

Kaleidoscope in the Schools program brings arts to classrooms ? but needs your support

Exposing youngsters to arts and culture at an early age can reap powerful dividends down the road, opening their minds to new ideas, cultures, and ways of thinking.

This is a philosophy that has been embraced by the Aurora Cultural Centre in its Kaleidoscope in the Schools (KITS) initiative, a program created by the Centre to bring performances and workshops by professional performing artists into area schools, all uniquely tied into Ontario's Ministry of Education Curriculum.

As much as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes the support of the ?village? to ensure such programs can continue, and next Thursday, June 12, you can have the chance to support KITS through the Aurora Cultural Centre's Sip, Savour and Support Kaleidoscope in the Schools night.

Billed as ?an elegant evening of Canadian wine and food pairings, curated cocktails, and live performances,? the evening will include music from guitarist David Chun, Trevor Copp of Tottering Biped Theatre, food from Chef Michael Edgar of Zest Up Your Life, and drinks by mixologist Kevin Harris of Crooked Rooster Cocktails.

?This fundraiser is the key component for us to be able to do the program,? says Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre.

KITS was established by the Centre with the help of two local philanthropists, with support along the way from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Now, Haines says they're fundraising on their own for a program that has only underscored its value with each passing year.

?KITS is a program we offer for all Aurora elementary schools and other low-capacity schools that have been identified through the York Region School Boards. Schools don't pay for the program; we need to fundraise and make it possible to go into those schools,? says Haines. ?This is such a passion project for me. We highlight the fact that the schools we go into throughout York Region don't have access to this kind of programming. We are specifically offering them to schools that are either unable to afford it [due to] socio-economic issues, don't have access to the programming just because it's not available to them ? a lot of French schools don't have French programming in live performance, and Georgina Island has such limited programming; they don't have anything like this coming to them just because of logistical challenges and how they operate a small school. The programming elements just really fit into this place of need around creativity and offering a professional performing arts experience for these youngsters in Junior Kindergarten all the way through to Grade 4.?

From Haines' perspective, it's all about fostering a ?creative, innovative learning environment? within their school community and allowing students to share in a very powerful collective experience.

?We have stories for every single school. For some schools, it's about their students who have exceptionalities that make it impossible or difficult for them to attend an event outside of the school ? they're all welcome into the same room with their peers to watch something like this in their school community,? says Haines, noting that the program incorporates many cultural elements, such as Indigenous programs, Chinese dance, programs in both of Canada's official languages, and more.

?Often it leads to other leadership within the school where students want to use what they've learned as a launching pad for their own kinds of projects,? says Haines. ?When I think about a corporate environment or a funder who wants to influence long-term growth of children and having a very strong, innovative creative workforce, this is how we do it. This is how you make it possible because all of those experiences create better communities. They [foster] creative outcomes and innovation within the school and within students, and offer them an opportunity to see things a little bit differently.

?Creating that community, even just within the school, is really powerful. People can see that those outcomes are real. They understand the joy and pleasure and the cross-pollination of just age groups and cultures, regardless of where you come from and your lived experience ? you're all watching the same thing and can reflect on that.

?We know the power of that live performance piece, what it can do for adults, and what it does for kids at that age is phenomenal because they have very few barriers to communicate what their next move is. They're not limited by their peers at that age; they're really open to hearing, learning, and being a part of this kind of environment that just helps them be present and feel like they belong in their school. People can really feel that when they support something like this, it has a direct impact on their community, on their schools, and on their potential for the future.?

Haines estimates that since KITS was first launched in 2019, they have reached more than 30,000 students and they want to keep that momentum going.

For more on the upcoming Sip, Savour and Support event, including how to secure your ticket, visit auroraculturalcentre.myshopify.com/products/individual-june-12-sip-savour-support-ticket.

If you are interested in supporting the KITS program outside of Sip, Savour and Support, contact the Aurora Cultural Centre at 905-713-1818, or visit auroraculturalcentre.ca and select ?DONATE? in the top right corner of the page.

By Brock Weir