

# *Culture Builds Community!* **Engage**

Fall 2022

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 1



**MacKenzie Art Gallery Faces IDEA Head On**

**Listen to Dis': Increasing Accessibility is a Journey**

# Engage

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SaskCulture Inc.,

is designed to

highlight  
the work of  
cultural leaders,  
volunteers

and the

diversity  
of activities

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and Recreation.



## ON THE COVER:

YWCA Regina staff, residents and community joined together at Saskatchewan Legislative Building following the announcement of the uncovering of 215 unmarked graves at the Kamloops Residential School to lend voice to the collective action of truth telling.

Photo by YWCA Regina

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## Message from the CEO

This issue is focused on the importance of accessibility and the cultural leaders who are striving to increase access to cultural activities in Saskatchewan. As I read through the articles, I was struck by the innovative efforts being made across our province. We need only to look to our members, communities and other cultural groups for inspiration. Many of the cultural activities highlighted in this edition show the commitment of our cultural sector in its efforts to pass knowledge to our future leaders. The work being done speaks much more clearly and eloquently than any words I may have.

SaskCulture is in the early stages of our Program Renewal. Soon, we will be consulting with groups, communities and individuals across the province, over an extended period of time, to help us define what accessibility really means when it comes to our responsibility as a funder. Our current strategic plan specifically identifies the need to better reach typically underserved communities, to increase funding opportunities in the North and to ensure that leadership opportunities in Saskatchewan’s cultural sectors reflects the diversity of our population.

It will be your voices that will help us find a way to make concrete changes in order to ensure our funding mechanisms are accessible and equitable. Although I cannot predict what outcomes or recommendations may come from our Program Renewal, I am very confident that the voices in our cultural realm will guide us in the right direction.

*Engage Magazine is SaskCulture’s way of highlighting the great work being done in the cultural community in Saskatchewan. As you read through this edition, please let other people know about the amazing work being done by communities, organizations and individuals to create a better Saskatchewan.*

Dean Kush



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TOP: Cultural organizations gathered in October to discuss inclusiveness, diversity, equity and accessibility. CENTRE: Listen to Dis' is recognized for its innovative programming that highlights accessibility for those living with disabilities. BOTTOM: Work continues to increase accessibility on SaskCulture’s website.

# MACKENZIE ART GALLERY

## Faces IDEA Head On

BY JOHN LOEPPKY

The MacKenzie Art Gallery (MAG) isn't shy about its outward facing resolve to address inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) concerns. The 2018 installation of Duane Linklater's *Kâkikê / Forever* on the front of the building, which reads "as long as the sun shines the river flows and the grass grows" – words pulled from the Treaty making process – are evidence of that.

But In 2020, this resolve became more internal. An equity task force was formed, a move that Caitlin Mullan, head of strategic initiatives, says was made, in part, because COVID had brought forward just how much can happen when change becomes non-negotiable.

"Recognizing that there are a lot of other structural issues that affect everybody. It's not that they were being ignored, but they weren't being given quite as much priority. And, we wanted to take the opportunity to really sit down and, respond to racism and sexism, ableism, homophobia and other forms of oppression that harm countless people all the time."

But that look inward doesn't mean that the MAG isn't staying publicly accountable. The MAG staff has worked with organizations and companies such as Future Ancestors (a Black-owned and youth-led consulting group), Ivy + Dean Consulting, Listen to Dis' Community Arts, and Affective Consulting, as well as updated its vision and values on its website to reflect their short, medium, and long-term progress. For Mullan and the MAG team, keeping that level of visibility on the process is an acknowledgement that working towards equity is a journey that never ends and that the gallery, with its long history, has a large part to play.

"I think that, as one of the largest art institutions in the province, we have a responsibility to not only do this work, but to also share that we're doing it so that it's visible to other arts organizations and other businesses," says Mullan. "It's really important for us to be thinking that way, because the tendrils do spread out, there are little ripples, and then there are big

ripples. The more that we do this work, the more we're approached by organizations who have similar values and similar goals, or the more other organizations might feel that they can trust us."

Some of MAG's long-term goals include, "significant progress after long-term repatriation of all objects in the collection that were obtained unethically or illegally," as well as "to embrace and expand our educational role on diversity in gender expression and identity in sexuality."

Mullan's advice for others looking to take meaningful actions on these sorts of initiatives is to understand that change can be big, or small, but it will need to be ongoing in order to be effective.

"This isn't work that can be done over a year, it's not work that can be done over five years," she says. "It's something you've got to continuously work at, and be open to learning about, and understanding that it's just always going to be something that you need to think about and put resources towards as an organization."

*The MAG receives Annual Global Funding from Sask Lotteries.*



Photo by Don Hall

# Anti-racism Conference

## NEW NON-PROFIT LEADS DISCUSSIONS ON ANTI-RACISM

BY JACKIE LAY



**A** new non-profit, focused on anti-racism, aims to create space for sharing and discussion designed to build understanding. At its first conference held this past summer, BIPOC Coffee Talk Inc. focused on the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous and People of Color, and the change needed to eliminate oppression.

