

Culture Builds Community ! **Engage**

Fall 2025
Volume 16 Issue 1

Sask *Culture*



Art as advocacy: Event gets creative to spread message

Murals for change: Artists call to rename Dewdney Avenue

Beyond tips: Why advocacy for arts and culture matters

Engage

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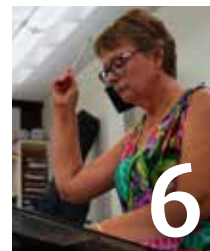
*Through LIVE Arts programming,
led by professional artists,
students gain an early and lasting
appreciation for the arts. (Photo
courtesy of Dash Reimer)*

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Message From the CEO

Advocacy plays a vital role in sustaining and enriching the cultural sector. It ensures that the voices of artists, cultural workers, and communities are heard in policy-making, funding decisions and in the public discourse. Through advocacy, stakeholders, communities and individuals can highlight the social, economic, and educational value of cultural activity, demonstrating how cultural expression fosters inclusion, dialogue, and community vitality.

SaskCulture's role in advocacy is not just about being a voice for culture; it's about creating space, building capacity, and amplifying the voices of those already leading this work in communities across Saskatchewan. This issue of *Engage* highlights cultural organizations whose grassroots efforts are making a real difference. In the following stories, you will see how campaigns, public engagements, strategic partnerships and more can amplify the impact of advocacy efforts. Whether through storytelling, research, or mobilization, advocates in our sector influence change and garner support from both the public and decision-makers.

In times of budget constraints, shifting political priorities or societal uncertainty, advocacy becomes even more important. It can help secure funding, promote equitable access, and support the development of diverse and relevant cultural practices. Moreover, advocacy empowers marginalized voices, ensuring that cultural narratives reflect the full spectrum of society.

Ultimately, advocacy is not just about maintaining the status quo; it's about championing creativity as a cornerstone of vibrant, healthy communities. Thanks to funding from Sask Lotteries, SaskCulture supports and champions this work year-round through partnerships, community engagement, research, and communications. By strengthening the conditions for cultural advocacy to thrive, whether in arts, heritage, culture, multiculturalism, or Truth and Reconciliation, SaskCulture helps ensure culture remains a powerful force for connection and positive change.

Dean Kush



Cultural leaders across Saskatchewan build awareness and understanding through advocacy, thanks to funding from Sask Lotteries. (Photos by Hannah Williams, Red Thunderbird Photography, and Ana Cristina Camacho)

Culture Builds Community!

Engage

just got more **digital!**

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ONLINE AND
SHARE YOUR
THOUGHTS



Art as Advocacy:

EVENT GETS CREATIVE TO SPREAD MESSAGE

BY NICKITA LONGMAN



To promote awareness for the longstanding racial disparity in donor systems, one community event engaged the public in local art, while shedding light on culturally sensitive information on stem cell donation.

The CellART event, held in the summer of 2024, is one of the ways the Black Donors Save Lives (BDSL) non-profit advocates for health equity for both patients and donors from African, Caribbean, and Black communities. Community leaders and artists were invited and given a platform for their advocacy, with the goal of increasing the representation of Black communities across blood, stem cell, organ, and tissue donor registries in Canada.

Sylvia Okonofua, BDSL founder and event organizer, says that “art has always been a tool of resistance and healing in Black communities. Combining it with stem cell advocacy allowed us to spark deeper conversations while breaking down fear and stigma.”

She continues, “events like CellART are about shifting the status quo, transforming awareness into action, and action into lives saved. [Our event] aims to build trust by creating culturally safe pathways to donation.”

For Okonofua, the motivation to organize the event stemmed from her personal life, where she saw Black patients waiting longer for matches or not receiving matches at all, simply because of underrepresentation in donor registries. She came to realize that information about becoming a donor does not have to be restricted to a clinical setting, and can instead incorporate joy, celebration and community.

“We wanted to create a space where people could engage with a serious issue in a way that felt human and inspiring,” she says.

She explains that the gathering, centered around art while incorporating a swabbing booth, allowed attendees to explore the process before committing to registering for something they had limited information on.



Community leaders, advocates and artists came together to break down stigma around stem cell donation. (Photos courtesy of BDSL)

“Events like CellART are about shifting the status quo, transforming awareness into action, and action into lives saved.”

– SYLVIA OKONOFUA

“People came for the art and stayed for the conversation,” Okonofua says. “Having a swabbing booth in the space really helped demystify the process.”

A standout moment from the event was a spoken word piece by artist Nifemi, which explored loss, grief, and resilience. “Her performance created a stillness and connection that really resonated with the entire room,” Okonofua reflects. Along with the contributions from other artists, the event created a powerful connection that reminded attendees that saving lives is a collective effort.

