

Kaleidoscope project will bring Cultural Centre into Aurora schools

**By
Brock Weir**

Since its inception, the Aurora Cultural Centre has been delivering arts to Aurora within the walls of the historic Church Street School, but now, through a collaboration with the Town, local school boards and local private donors, they're preparing to take the show on the road.

Last week, Council approved the 2019 Operating Budget and, within it, is a \$100,000 infusion, which will be phased in over two years, to bring the Kaleidoscope in the School project to fruition.

"Kaleidoscope in the School is a new initiative to bring live performing arts to Aurora kids in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 4 at public schools at no cost to parents," said Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre.

The Kaleidoscope in the Schools project is made possible, in part, by Aurora couple Isobel Ralston and Jan Oudenes who were looking to get more involved in the work of the Cultural Centre. They made a commitment to fund 50 per cent of the program in 2019 if the Centre could find matching funds.

From these early seeds, excitement has germinated, gaining traction from both the York Region District School Board and the York Catholic District School Board.

"This program brings professional arts to Aurora children with long-standing and impactful outcomes to make them better humans," said Ms. Haines. "However, it also has a ripple effect on our organization where we have gained our first major donor from the community."

Now that the funding is in place, the Cultural Centre can move forward with the program, which includes a performance from Red Sky, a leading company of contemporary indigenous performing arts in Canada, with their theatrical show Mistatim.

"As two children search for ways to connect with the adults in their lives, some of whom have been affected by Residential Schools, they also learn to connect with each other as friends," said Ms. Haines. "At the heart of the story is the horse Mistatim, powerfully played by an athletic dancer who memorably inhabits the character of the horse. Working together, the children find respect for each other, discover the tools they need to cope with their family lives and, most of all, how to find and nurture trust."

Also part of the program is the string trio Infinitus, which offers an 'upbeat performance style featuring a mix of classical standards' and additional components that range from classic rock to beat boxing.

'Their shows and workshops focus on the skills and value around collaboration between peers as they listen, discover and join in on the performing aspects of music.'

Le Choses Bercantes (Sisters, the Warm Embrace), is billed as a 'beautiful theatrical presentation' that can be performed in either English or French that 'explores two sisters, one in sorrow and the other gently unravelling her sister's feelings through a series of funny, kind and caring gestures.'

'It is a wonderful validation of a child's emotions,' said Ms. Haines. 'The gentle show for two endearing actresses whispers in our ears that time heals all wounds, and even the deepest sorrows because, in the end, tears make the flowers grow and spring will come again. By offering the production in French, if requested, children in French language or immersion programs experience French as a living language and enjoy the visual elements that enhance language-learning through theatrical presentation.'

Programming choices, she added, will hit on several [themes] in Ontario's education curriculum, including conflict resolution, survival, emotions, feelings, communications and language barriers.

'By bringing the program into the schools, we're removing the barriers to participation for all students, regardless of their situation,' she said. '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.'

'Once the show is over, the artist will stay at the school through the afternoon for an interactive activity or workshop with the kids. Not all children will be able to attend the special workshops, so age-appropriate activities will be available for teachers to use in the classroom, also. We're also supporting educators with advance workshops to help them deepen child engagement.'

'Elementary school teachers are generalists and the school boards are very excited about the professional development applications of our program to help teachers who may not have an arts background in their studies but are still expected to deliver on the arts curriculum in the school. Our workshop will help to bridge that gap and help educators to use the tools associated with each of the shows to bring creative elements into the classroom before and after the production.'

'The full journey for the children is to have an

activity in the classroom before the show, go and see the show, participate in an artist workshop or classroom activity after the show, go home and show their completed art project, talk as a family about their experience and hopefully the family adopts an interest in supporting the children in their creativity by attending an arts event. This teaches the child that the arts is important and they have a voice in their family life.?

The program for the 2019/2020 school year will be funded to the tune of \$75,000 by the private donation, and \$100,000 by the Town through money drawn from the Town's tax rate stabilization reserves.

Councillor Michael Thompson voted against the grant funding.

The balance, an estimated \$25,000, will be covered by the school boards through grants, corporate gifts and other donors.