The BIPOC Lens: An Anti-Racism Forum and Social Gathering, was the organization's furthered aim at continuing discussions about the lived experiences for BIPOC and anti-racism education.

For the non-profit directors, Dyana Castillo and Theresa Quagraine, the lack of organizations in Saskatoon devoted to having these kind discussions was something they wanted to address.

"The conference was our attempt to invite people to have anti-racism discussions on topics that disproportionately affect the BIPOC community," says Castillo. "And also incorporate other cultural elements, such as Dominican dance lessons and the Indigenous performer Fabian, for some fun elements."

Quagraine goes on to say, giving people an opportunity to meet up and build community was important too. "We wanted to allow people to connect with each other and to educate themselves on topics that they have knowledge and experience in. It was really great to see different kinds of people come together and connect in learning."

The day-long event included speaker presentations on anti-racism topics affecting BIPOC communities, BIPOC

perspectives in workplaces, the need for newcomers and the effects of climate change on Indigenous peoples. Each session was followed by a question and answer session.

Castillo says education and safety were also key in the planning of the conference. "There is a lot of learning and unlearning when it comes to the topic of anti-racism. It can be uncomfortable, so we wanted it done in a space where people weren't going to get called out for being a little bit unknowledgeable on a subject," she explains. "As well as, we wanted a space where there was no shaming, no judgement, only encouragement to ask uncomfortable questions."

Both women emphasized they didn't want anyone to feel discriminated against or unsafe in ways they had experienced in their lives.

One of the presenters, Dakota Norris, who spoke on sustainable development and Indigenous Peoples, says the invitation to speak was, not only a great experience giving him a new opportunity to put together what he was interested in, in a more comprehensive way, but an opportunity to learn about other cultures as well.

"It's important that we come together from different cultural groups because it's not about one specific culture, movement or idea. It becomes about understanding different ways of being, understanding the visions and values of a culture. The more we get exposed to these differences, the more we can take a step back from our own systems, values and morals and see them in a different way."

Norris went on to commend the organizers for showing leadership in both their ideas for, and planning of, the conference. As well, he congratulated them on bringing people together in this way to have these kind of discussions.

"For the participants themselves to take the time out of their day to go to this conference is also an act of leadership. Thank you, for your willingness to listen, learn and connect."

*This project received funding from SaskCulture's Small Grant Accessibility Program, funded by Sask Lotteries.*

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Left to right: The directors of BIPOC Coffee Talk Inc., Theresa Quagraine, Dyana Castillo, and Theodocia Quagraine. Photo by Danks Jay Photography

# Examining Bias

## FIRST STEP IN CREATING ACCESS

COMMENTARY BY JOHN LOEPPKY



**F**rom my perspective, if a disability activist says they aren't biased they're either lying or disillusioned.

In order to create access, we have to sit with the uncomfortable truth that we are, at least in part, the sum of our experiences. It can be easy to see this on a one-to-one basis, but what happens when you're trying to create access at an organizational level? For me, it has to start with self-reflection.

Let's take a look at a few of my biases:

To start, I'm white, relatively young, a wheelchair-user, and have a university

degree. Much of the disability advocacy space – at least the people handed the microphone and given the money – look and sound like me. In order to create access, I have to understand that I am the type of person that gets listened to, more often than not.

I am a former para-sport athlete, I have been given the privilege of travelling across the continent, meeting different disabled people and learning about hundreds of different contexts. Within those spaces, I was also given time to share and to learn before advocacy ever

truly became part of my lexicon. When I do this work, I have to remind myself that I am not creating a world for just the (relatively) abled in our communities. The first sports wheelchair I bought was from Colette Bourgonje, who now has a school named after her. I cannot pretend that I don't have connections and then do this work equitably.

I am/was part of deeply problematic spaces, such as those found in university and para-sport communities, during my formative years as an advocate, writer, and artist. I have a responsibility to reflect on those experiences and understand how I can prevent myself from perpetuating that harm. Sometimes that happens in my writing, such as when I wrote about internalized and lateral ableism in Paralympic sport for *Rooted in Rights*, an online publication, and sometimes it's through discussions with collaborators and friends.

I regularly come back to something Dr. Michael Capello of the University of Regina spoke of often in a class about anti-racist education: there is a fundamental difference between feeling uncomfortable and feeling unsafe. As a white, privileged disabled person, there will be plenty of times when I am deeply uncomfortable, even as I'm "holding space". My task is to be discerning and create space for learning that doesn't shift into a lack of safety.

Even as we identify biases, we also have to be willing to apologize. A lot of Equity, Diversity and Inclusiveness (EDI) or Inclusiveness, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) initiatives are flat when it comes to disability, in my personal opinion, because they position access and inclusion as a new thought. While disability access is undoubtedly becoming a more common topic of discussion, it's not as if disabled people haven't been thinking about access over their lifetimes.

