

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Autism Ontario's Blueprint Project back at the TOM

OWEN SOUND (ONTARIO) CANADA: Grey Bruce Chapter of Autism Ontario and the Tom Thomson Art Gallery are continuing their partnership with the launch of another Blueprint Project this spring. The six-week Blueprint Project kicks off at the TOM on Saturday, April 16 and is designed for children, ages 5 – 15, who are on the Autism Spectrum. The program runs weekly from 1:00pm to 3:00pm and is free for families dealing with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Grey & Bruce Counties.



Artwork created by one of the participating children in the Blueprint Project

Instructor Monica Matei describes the program: *“One of the key concepts of the Blueprint Project is to promote success by focusing on what kids can do, rather than on what they can't do. Areas of difficulty should be supported, but they should not be the main focus. Changing the focus from disability to ability, and promoting that success in turn, fosters good self-esteem and self-efficacy.”* The Blueprint Project offers a unique opportunity for children with ASD to be less literal and concrete in self-expression, and it offers a non-threatening way to deal with processing emotions. The concrete, visual characteristics of art help the children to relax and enjoy themselves while they are learning social skills in a controlled environment.

“The willingness of organizations to develop programming that is inclusive for children and youth with ASD is a huge success for our Chapter” states Jennifer Miller, Chapter President. *“Often families dealing with ASD are so overwhelmed and intimidated by extracurricular activities that children miss out on experiences that can help them grow and develop socially and emotionally. We hope this is one of many partnerships that will support inclusion. We need to work together to help the families dealing with Autism get the support required to enable individuals with ASD to grow to become productive members of our communities.”*

Autism Ontario is dedicated to increasing public awareness about autism and the day-to-day issues faced by individuals with autism, their families, and the professionals with whom they

interact. The association and its chapters share common goals of providing information and education, supporting research, and advocating for programs and services for the autism community.

Autism is a neurological disorder that effects the functioning of the brain. According to the National Epidemiologic Database for the Study of Autism in Canada, the Canadian prevalence rate of Autism Spectrum Disorder is 1 in 94. The CDC based in the US estimates 1 in 64. In Ontario alone, there is an estimated 199,000+ individuals with ASD and perhaps most importantly, there are over 2,750 people with Autism in the Grey Bruce Region.

For more information about the Blueprint Project taking place at the Tom Thomson Art Gallery, to register or to find out more about Autism or the Grey Bruce Chapter of Autism Ontario, please visit their website:

<http://www.autismontario.com/client/aso/ao.nsf/GreyBruce/GreyBruceHome>



The Tom Thomson Art Gallery's inclusive community programming is made possible with the support of our **Specialized Community Engagement Sponsors Sun Life Financial – Owen Sound**. For more information about programs and events at the TOM, please visit our website: www.tomthomson.org.

For more information, or to request interviews and images, please contact Suzanne Watson, Partnership and Sponsorship Manager at swatson@tomthomson.org or 519-376-1932, ext. 221.

The Tom Thomson Art Gallery is a national cultural attraction, dedicated to the innovation and spirit of iconic artist Tom Thomson, strongly identified with the Group of Seven whose images are virtually synonymous with the very idea of 'Canada.' Our national identity is forged and fortified by our awareness and understanding of historical figures like Thomson, whose artwork has been described as being the "visual equivalent of our national anthem."

With over 50,000 visitors each year, the TOM is the region's main disseminator of contemporary art and provides a unique experience for its audiences. The TOM celebrates excellence in the visual arts locally, nationally and internationally, through exhibitions of historical and contemporary art, education programs and the enrichment and interpretation of its significant permanent collection. The TOM supports Thomson's legacy through programs such as **Canadian Spirit** involving galleries, organizations and businesses across the country.

Admission to the TOM is free or by donation and more information about the Gallery's hours, collection, programs and events can be found at www.tomthomson.org.

The Gallery gratefully acknowledges its major funders, major sponsors, partners, members and donors.



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