The organization looks forward to hosting many more events in Saskatchewan, while also expanding its advocacy across the country.

The Black Donors Save Lives CellART event received support from SaskCulture’s Small Grant Accessibility Program, with funding from the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund.



MUSIC PROGRAM HELPS KIDS Embrace Heritage

VIDEO STORY BY HEYWOOD YU

Advocacy comes in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes, all it takes is one educator with the commitment to give children a way to embrace and understand their culture through music.

Through the Bayanihan Filipino Arts and Culture Club, youth in the Yorkton area have a space to engage with their culture while helping to preserve and promote Filipino identity.

With about ten participants at a time, the program has a big impact on kids, their families, and their community.

The Bayanihan Filipino Youth Band Workshop received support from SaskCulture's Small Grant Accessibility Program, with funding from the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund.



Watch the video story online for an inside look into the only Filipino youth band in the province, and how young people are connecting to their cultural identity through music.



Filipino youth in the Yorkton area came together on Sundays to make music and celebrate culture.

(Photos by Heywood Yu (above) and courtesy of the Bayanihan Filipino Arts and Culture Club (below))

Advocating Together:

BUILDING A STRONGER VOICE FOR ARTS AND HERITAGE

PODCAST EPISODE: CONVERSATION
WITH EM IRONSTAR & INGRID CAZAKOFF

When SaskCulture was established back in October 1997, it introduced the idea of Communities of Interest, organizations that don't just represent specific groups, but also bring valuable insight and expertise from across

Saskatchewan's cultural landscape to help guide SaskCulture's work.

Today, two longstanding organizations continue to play that role. These organizations lead, advise, and advocate

on behalf of the individuals, communities, and organizations in their sectors, making sure that arts and heritage voices are heard.



Listen to this podcast episode online to hear from the Executive Directors of the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance and Heritage Saskatchewan. Representing individuals and communities in arts and heritage, they discuss what it means to advocate for their sectors, the progress made so far, and how others can be a part of the movement.

The Saskatchewan Arts Alliance and Heritage Saskatchewan receive funding from the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund.



Heritage Saskatchewan (above) and the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance (below) promote involvement in arts and heritage across the province through programs, outreach and more. (Photo courtesy of the SAA)

Event Builds Understanding OF TWO-SPIRIT IDENTITY

BY SABRINA CATALDO

Two commemorative dates in June, Pride Month and Indigenous History Month, offered an opportunity in the Battlefords to build understanding and connection.

An event, presented in partnership between the Battlefords Area Pride and the Battlefords Agency Tribal Chiefs, created a space for community members to learn, share, and reflect on the meaning of Two-Spirit identity – the 2S in the 2SLGBTQ+ acronym.

“We liked the idea of doing the event in June. It’s Indigenous History Month and Pride Month, so it’s a good blending of those themes,” says Kelly Waters, volunteer secretary, Battlefords Area Pride Board of Directors.

Waters notes that the two organizations have had many discussions on ways to coordinate and support their mutual interests in the community. “Anything on diversity and inclusivity is common ground ... there is lots of intersectionality,” says Waters.

“Two-Spirit” refers to Indigenous people who embody both masculine and feminine spirits, often encompassing a spiritual and gender identity outside the binary. The organizers noted that few people in the area, including among Indigenous

communities, know a lot about Two-Spirit identity, its history, cultural significance, and how to be an effective ally. The event aimed to change that.

Attendees represented a wide range of people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, Two-Spirit and allies, teens and seniors, and included people who wanted a deeper understanding of Two-Spirit identity in order to serve the community better in areas such as healthcare and education.

The response to the event was overwhelmingly positive, with 77 per cent of participants saying they learned quite a bit or a lot from the experience. Feedback included how they appreciated learning about the colonial impact on the erasure of Two-Spirit people and how to create and maintain space for them.

One participant commented, “Although I came in with a lot of 2S knowledge, it’s always healing to be around other Two-Spirits. I loved that there was an ally Elder. That the city councillor stayed to listen and learn warmed my heart.”

The day began with a blessing by Elder Alvin Baptiste, of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation. “We were looking for an Elder, but we didn’t even have to ask anyone. He contacted me and said, ‘I want to support this,’” Waters explains. “He said afterwards that he learned a lot.

“Anything on diversity and inclusivity is common ground ... there is lots of intersectionality.”