If we refuse to engage with the wrongs of the past—even if those actions were made in good faith—then we will struggle to create a more equitable society. Creating accessibility is daunting, but starting with ourselves is an important way to move forward.

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John Loepky performs in *Neither Heroes Nor Ordinary People* presented by the Globe Theatre in 2016. Loepky is also an artist and programmer with Listen to Dis'. Photo by Chris Graham



# Listen to Dis':

## INCREASING ACCESSIBILITY IS A JOURNEY

BY DIANE ELL

**I**ncreasing accessibility in an organization is not just a “check-box” list of changes, it’s a learning journey that begins with listening.

While organizations can start with common solutions, such as ensuring wheelchair accessibility and adding closed-captioning and ALT Text on websites, or use of American Sign Language (ASL), it does not replace an increased understanding to include accessibility from the perspective of people living with disabilities. Starting in 2020, SaskCulture participated in five sessions led by Listen to Dis' Community Arts to gain greater insight into the disability culture and the changes needed, including a better understanding, to increase accessibility.

According to Traci Foster, artistic director and founder, Listen to Dis' Community Arts, “there is a grave misunderstanding of disability within our province,” which includes the arts and culture sector. People often don’t realize what they don’t know about disabilities and accessibility, she says. “People fear what they don’t

know.” This is where the Disability Audit process begins.

Foster, along with artist and program partner, John Loepky, will usually start discussions by dismantling some of the myths spread about those living with disabilities. This includes ensuring participants understand the detriment of “ableism” – which is the discrimination against people with disabilities, and the assumption that some typical abilities are superior.

Other ideas covered in the Disability Audit included discussions on the great diversity of disabilities, from physical to intellectual, and how these disabilities shape identity and culture within the community. “It’s important to know that disability is more than a medical condition,” she explains. And, to understand that barriers are more than just environmental. Attitudinal barriers, such as the idea that disabled artists can only participate in programs designed for disabled people, are often more discouraging.

By listening to people living with disabilities, participants are often surprised by what they learn. As part of the Disability Audit, “we’ve got to go through discomfort,” Foster says, feeling discomfort is a good sign. She says that people really do want to see change, so Listen to Dis' focuses on “calling people in, instead of calling people out.”

As with all positive change, it takes time, understanding and a commitment to change. When people realize that, “everyone will all experience some form of disability in our lives, as we age”, from mobility, to diminishing hearing and sight, it makes even more sense to support initiatives designed to improve accessibility for all.

While there is still lots of work to do in creating understanding, Foster says there has been some shift. The important factor is not to ignore the barriers, or be afraid. Consider work to increase accessibility as part of an inclusion plan. To start:

- Help to eliminate the myths about disability;
- Ensure disability initiatives are led by those living with a disability;
- Consider technological options, such as Zoom events, to increase accessibility for those facing physical barriers;
- Ensure programs create a sense of belonging for those living with disabilities; and
- Resist the check-box narrative – consider all your programs and services from a disability perspective.

Most importantly, listen more, talk less and participate in a learning journey that will bring about positive change that increases accessibility overall.

LEFT: Listen to Dis' performers pose after presenting information, music and monologues.

RIGHT: Traci Foster, artistic director, Listen to Dis', spoke to cultural organizations about some of the accessibility challenges faced by people with disabilities. Photos by Alejandra Coronel



# Teaching Traditions

## TO STUDENTS IMPORTANT TO CREE KNOWLEDGE KEEPER

BY JACKIE LAY

Connecting the students back to their culture through traditional teachings is important to Lynal Ernest. As a Knowledge Keeper he was invited by Antje Rongve, Dream Broker, Rivers West District for Sport, Culture & Recreation, to help develop and deliver cultural programming for Connaught Elementary and St. Mary School students in North Battleford.

Rongve says, “There was both a need for, and a push for, more cultural programming for the schools in this area, as over 90 percent of the students are Indigenous.”

Because of COVID, the program that would normally run after school, was held during school hours, so Ernest had more involvement with the students and teachers, which created a larger impact. Not only did he reach 300 students with his sessions, but all of the non-Indigenous

teachers at both schools also gained a better understanding of Cree culture and protocols.

“He opened the staff’s eyes to how beautiful and respectful the culture is and always welcomed any questions they had,” says Rongve. “It also introduced kids who hadn’t had the opportunity to learn about their culture before in a safe space, to an amazing instructor.”

The program, Lynal’s Cultural Protocols, ran from January to June, 2022, for grades four to seven, focused on Cree traditions, protocol, language lessons, storytelling and Treaty history. For kindergarten to grade three, his focus was on singing, drumming and some Cree conversations. Each grade got four or more sessions with Ernest, which started with a smudge, prayer and an inspirational video about his journey with drumming and singing, which led to his participation in an Indigenous Youth Gathering at the 2010 Olympics.

