

Kaleidoscope program drums up excitement at local schools



They were fidgety as they sat down on their gymnasium floor in front of drums of all shapes and sizes lined up before a colourful backdrop of African fauna, each creature imbued with symbolism that sparked the imagination.

As soon as percussionist Fana Soro stepped forward in his colourful, billowy clothes, the fidgeting immediately ceased as Mr. Soro transported Grade 2 and 3 students at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Elementary School into the culture of his native Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Soro brought his Yamo! Yamo! presentation to Our Lady of Grace (OLG) on Thursday afternoon as the Aurora Cultural Centre kicked off its Kaleidoscope in the Schools program.

The Kaleidoscope in the Schools program was founded by the Aurora Cultural Centre earlier this year, through a donation from patrons Jan Oudenens and Isobel Ralston, along with support from the Town of Aurora, to take cultural programming on the road and into local schools.

Focusing on professional performances and workshops for students from Kindergarten through Grade 4 at no cost to parents, programming choices were selected to hit on several themes in Ontario's education curriculum, including conflict resolution, survival, emotions, feelings, and overcoming language barriers.

?By bringing the program into the schools, we're removing the barriers to participation for all students, regardless of their situation,?
said Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre this past April once they had funding in place. ?Students with exceptionalities do not have to leave their home school and known environment to participate. Schools

don't have to work out the logistics of busing and there is no cost, so no economic barriers for kids. No one is left behind.?

This is one of the many reasons OLG Principal Inez Donato was eager to bring the Yamo! Yamo! (?Hello! How are you doing!? in Baoulé) presentation into school.

?We took a liking to the program right away and what I think we liked about it a lot was there was so much variety to choose from and we could pick something that spoke to our community.? said Ms. Donato of Kaleidoscope. Yamo! Yamo! is great because it lends itself to so many areas in the curriculum [and] I was hoping we could bring it to the school in November for Bullying Awareness Week. It fits perfectly because it exposes students and the community to different cultures. What we're looking for in the wider school community is that there is acceptance of each other, accepting each other's differences, and I am hoping that presentations like this will further

[students']

awareness and understanding of each other.?

That is exactly what fuels Mr. Soro as a performer.

Having lived in Canada since 1997, Mr. Soro has seen firsthand the benefits of intercultural exchange, and this is what he sets out to foster when he comes into schools like Our Lady of Grace.

?I hope this makes a good connection and we can reach new generations,? he said. ?I am hoping to show my culture to new generations and that way they can connect with Africa. I want them to learn about Côte D'Ivoire. We have so many African [cultures] on TV, but I want kids to see things that aren't on TV, that way it becomes more real. Kids need to know that we're made up of many different cultures and when they learn about the many different cultures, they're not afraid. Some of the things we see on TV, we get scared, but when you see it and know about it, you won't be scared anymore. Plus, when it comes to music, music is everywhere. When you show them [the instruments] we work with, they can see what they want to learn and where they want to go.

?The best question I get from students is sometimes they will ask me what we eat in African and what we're wearing. I will show them my clothes and that they are not pyjamas and these are clothes you will see in Africa. Sometimes they have no idea. They will learn each culture has their own style too. It's all about enjoying life.?

Added Ms. Donato: ?Our students were very engaged. At the beginning, it seemed as though they didn't know what to expect, especially the younger ones, but [Soro] did an amazing job engaging them through his

storytelling and definitely through the music. I think the more they were able to participate, the more engaged and involved [they were]. There was definitely a lot of learning in an active and enjoyable way.

?I want to thank the Aurora Cultural Centre [for having] this vision for us. I am looking forward to continued partnership with them. Their goal is to do one a year and that would be amazing. I look forward to continuing with this and having it grow.?

By Brock Weir