– KELLY WATERS

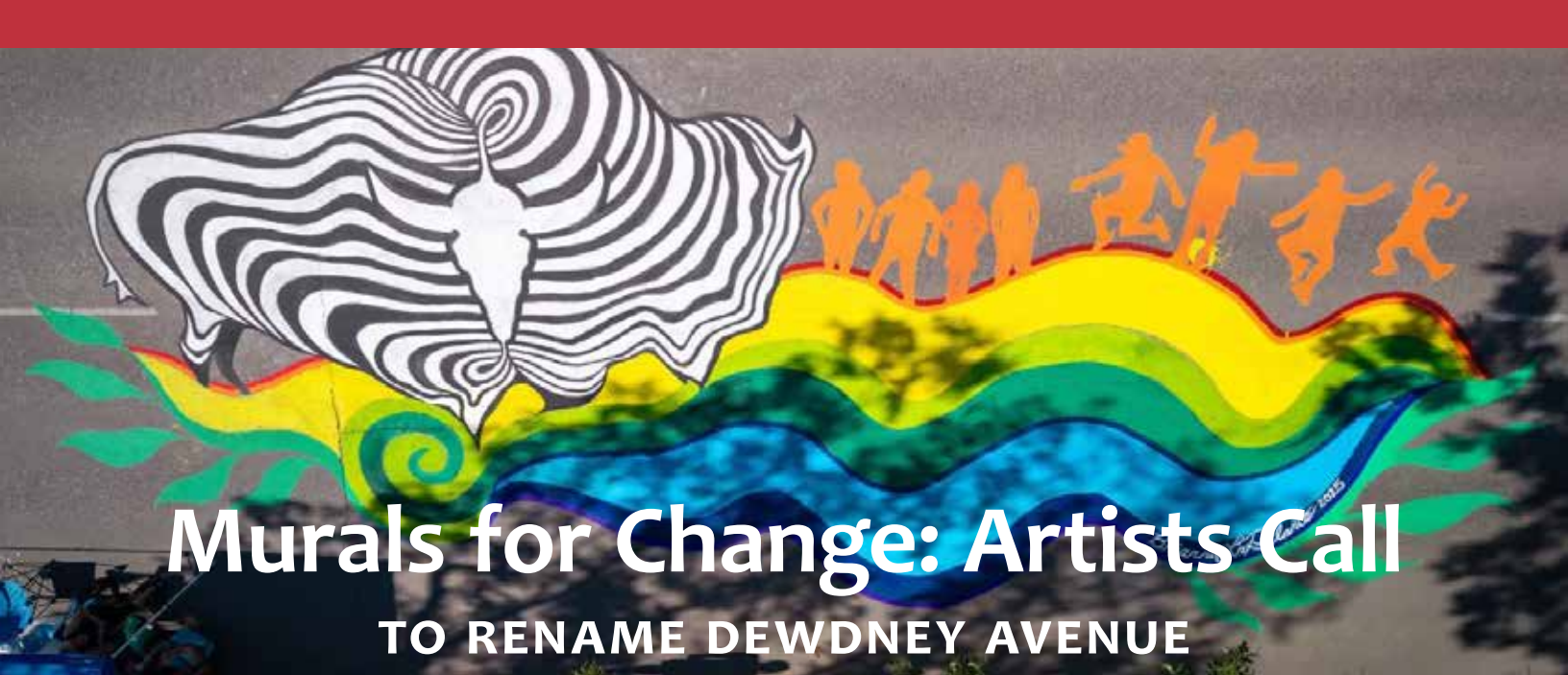
There were things that he previously didn’t understand about the history and experience of Two-Spirit people.”

Waters says that the feeling of the importance of the presentations and discussions was palpable in the room. “I was so engaged in what was taking place, I didn’t realize until later in the day that I wasn’t taking photos,” Waters says. “Everyone was listening and engaged and asking good questions. It was very powerful.”

This project received support from SaskCulture’s Multicultural Initiatives Fund – Small Projects, funded by the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation.



Jack Saddeback (right) gave a keynote presentation titled "No Closets Under the Tipi" at the Battlefords Area Pride event. (Photos courtesy of Battlefords Area Pride)



Murals for Change: Artists Call TO RENAME DEWDNEY AVENUE

VIDEO STORY BY HEYWOOD YU

Arts organizers in Regina brought the community together through a public art project aimed at raising awareness and support for the ongoing efforts to rename Dewdney Avenue to Tatanga Avenue. Painted by four

Indigenous artists, the project used art as a powerful way to spread understanding, build awareness, and rally support.

The Buffalo People Arts Institute, a Regina-based arts group, has

hosted “Tatanga Day” celebrations on July 1 for several years as a way to honour Indigenous cultures and their contributions to Canadian history. This year’s celebration included a special advocacy project: a vibrant street mural.



Watch the video story online to learn more about this group’s message: that renaming an avenue can be a tangible step toward responding to the Calls to Action.

