

Kerry's Place to host carnival for entire community

By Brock Weir

A carnival atmosphere awaits you at Town Park next Saturday, July 7, as Kerry's Place Autism Services takes over the popular greenspace for a day of family-friendly fun.

The first Saturday in July is traditionally Kerry's Place Appreciation Day, an opportunity for the Berczy Street-based service, which provides autism services throughout southern Ontario, to say thank you to the volunteers and families who provide vital support for their programs, but this year's celebration is a bit different, and you're all invited.

The fun runs from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., featuring live music from the Therapy Seekers, carnival games, crafts, food, face painting, a bouncy castle, and the Art in the Park festival spearheaded by Deborah Campo and her team of dedicated fellow artists, and much more.

“One of the things we really want to focus on at Kerry's Place is to get to know our community better,” says Kerry's Place's Kate Tansley. “This event was previously known as Appreciation Day and I think that name can get a little bit confusing – who are we appreciating? We wanted to rename it this year and make it a carnival to have more events available for people in the community. We want to encourage integration between our Kerry's Place community – our staff, our residents, those that we support and their families – and the families within our wider community.”

While the event will very much focus on fostering that carnival atmosphere, they are mindful of some of the sensory issues persons on the Autism spectrum live with every day. As such, you won't see entertainers with face coverings – no clowns in full face paint – or other things that might be “intimidating” to anyone, including loud music. The Therapy Seekers, long-time performers for Kerry's Place, are mellow and encourage an atmosphere that is “enjoyable and relaxing” for the community.

New to the Kerry's Place organization this year, this is Ms. Tansley's first time getting her hands dirty helping to plan this annual celebration, which has become a hallmark in conjunction with the Aurora Farmers' Market's outdoor season.

“What I find most enjoyable about this is looking at it with a different perspective and to really think about the ways we can fully integrate our Kerry's Place community into our wider community,” says Ms. Tansley. “That has been the most fun: just getting to know the people we support, the folks that work with Kerry's Place in this Region and just seeing their passion and their drive. It has really made such an impact on me and really hearing from community members how much they enjoy Kerry's Place. All of those things have given me a drive to do what I do every day and to make sure I am putting my best foot forward all the time.

“The main takeaway I would love people to have from our carnival is, number one, Kerry's Place is a great organization that provides assistance to those with ASD and their families in this area. Additionally, I would want them to feel comfortable. I would want to dispel any myths and that there is nothing to be afraid of. This is also an effort to educate and create awareness as well. We will also have information that people can take away, things they can learn from about what autism is and what autism isn't, as well as services and supports Kerry's Place provides in this area.

“We just really want to encourage the community, members of all ages, to come out and enjoy a good time!”

But, before you set out to have a good time at Town Park next Saturday, Kerry's Place encourages you to register ahead of time. To register, and for more information on the Carnival itself, visit www.kerrysplace.org/communitycarnival.