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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Burlington, VT: (June 2, 2019): VTIFF is pleased to announce the recipient of the 2019 VTIFF Community Champion

For Immediate release:

Bess O'Brien

to receive the 2019 VTIFF Community Champion Award

Burlington, VT: (June 2, 2019): The Vermont International Film Festival is very pleased to announce the 2019 *VTIFF Community Champion Award*. This is the third year of this prestigious award given to a person who has significantly contributed and impacted film culture in Vermont.

The Award ceremony will take place at a private reception in the home of VTIFF Board member Kevin Meehan in South Burlington.

Overview:

As part of VTIFF's mission to enrich the community and bring the world to Vermont through film, we wish to salute and thank those who help and support the organization to fulfill its cultural mission. We consider film to be a most important artistic and communication medium and do our best to bring to Vermont films that would not be shown here otherwise.

Bess O'Brien is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and theatre producer with a knack for getting people to talk about uncomfortable subjects. She has been alternately called "Vermont's truth teller", "exemplary", and someone who shines a light on Vermont's shadowed corners.

Bess is perhaps Vermont's most tireless filmmaker who not only hones in on some of the most burning issues the community faces but is not content with merely making a film

about it. Once completed she devotes her time to lobby on all levels, from community centers to state level, to spread the word and create change. She takes her films everywhere in order to create conversations about their subjects. As Bess has said, what she likes about making the films she makes is that she can “be an artist and an activist at the same time.”

She has made films about eating disorders (*All Of Me*), about Circles of Support and Accountability program that helps recently released prisoners reintegrate into their communities (*Coming Home*), about domestic violence (*The Hungry Heart*) about the opiate crisis in the state, and many more. As Bess said in an interview with Seven Days: “I often joke that all my films are essentially the same film, because these issues all intersect with each other”.

Bess is a true community champion and VTIFF is honored to add to the many awards she has already received. She is a great example of the power of cinema to raise questions and challenge ignorance.

Links to High res stills: vtiff.org/press

Awards and Accolades

- *Hungry Heart* winner of the 2016 PRISM award by the Entertainment Industry Council in Los Angeles.
- *Hungry Heart* winner of the 2016 National Institute on Drug Abuse Media Award.
- *Hungry Heart* winner of the 2015 Media Award from the American Society of Addiction Medicine.
- 2014 Walter Cerf Award for Excellence in the Arts
- 2012 Labor of Love Award from Vermont Works for Women.
- 2011 Voices For Vermont's Children Youth Advocacy Award in recognition for O'Brien's dedicated, creative and artistic advocacy on behalf of VT children.
- 2010 National Education Association (NEA) Human and Civil Rights Award for *Shout it Out* for empowering youth voice.
- U.S. Department of Justice Special Recognition for documentary film, *Journey into Courage*.
- Jack Barry Communication Award for *Here Today*, state-wide recognition for Excellence in prevention awareness
- Vermont Agency of Human Service 2005 Award in recognition of *The Voices Project* for excellence in improving the lives of Vermonters.
- Member of the Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences
- Recipient with Jay Craven of the prestigious Producers Guild Of America's NOVA Award.

Quotes and Press

“Thank you to Bess O’Brien for being Vermont’s storyteller, but even more importantly thank you to Bess for being Vermont’s truth teller.”

— Attorney General T.J. Donovan

“Bess O’Brien and Kingdom County Production’s work is exemplary in the state of Vermont and has raised issues that are critical to children and families.”

— Senator Bernie Sanders

“Bess O’Brien’s film *The Hungry Heart* is a brilliant and beautiful film that captures the true lives of people in recovery—it should be seen by everyone!”

— David Sheff, best-selling author of *Beautiful Boy*