Ernest saw some noticeable positive changes within the children and youth the more time he spent with them. “The little ones, would come give me a hug and tell me how excited they were to see me again,” he notes. “The older students started sharing with me about their families

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Ernest addresses the crowd at the Program’s year-end pow wow. Photo by Antje Rongve



and how they were involved in culture, showing a lot of pride in themselves. And, the teachers said they heard the students, trying to talk Cree in the hall and were singing the songs I taught them.”

For everyone involved in his program, a great deal of understanding and respect was gained for the Cree culture and for the Knowledge Keeper who taught them.

“Lynal is a leader by example. When he walks into the schools, I think that is his happy place. He has a vision for how he wants to do things with his life and help the youth in the community,” says Rongve. “He is very patient with the kids. His methods were effective and the students really listened to him because of him being so humble, calm and having nothing but good things to say to them.”

For Ernest the experience was one of growth and hope for the future. “The students remind me so much of myself growing up, understanding all the issues we go through as a First Nations person. I am glad I was able to help them see the good in our culture,” he goes on to add. “These teachings are so important because, I believe these are the things that are going to begin to heal our people and solve a lot of issues we are facing as First Nations People.”

*This program received funding thanks to a Dream Brokers Program Grant offered through Creative Kids.*



Lynal Ernest receives thanks and hugs from the grade one class for sharing his teachings. Photo by Antje Rongve



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# Culture Days in Oxbow

## SETS A DIRECTION FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

BY SHELLEY FAYANT

**A** new understanding of Truth and Reconciliation helped contribute to a successful Culture Days in Oxbow, which opened the door to new partnerships, perspectives and plans going forward.

For Treena Mohrbutter, community development officer, Town of Oxbow, Culture Days presented an opportunity to bring her community back together after the last couple years of living in a pandemic. She especially wanted to honour the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and was excited to learn that SaskCulture’s Culture Days Hub Sponsorship prioritized applications with activities focused on Truth and Reconciliation.

“Our original plan was to hold the Kairos

Blanket Exercise, followed by a Reconciliation Walk and some cooking workshops that included bannock-making with Elder Angie McArthur-Delorme, from White Bear First Nations,” Mohrbutter recounts.

“However the Blanket Exercise was unexpectedly cancelled so I was in a bit of a panic when I reached out to SaskCulture about how this might impact our hub sponsorship. It was suggested that I connect with Elder Angie, to get her input and guidance about how we could still move forward in a meaningful way. After getting some reassuring advice on how to respectfully approach her, I made arrangements to visit Angie at her home.” It turns out the cancellation was a blessing

in disguise that led to a profound and impactful day that set the community firmly on its path of Truth and Reconciliation.

“I was so nervous, but Elder Angie was just so awesome and kind. She told me that you can’t reconcile until you know what you’re reconciling,” says Mohrbutter. “We begin to do that by building bridges and relationships and understanding each other. We shared our intentions and objectives and then got to work putting things into motion.”

The day-long Culture Days event included the Reconciliation Reflection Walk, a

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Lindsay Littlechief talks about the significance of the Honour Song. Elder Angie McArthur-Delorme is second from the right. Photo by Starr Mercer.

lunch, and an open discussion for people to ask Elder Angie about her experience as a Residential School Survivor. Attendees came from Oxbow and neighbouring communities to participate. Other people attended to provide support to Elder Angie throughout the day, including her close friend Joanne Neddow, who took part in the open discussion, and Lindsay Littlechief, who led the opening and closing prayers. Littlechief also performed an Honour Song on his drum before the walk started, taking the time to explain its significance. Participants also took part in other First Nations' traditions, such as smudging, preparing spirit plates for those who have passed on, and a spontaneous Round Dance, that capped off the day. Mohrbutter attributes much of the event's success to Elder Angie's generous guidance and involvement, but also to the community's support and openness to learning about Truth and Reconciliation. "We hoped to have 80 people come out but ended up with about 140 people turning out," she says. "It was so awesome to see them in their orange shirts signaling their intent to open their minds and their hearts." The town and the event organizers appreciated all the community support. "We also had tremendous support from our



hub partners, our neighbours in nearby communities, our local Co-op, the South East Sport, Culture & Recreation District and the Friendship Club of Oxbow, among many others," Mohrbutter says. "We are

also thankful to SaskCulture for recognizing how important it is to support activities like this in smaller and rural communities – we couldn't have done it without getting a Culture Days Hub sponsorship."

"I think the biggest lesson everyone took away was Elder Angie's message to all: 'If you don't know the past, how can you fix it? We're doing this for every child, because every child matters and by coming here today, we're making sure that this doesn't ever happen again to your children or to anybody'."

- TREENA MOHRBUTTER



TOP: Elder Angie hugs a walk participant. BOTTOM: Attendees of Oxbow's Truth and Reconciliation event during Culture Days. Photos by Starr Mercer.



