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Cultural Centre kicks off crowdfunding campaign to expand student arts programs throughout Region

Arts and culture can break down barriers, build bridges, and foster growth ? and, with your help, students from across York Region will soon be able to see the benefits firsthand through the Aurora Cultural Centre's Kaleidoscope in the Schools (KITS) program.

The Cultural Centre's KITS program was founded by and for the community to provide cultural opportunities for kids in Junior Kindergarten through Grade 4, as well as professional development activities for teachers. From its start with seed funding from a local Aurora couple, the success of the program within Aurora was immediate.

Its success was also evident to the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which provided the program with a $200,000 Grow Grant in 2020 to expand the initiative.

Expand it has, and now the Centre is looking to crowdfund KITS to the next level, expanding it throughout York Region.

?The Aurora Cultural Centre plans to bring this program to all publicly funded schools in Aurora, and all historically under-resourced elementary schools in York Region as defined by the Region's school boards,? said the Centre. ?To reach these 52 elementary schools and over 12,000 kids, the Aurora Culture Centre needs $278,000 annually, which is 927 people giving a minimum of $25 per month. The ACC believes the KITS program opens doors to creativity and tolerance and creates lasting positive memories through a shared experience of the arts.?

The benefits of the KITS program were celebrated at Town Park on Saturday morning in a special announcement with community leaders that was previously delayed due to the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

As MP Leah Taylor Roy, MPPs Michael Parsa and Dawn Gallagher Murphy, and several members of the incumbent Council looked on, Aurora Cultural Centre Executive Director Suzanne Haines hailed the success of KITS.

?This program is very special to us at the Cultural Centre, built from over 35 years of programming, education and performing arts experience,? she said. ?The pedagogy of the [program] was built on a strong foundation of meaningful academic study, discussions with the school board administrators and educators, and personal experiences that shape the unique, full-service program for the elementary schools of Aurora and now into York Region.

?Working with all four school boards ? English, French, Public and Catholic ? the program delivers professional development to

elementary school teachers in JK to Grade 4, on arts integration, arts curriculum and shows that we'll bring to their students in the schools to prepare their teachers for their pre-and-post-show activities. They do all of their prep in these sessions.

?We also bring in a live, professional performing arts show in music, theatre, puppetry, multi-disciplinary work?with the programming ethos that includes Indigenous content, world voices and diverse content in English and French. We keep the artists in the school for a post-show in-depth workshop with Grade 4 students who are going to age out of the program, giving younger students something to look forward to in developing creative leaders in the school.?

In his nine years as a member of the Aurora Cultural Centre Board, incumbent Board President Eric Acker said he has never seen a program that ?has the potential to have such a positive impact on this community as KITS.?

?We want to create a legacy for York Region kids,? said Acker. ?We on the volunteer board are committed to the growth of the program and making a substantial impact on the lives of over 12,000 children throughout York Region who would otherwise not have access to these experiences due to social, economic or capacity issues in the schools, including our Indigenous neighbours on Georgina Island. We now need you, our community, to come together and make this program a reality for these kids into the future.?

For more information on the Centre's campaign, including how to contribute, visit kits4kids.ca.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter