

## New after-school program is outlet for artistic high school students



Art-minded Aurora high school students will have a fresh chance to foster their talents through a new after-school program hosted by the Aurora Cultural Centre.

This week, the Cultural Centre will welcome students to the first After School Art Program (ASAP), hosted in conjunction with the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts (MCOYA), an annual exhibition featuring the work of local Grade 12 students.

MCOYA is now underway in the Centre's temporary gallery space at Town Hall.

ASAP is a free weekly drop-in session that will run Thursdays from 4.30 ? 6.30 p.m. through March 21, with the possibility of an extension into April.

The objective of the program is to provide students with ?private, exclusive access to the space for their own creative exploration and development.?

Here, students can work on art projects, develop creative ideas, establish their artistic portfolio, meet other ?artistically-driven? peers, gain professional advice from the Centre's gallery team, or simply hang-out with like-minded peers.

?In ASAP, there are no rubrics, guidelines or expectations for participants,? say organizers. ?An optional, lightly-guided art project will be available for students to follow, if desired. Light art materials and snacks are provided; however, this program is B.Y.O.S. ? Bring Your Own Sketchbook.?

The program is designed to be a safe space where students can ?create freely and build their own artistic community,? adds Adora Lau, Gallery Assistant for the Aurora Cultural Centre.

?ASAP really started because Samantha (Jones, Gallery Manager) and I realized there is a need for this ?third space' for youth in Aurora,? says Lau. ?These places are just neutral grounds in communities for people to meet others, to build their own community, just as a way to get away from home, and also work and school. It's a really great way to build relationships and get to know other people who are in similar situations, similar interests as well, and the program really started off with this need for places and places for casual meetings.

?It was the realization that a lot of places outside of school, [students] would just go out and they wouldn't really have a place for them to hang out in a safe space that's also indoors without having to spend any money or be in constant motion. They could hang

out at a mall, but that would require them to spend money. Or hang out at a food court, but that would also require them to spend money. We realized we needed spaces for youth who don't have access to money and stuff like that and we wanted to provide a space for them.?

It's been a busy month for the Aurora Cultural Centre and local art students as the opening of MCOYA 2024 approached.

The exhibition opened to the public on February 10 with a public opening reception slated for Thursday, February 15. Due to weather, however, this reception has been rescheduled to this Thursday, February 22 at Town Hall beginning at 6.30.

Over at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex on Industrial Parkway North, an additional MCOYA program is underway with ?Assignments of Art Class Past,? showcasing large scale art projects created by Grade 12 students from Aurora High School, based on the idea of very large versions of small everyday objects, including a larger-than-life piece of Dubble Bubble and a gigantic Toblerone bar.

Assignments of Art Class Past runs through April 17.

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