# OUT on the Land

## CONTINUES TO BUILD TWO-SPIRIT CONNECTIONS

BY NIKITA LONGMAN

**A**fter wrapping up the 6th annual OUT on the Land camp, OUTSaskatoon was again reminded about the growing interest for gender-affirming spaces designed to centre Indigenous cultural teachings and ceremony. The camp, which runs in early August in Pine River, SK, welcomes Indigenous Two-Spirit, Queer, and Transgender urban and northern youth and connects them with traditional Indigenous Knowledge Keepers to participate in a four-day, culturally rich experience away from the city.

The experience is meant to be a hands-on, self-governing structure, which means



campers are guided from set-up until tear-down, while choosing activities to fill their time throughout. Camp participants have the option to help gather food, such as fish and berries, go medicine picking, partake in crafts, learn their language, go canoeing, and/or partake in ceremonies and cultural teachings. “This teaching of self-governance will continue to manifest in future camps because it respects people’s authenticity and supports self-expression,” says Dakota Adams-Bevereye, Indigenous cultural projects coordinator, OUTSaskatoon.

The camp includes an intergenerational component by inviting Knowledge Keepers and Elders, as well as participants



from a wide age range in the 2SLGBTQ community. The idea is to strengthen relationships and build community connections in a gender-affirming environment.

Adams-Beavereye says that, before colonization, Two Spirit people and Queer individuals played a big role in their own traditional communities. Unfortunately, and largely due to the troubling and lasting effects of residential schools, the way some communities view those roles have been deeply damaged. “[Hosting the camp] means that Indigenous 2SLGBTQ will have access to ceremony, traditional teachings, and traditional medicine while being connected to Mother Nature without having to hide a part of themselves to feel safe and accepted.”

Plenty of work goes into planning a land-based camp, but Adams-Beavereye remains eager to continue building on the momentum of the community connections that remain at the core of the camp. She notes that there is a strong sense of



Participants and Knowledge Keepers from this year’s *OUT on the Land* camp. Photo by OUTSaskatoon

healing, confidence, and peace that comes out of the camp after participants have accessed ceremony and the other activities offered.

Over the years, *OUT on the Land* has helped decrease isolation in 2SLGBTQ participants and strengthened the dialogue happening around Two Spirit teachings in Saskatchewan. Furthermore, OUTSaskatoon has seen participants go on to pursue further education, become active in community-building and events, and further extend themselves.

As for the future, Adams-Beavereye is hopeful to expand organizing capacity and in turn, see more participants, Elders and Knowledge Keepers in attendance. She also remains hopeful that eventually, a winter *OUT on the Land* camp can take place so that the participants can come together more than once a year.

*OUTSaskatoon received funding from Sask Culture’s Aboriginal Arts and Culture Leadership Grant funded by Sask Lotteries.*

# YWCA Exemplifies LEADERSHIP IN IMPLEMENTING TRC'S CALLS TO ACTION

BY NIKITA LONGMAN



From programs, to policy, to staff and board retention, the YWCA Regina has been hard at work moving forward on its Truth and Reconciliation journey. It has been a journey of restructuring and decolonizing long-time systems and beliefs.

As with most structural changes, movement on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC's) Calls to Action would not have been possible without community consultations, the guidance of a Senior Director of Indigenous Relations, and a significant increase of Indigenous representation on the organization's board.

“For me, the work I do is more about resurgence and reclaiming,” explains Jessica Gordon, senior director of Indigenous Relations, YWCA Regina.

Gordon says that in order to meaningfully work on Truth and Reconciliation, an organization must consider significant structural reordering. “The TRC Calls to Action provide the guidance for the work to be accomplished,” she says, “but one of the main successes in reaching outcomes for Truth and Reconciliation has been understanding that Indigenous representation on the Board of Directors was needed. As well, representation on the Senior Executive team is important if settlers and organizations want to walk their talk.”

Currently, the YWCA staff team includes approximately 23 per cent Indigenous staff members, in addition, there has been a significant increase in representation of Indigenous peoples at the Board of Directors level.

Gordon has noted a restoration of balance within Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities the YWCA serves. “As a senior director, I have the freedom and authority to decolonize and view programming and policy from an Indigenous lens, which has provided the YWCA Regina with a path to what is required for Indigenous women, children

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YWCA Regina staff, residents and community joined together at Saskatchewan Legislative Building following the announcement of the uncovering of 215 unmarked graves at the Kamloops Residential School to lend voice to the collective action of truth telling. Photo by YWCA Regina



and families – as well as Indigenous staff – to find pride and identity in who they are,” she says. “For the non-Indigenous staff and clients, an emphasis on education and the incorporation of Indigenous ways of being has become a way to build true ‘allyship’ and understanding.”

The structural work has been recognized in the community and has helped create meaningful programming for the organization. Currently, the YWCA has incorporated regular access to ceremony and teachings with their Elders, and Knowledge and Language Keepers year-round. It hosts a traditional First Nations knowledge exchange camp for women and children to attend; it provides transportation and access to surrounding Treaty 4 ceremonies and events in community; and it also hosts its own annual feasts, storytelling events, round dances and solstice celebrations.

