "That course helped me come out of my shell, and taught me about this amazing marriage between theater and psychology."

Seeing how Burr thrived in the class, Miller told her that several schools around the country offered master's degrees in Drama Therapy. That was the moment Burr

realized she could pursue a profession using both of her passions. After graduating from McDaniel, she took a year to teach at the Therapeutic Parks and Rec Council in Carroll County, where she was introduced to working with the disability population and the wheels really started turning in her head about the possibilities in front of her.

“I thought, ‘Wow. I bet you could do theater with people who have special needs and that it could be really beneficial for social skills and group collaboration,’” Burr says. “I decided to apply to Kansas State University, which has a wonderful inclusive theater program and got my master’s degree in Drama Therapy.”

After completing her master’s degree, she worked for The Arc Carroll County in a grant-funded position working with individuals with autism, teaching them ways to use expressive arts to create therapeutic change. They offered classes in everything from dating and relationships to exercise, fitness, cooking and creative writing.

“But the most popular was barrier-free theater,” Burr says. “After the funding for that position ran out, I wanted to keep the inclusive theater program going, so we branched off and created Barrier-Free as its own entity.”

In fall 2019, Burr and her wife, Lauren, established Barrier-Free as a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing inclusive arts for adults with disabilities in Carroll County. “We established our board and had our first board meeting late in 2019,” she says. “It’s a real deal now.”

And that “real deal” has grown impressively over the years. “This started from nothing. At The Arc, we were only serving about 20 families,” Burr says. “When we branched out, we grew to about 40 and since focusing on our nonprofit status and developing more programming, we now serve 60 families between our social clubs, classes, talent showcases, improv groups and the inclusive theater company.”

More impressive is that Burr and her wife manage to do all of this while both working full-time jobs. In 2014, Burr returned to McDaniel, where she works in the [Student Accessibility and Support Services \(SASS\)](#) office as an academic counselor.

Her wife is an elementary school teacher in Montgomery County. They work on Barrier-Free in their spare time, which usually amounts to at least a couple hours a day of administrative work, not to mention the evenings spent in rehearsals with their actors and other special programming. “We joke that 50% of our marriage is spent talking about Barrier-Free,” Burr says.

Burr has played many parts in her life, but with her roles as drama therapist, nonprofit founder, creative director, academic counselor and adjunct professor, how does she introduce herself?

“I’m a drama therapist that specializes in working with adults with disabilities, as well as an academic counselor at McDaniel College helping students with learning differences advance academically,” she says.



Burr loves that her life has come full circle back on the Hill. This is where she first learned about drama therapy, which has guided the last decade of her life. In addition to her role in SASS, she’s also had the opportunity to be an adjunct professor teaching Drama Therapy on campus. “It was kind of cool to teach the course that introduced me to my career,” Burr says.

Now, Barrier-Free partners with McDaniel in a variety of ways. Barrier-Free has three interns from the college — students who are majoring in Theater, Psychology and Kinesiology — and the company’s final shows in March will be performed right here on campus.

“If you would have told me when I was graduating from McDaniel that I’d start my own nonprofit, I would have said, ‘No way, that’s a lot,’” Burr says. “And it is a lot. But we just built from where we were and all of a sudden, it just makes sense.”

### **About Britt**

Career: Founder of Barrier-Free Theatre of Maryland

Class of 2011

Major: Psychology & Theatre Arts