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Teamwork Works Best

By Kim Skene, Program Manager, Tom Thomson Art Gallery



Local Schools participated in this year's IGNITE Youth Arts Festival

Summer seems to be about teams: baseball teams, soccer teams, dragon boat teams – even hide'n'seek teams. Working through the programming schedule this spring and summer here at the TOM, I see a new team emerging, a Culture Team if you will, made up of area players and stakeholders, big and small, whose collaboration and teamwork will become key to the continued success and sustainability of the regional cultural milieu.

Collaboration is nothing new to most area groups or to the Tom Thomson Art Gallery. It is part of the Gallery's vision to "play a prominent and supportive role within the cultural realm". We partner with other groups on projects and events, fostering relationships that extend our outreach, enhance our reputation, and benefit all participants.

The significance of such teamwork is being reflected in the new strategic plans of provincial and federal funders. The Ontario Arts Council's new strategic plan *Connections and Creativity* mandates building stronger connections between arts groups and communities. The Canada Council for the Arts' *Strengthening Connections* states that making partnerships with other art organizations, along with using the "existing arts infrastructure to enhance sustainability and adaptability" and ultimately, to share resources, will be elemental in delivering their mandates. Taking the lead from these two organizations, partnerships and collaboration will become a significant part of a programme's success and be important to an institution's viability.

The TOM has a long-standing relationship with the local school boards, conducting tours and workshops for hundreds of school children each year. This spring we had over 500 children through the Gallery. Often, we coordinated these tours with other cultural institutions, like the Owen Sound Marine & Rail Museum, the Billy Bishop Home & Museum and the Owen Sound & North Grey Union Public Library. It does take a village to raise a child...and a gallery, and a library and a museum or two.

This June the TOM was happy to be part of the IGNITE Youth Arts Festival and Arts Fair that saw the few blocks surrounding the Sydenham River come alive with workshops and performances for and by regional young people. Local choirs, bands, dance schools, youth theatres, and artists all came together for a couple of days offering a cornucopia of arts. It took a whole roster of dedicated volunteer organizers, community arts groups and business sponsors to present this great event...and the collaboration of all the players was instrumental to its success.

And the TOM will be there, in late August, when the perennial favourite Summerfolk and the once-in-a-lifetime Tall Ships culminate in one of the biggest cultural weekends ever along the waterfront in Owen Sound; no show-down here - this type of collaboration is strictly win-win.

Working together we can build more diverse experiences, share promotional vehicles, and reach larger audiences with fewer resources. We all bring our different sizes and strengths to the Culture Team, and we will all continue to do what we do best. In an area like Owen Sound, rich in the arts and rich in culture, with so many dedicated and successful organizations, like any good team, the whole will be significantly greater than just the sum of its parts. And the best part - everybody wins.