“The programming and supports for the women, children, and families that access the YWCA have been rooted in decolonization and restoration of culture and language,” Gordon says.

Further, the YWCA has implemented anti-racist and anti-colonial commitments into its policies that promote structural change for Indigenous peoples on a societal level.



“As we continue this work, we do view the organization as a possible model for other member associations across Canada and organizations to follow,” Gordon explains. “Creating spaces that are inclusive of Indigenous content while educating, practicing representational hiring, and

decolonizing structures and cultural programming has, and must continue, to be a priority in this work.”

*The YWCA Regina receives project funding through SaskCulture's Multicultural Initiatives Fund and Aboriginal Arts and Culture Leadership Grant, both funded by Sask Lotteries.*

TOP: On June 27, 2020, YWCA staff participated in the Sunrise Ceremony with the Willow Warriors, and its partner All Nations Hope Network. BOTTOM: YWCA Regina's Outreach Services Team hosted a healing dance on National Day of Awareness in May, 2021 at YWCA Regina. Photo by YWCA Regina



# Ribbon Skirt-Making Project

## RECONNECTS COMMUNITY AFTER COVID

BY JACKIE LAY

**B**uffalo Narrows, like so many other communities during COVID, felt the deep effects of isolation on its residents' mental health, but for some women, it was even harder. The members of Nimisak Buffalo Narrows Métis Women Inc. recognized a need to bring the women from the community together for reconnection and healing.

"There was so much isolation and loss within our community. The women were taking care of their children and Elders during COVID and needed something for themselves," says Tracy Tinker, one of the project leads.

After consulting with the community about what kind of project they wanted, the Ribbon Skirt-Making Project was defined.

"Many of the women in the community didn't have their own ribbon skirts and said they were interested in learning how to make one," she says.

The Ribbon Skirt-Making Project took place over three sessions from December 2021 to January of 2022. Originally only two sessions were planned, but because so many women from the community enrolled and were on the wait list, they held a third session for Elders in the community.

The project brought together all ages of women from the surrounding community, and many didn't really know each other before, she says. In the process, not only did the women find their laughter again, they came together through reconnection to help each other finish their dresses.

Darlene Petit, a local Knowledge Keeper, led the sessions teaching the women how to sew the skirts, as well as, the cultural significance behind making them.

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Project participants cut fabric for their skirts.  
Photo by Tracy Tinker.

"Many of the women in the community didn't have their own ribbon skirts and said they were interested in learning how to make one," explains Tinker.





“Ribbon skirts are made to honour women,” says Petit.  
 “They are a symbol of resilience, sacredness and survival.”

The women created their own unique ribbon skirts, no two of them are alike,” she adds. “And now you see so much pride when they wear them. Everyone in the community wants one.”

She goes on to add the project was not only one of reconnection, but of healing. “All of the women showed me a lot of respect. I never saw one lady bicker. There was a lot of laughter and happiness even though these were people coming out of

COVID after being stuck at home for so long. It was really so nice for them to be out again.”

After the project ended the community came together, along with some of the children from a previous ribbon skirt-making project, for a fashion show. Petit says they wore their ribbon skirts with pride. The members of Nimisak Buffalo Narrows Métis Women Inc. recognize the continued importance of cultural projects

for the community and will continue to plan projects to take place over the next year.

*This project received support through the Métis Cultural Development Fund, administered by Gabriel Dumont Institute on behalf of SaskCulture and funded by Sask Lotteries.*

Participants model the diversity of their completed ribbon skirts. Photo by Tracy Tinker

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# REGINA FOLK FESTIVAL Improves Accessibility with Hearing Loop

BY DAVE MARGOSHES



folks with hyper-sensitivities to stimuli such as loud sounds,” he says, as almost five million Canadians suffer from the condition. “The hearing loops allow people with these problems to control the volume and frequency themselves.”

After this summer’s trial is evaluated, the hearing loop area will be enlarged next year and eventually, the entire festival area within Victoria Park could be encircled by the wires.

One participant wrote, “In my opinion, the tele-coil loop is a success and well worth it. “You need to advertise this, and advertise it BIG.”

A full accessibility audit is also planned for the organization, and improvement of the wheelchair access area, says Haugerud. “We need to build on what’s already been done. We want everyone to feel welcome.

“I am so happy to share this initiative as it continues our commitment to ensure that all can attend and enjoy Regina Folk Festival events.”

*The Regina Folk Festival receives annual funding from SaskFestivals administered by SK Arts, thanks to funding from Sask Lotteries. This Hearing Loop was funded with the assistance of Hearing Loop Canada and a special grant from the City of Regina.*

**A** ligning with one of its core values, the Regina Folk Festival launched the Hearing Loop Project this summer to enhance the musical experience of its annual event for the hard of hearing.

The festival’s new Executive Director, Josh Haugerud says, “The audio loops allow people who are hard of hearing or with sensitivity to sound, such as people on the autism spectrum, to have the sound at the level that they want and to be able to focus a little bit better on what’s going on, on stage.”

