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ART CITY WINNIPEG

Speech by:
The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Thursday, February 24, 2022

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Honourable senators, I have worked with Ukrainian organizations, and I echo all that has been said today.

I now move home to our inner cities, with amazing organizations doing amazing things, supporting their communities by giving meaningful opportunities to their residents. Art City in Winnipeg's West Broadway is one such oasis. This community's population is 5,590, its density is 402% higher than Winnipeg as a whole and its median age 14% lower.

Led by professional artists, Art City offers a wide range of art activities, using all sorts of donated materials. Of their participants, 96% are children and youth; 35% are Indigenous; 38% are immigrants and refugees — including those from Ukraine; 12% are persons with disabilities; and 25% are single-parent families.

The kids develop their code of behaviour; it hangs by the door. "Zero tolerance" allows for total focus on creativity. This is a free drop-in program. No one has to be there. The spirit is imaginative and positive, sensitive to the area's wide cultural diversities. Participants work on their own and do group projects.

A recent theme, "decolonializing comics," was an inspired way to engage the kids. Each year, they build stunning themed floats for their neighbourhood parade, and they make banners on request for local groups and organizations.

Founded in 1998, by acclaimed artist Wanda Koop, Art City's impact is transformational. One young medical student who grew up in the neighbourhood told me that Art City was his haven. His dream was to give back, and live and practise family medicine there. He is doing so.

During the two hard COVID years, Art City determinedly served 5,335 people — less than the pre-pandemic 9,828, but significant given the lockdowns. Art City's reach expanded to other parts of the city, too. In addition, they packaged free art kits, with instructions, for pickup, and they inaugurated a program for northern Manitoba, delivering thousands of kits to many northern communities.

Their social responsibility to meet immediate community needs and working with community organizations is also paramount. Enhancing the safety of the area, Art City teams join the district's weekly Bear Clan Patrol. In regular contact with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Art City ensures their programs and outreach are appropriately sensitive to cultural and reconciliation concerns.

With Winnipeg reopening, kids are returning to Art City. As Eddie Ayoub, Artistic Director and Senate 150 medal recipient, said, "For them, art is everything."

I commend Art City. Thank you.