For the project, five people from the deaf and hard of hearing community and five people with autism were invited to take part in the trial. The hearing loop wires were buried into the ground in a circle or square and connected to the festival’s soundboard. People sitting or standing within the loop received enhanced sound quality transmitted directly to their hearing aid or implant, or in the case of people who are sensitive to sound, through special headphones.

“Hearing loss is often considered an invisible condition. There are also many



TOP: Some of the hearing loop equipment, used to increase accessibility at the Regina Folk Festival, includes wires and special speakers. BOTTOM: The crowd at this year’s Festival gathers where the pilot project was launched. Photo by Danielle Tocker.



## NEW CHAMPION SAYS Access to Dance a Life-changer

BY JACKIE LAY

**E**mily Tang says dance lessons she received thanks to Creative Kids have contributed to her growing success today. Her belief in the importance of life-changing cultural activity led her to become a spokesperson for Creative Kids.

“I am excited to represent Creative Kids as a spokesperson,” says the 21-year-old kinesiology student. “Receiving the support for dance lessons when I was 10, was a life-changing opportunity for me and I wanted to give back to the program that did so much for me.”

For Tang, like so many other families in this province, there were barriers to her family’s ability to afford lessons. Saskatchewan has one of the highest provincial child poverty rates in Canada. As of 2019 — the most recent numbers available — more than

73,500 children have limited access to essential daily needs and opportunities for positive growth and self-esteem.

Since 2010, Creative Kids has been providing grants to children and youth who face financial barriers to participating in meaningful cultural and creative activities. Over \$5.38 million has been granted since it began, helping over 11,659 kids in more than 241 communities across Saskatchewan.

“We are excited to have Emily as our volunteer champion for Creative Kids,” says Gloria Walsh, manager, Creative Kids Saskatchewan. “We know that participating in a cultural activity can be life-changing. Having someone speak about their personal experience helps demonstrate why creative activity, such as dance, music or theatre, is so important to children.”

Tang also wants people to understand why cultural activities are important and says looking back at her experience in dance, she realizes she gained not only skills, but many positive attributes as well.

“Because of dance, I became more body confident. The dance studio I went to was such a positive environment that I no longer felt insecure with the way I looked. Mentally, learning and mastering new dance skills made me apply the same perseverance and energy to everything I do now.”

She adds, “Not only did my physical and mental health get better, but Creative Kids also helped me gain a variety of valuable mindsets, such as perseverance, and teamwork. It also helped me meet amazing life-long friends, and dance mentors. It sparked many passions in me, such as the dream of becoming a lawyer, joining the competitive Bedford Collegiate pom/cheer team in high school, and becoming an advocate for the mental and physical health of Canadians.”

Without the funding for dance lessons, she isn’t sure where she would be. “To be honest, if I didn’t do dance, I would probably still be struggling with my mental health. I probably would have dropped out of school when COVID hit, since online school, without the skills and the life-long friends I’ve met through dance, would have been so hard.”

Now, she wants everyone to know how much Creative Kids support benefited her and how it could also be a life-changer for other youth. “I feel so grateful for everybody that donates to such an amazing charity. It truly transformed my life.”

*For more information on how to apply for funding, become involved or to donate to Creative Kids go to [creativekidssask.ca](http://creativekidssask.ca)*

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Creative Kids Champion, Emily Tang is happy to speak about the positive benefits of cultural activity and the importance of Creative Kids.

## Accessing the Filmpool



# SASKATCHEWAN FILM COOPERATIVE PRIORITIZES Accessibility for Members

BY JOHN LEOPPKY

**M**aking sure all community members' needs are considered, including those in the disability community, is a major focus for the Saskatchewan Filmpool.

In 2021, Hagere Selam “shimby” Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, the Filmpool’s new executive director, made changes to repurpose the organization’s former membership and communications job, into a Membership Innovation Coordinator, in order to focus on how the organization could better reflect and support the community it serves.

Embracing the concept of “innovation” was necessary to move forward, says Zegeye-Gebrehiwot, “As there needs to be a regular check in, or updates on what we’re trying out and what we’re experimenting with, as well as, what we’re learning from to figure out how to keep on modernizing the organization to bring ourselves forward while not leaving behind some of the stuff that works well.”

One of the tasks to address change needed was creating a dedicated “access page” on the Filmpool’s website that is aimed at providing patrons and members with information that helps increase accessibility. Some new accessibility information on the website includes: the size of the elevator to make sure wheelchair users can enter safely; a

statement that highlights the mutual responsibility of creating a safe space; and an accessibility widget that allows viewers to change things such as the contrast levels and text size. The organization also acknowledges the organizations they consulted with, including Listen to Dis’, a Regina-based disability arts organization and Khyber Centre for the Arts from Halifax, NS.

“Having a dedicated part of our website where anybody who is trying to learn more about the organization, or who might be new to it, could get a sense of some of the things that physically, structurally [they might have to navigate] that are a part of where we’re located was important,” says Zegeye-Gebrehiwot. They goes on to explain that other points of access are necessary to consider, such as language, transportation, or financial access. “That’s why there’s just a bit of a hub on our website for people to be able to get a sense of what the organization offers more broadly and holistically, and the framework for how we offer things within.”

They added, that whenever questions of equity and access are brought forward, others at the Filmpool—whether they be staff or board members—are supportive and operating with “curiosity and excitement”.

“I think that we’re here to be good neighbors, but in ways that are thoughtful and not extractive,” they say. “And we also have work to do. I think that the access page is just one step of many that needs to happen.”

Zegeye-Gebrehiwot’s advice to organizations that are contemplating how they can best support their communities in this way, is to sit with the fact that change, whether it’s sorely needed or the natural order of things, is one of the few constants in non-profit leadership.

“The nature of our organization, and of our sector as well, is that every few years, there will be staff turnover for permanent positions. That also means that we have to properly equip our team with the tools for unpacking and understanding why it is we do what we do, and the ways we want to do it.”

**“We still have a long way to go, but that’s also why we’re here, so that we can continue to grow and move forward.”**

TOP: The Filmpool’s website features elements to increase accessibility. BELOW: The Filmpool hosts an event to showcase its focus on accessibility.

# Fransaskois Festival

## SUCCESS A RESULT OF STRONG LEADERSHIP

BY DAVE MARGOSHES

**A**fter two long years, the Conseil culturel fransaskois (CCF), was finally able to celebrate the francophone culture in-person, with the return of its Fransaskois Festival this summer. Getting the festival back on track after two years of COVID, required a commitment from leadership to get programming back to normal.

Conseil culturel fransaskois has helped bring the Francophone community together to celebrate the shared culture for the past 48 years.

Suzanne Campagne, executive director, CCF, says Saskatchewan brings together francophones, “from all over the world – we’re unique. We have a lot of diversity.” In addition to the French settlers from Quebec, Saskatchewan is also home to many newcomers from French-speaking countries. And, while the number of people



who claim French as their first language is slowly diminishing, the number of people who are bilingual is on the rise, pushing the French-speaking population in Saskatchewan up to almost 60,000 people, according to most recent census figures.

Campagne notes that the strength of the CCF lies in the fact that the board is made up of leaders “from a whole range of sectors,” allowing the organization to play a leadership role for the fransaskois community at large. “We take on that leadership proudly.”

Besides sending musical groups into communities and schools year-round, as well as, financially supporting francophone groups throughout the province, the annual Fransaskois Festival is its most important project, explains Campagne. “It’s a celebration of the French language and what it means to us and our culture.”

BACKGROUND: The Festival’s audience enjoys the evening main stage show in Pike Lake Provincial Park. ABOVE: An array of fransaskois artists on the main stage at the 2022 festival: Alexis Normand, Étienne Fletcher, Lunch Krew, La Raquette à Claquettes, Nyénimana, Christianne Blondeau, Freddie Pelletier and Dominique Fréchette. Photos by Sebastien Fasiang for Conseil culturel fransaskois.



During the pandemic, the Festival carried on in 2020 and 2021 in a virtual format. According to Anne Brochu Lambert, president, CCF, says “Putting on a festival online is a great challenge,” which has turned everyone involved “into pioneers.”

In 2022, the Fransaskois Festival returned to bringing people together in-person. Held at Pike Lake Provincial Park, south of Saskatoon, the Festival is described as “a three-day showcase of Francophones’ artistic and cultural heritage”. It is Saskatchewan’s only french-language summer music festival. In existence since 2014, it is a mix of music, theatre, art exhibits and book launches, and this summer’s festival featured a number of musical acts, including several from Saskatchewan, circus-style acrobatics and kids’ games.

Attendance, which usually varies from 400 to 700 people, was down this year, with many people still wary of COVID. “We had hoped for more,” Campagne says, but the presence of a “huge amount of young families” bodes well for the festival’s future.

Campagne notes that, “There’s a whole culture here, not just a language.” And, events such as the festival, “are really important for fostering that. We’re able to present the whole ecology of the French community here in Saskatchewan.”

The council began as the Commission culturelle de la Saskatchewan in 1974 – the name was changed in 2000 – and will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2024. Work has already begun on that celebration, which includes new partnerships with other cultural organizations such as the MacKenzie Art Gallery and New Dance Horizons. “We’re trying to think outside the box,” Campagne says.

*The Conseil culturel fransaskois receives Annual Global Funding from Sask Lotteries.*



TOP: Members of the Regina-based Abahebera drum troupe originally from Burundi perform at the Festival.  
BOTTOM: An acrobatic performance by the Edmonton-based Cirquetastique – demonstrates artistry on the Festival’s outdoor stage. Photos by Sebastien Fasiang for Conseil culturel Fransaskois.



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Ribbon and fabric laid out for the ribbon-skirt program participants. Photo by Tracy Tinker



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