The Buffalo People Arts Institute’s Tatanga Day Street Mural Project received support from SaskCulture’s Aboriginal Arts and Culture Leadership grant, with funding from the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund.



Brianna LaPlante's colourful mural on Dewdney Avenue was part of the Buffalo People Arts Institute Tatanga Day celebrations.

(Photos by Red Thunderbird Photography, Brianna LaPlante and Heywood Yu)

Small Museum

MAKES A BIG IMPACT

PHOTO STORY BY CULTURE DAYS SK

“[The reception has] been supportive, and it’s growing. We attract quite a group of diverse people. Not only is [awareness] spreading in our community, but it’s expanding beyond ... reaching out into the rural areas.”

– MARINA GRYDE, CURATOR, CLIMAX COMMUNITY MUSEUM



In the small community of Climax, the local museum is creating space for reflection, learning, and connection. Through its Culture Days events, the Climax Community Museum commemorates the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30, offering residents meaningful opportunities to learn, share stories, and strengthen their commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

This year, the Museum worked alongside First Nations artists, Knowledge Keepers, educators, and leaders - Clarence Oakes (Nekaneet First Nation), Sylvia Thorburn (Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation), Dr. Sean Chandler (Aaniih, Fort Belknap), and Gabriel Essaunce Lamarche (Beausoleil First Nation) - who shared their knowledge and experiences with the community.

The Climax Museum received support from SaskCulture's Culture Days Hub Sponsorship, with funding from the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund.

"I am very grateful to the people from Climax. I never thought that they would bring something like this here, to try to learn about what their forefathers didn't understand."

**- CLARENCE OAKES,
KNOWLEDGE KEEPER FROM
NEKANEET FIRST NATION.**



l-r: Clarence Oakes, Yvonne Mosquito, Marina Gryde and Sylvia Thorburn gather at one of the Climax Museum's Culture Days events in 2025. (Photos by Hannah Williams)



The Climax Culture Days Hub included activities such as flint knapping, beading and ribbon skirt presentations to foster understanding in the community. (Photos by Hannah Williams)

FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

Reclaim Traditional Ways

BY NICKITA LONGMAN

A gathering of women, grandmothers, and Knowledge Keepers harnessed traditional ways and knowledge to better advocate for healthy familial structures and communities.

Susan Jolly-Maxie, an organizer of the event from White Bear First Nation, says the vision for the gatherings was to reawaken traditional laws and ways of maintaining good relations in the family structure.

“We’ve heard Elders talk about this for years,” she says. “Bringing people back together in a circle to talk things out in good relations to provide women with the skills of handling conflict and apply those back in their communities was our goal.”

The land-based Woman’s Peacemaking Camp, held in fall 2024, was developed after local child welfare prevention services in the community identified the need to support and empower families to

take care of each other. The event hosted members from White Bear, Ochapowace, Pheasant Rump, Cowessess, Ocean Man, Zagimē Anishinabēk, and Kahkewistahaw First Nations communities.

Jolly-Maxie explains that, in traditional laws, women and matriarchs were often conflict resolvers who promoted healing in family units. “We had to reawaken these laws because we rely so much on outside systems that make decisions for us when we find ourselves in disagreement and disputes.”

She continues, adding that healthy communication, conflict resolution, and consensus decision-making are all elements of traditional teachings that have been lost in colonial systems. “There is a lot of emphasis in these gatherings to explore what deep listening means while encouraging one another to speak and share in a good way. Healthy communication needs to be built.”

“We had to reawaken these laws because we rely so much on outside systems that make decisions for us when we find ourselves in disagreement and disputes.”

– SUSAN JOLLY-MAXIE

Land-based teachings and activities were incorporated to further promote traditional ways of doing things. “The time of year was perfect because we wanted to incorporate chokecherry crushing and pemmican making,” Jolly-Maxie says. “People start to remember what they were taught by their grandparents and begin to reclaim those teachings when engaging in these activities together.” Incorporating hands-on elements while engaging with the land strengthened the group’s ability to build trust and connection.

The camp received strong positive responses from participants who left feeling empowered and equipped to navigate and resolve difficulties in their families and communities. Involving multiple communities allowed the organizers to “plant seeds,” as Jolly-Maxie calls it.

“When we’re talking about kinship, we aren’t restricted to boundaries just within our own bands,” Jolly-Maxie says. “Extending our community work to other bands are ways other communities can organize these types of events moving forward.”

This project received support from SaskCulture’s Community Cultural Engagement and Planning Grant, with funding from Sask Lotteries Trust Fund.



The event fostered change by equipping matriarchs with conflict-resolution skills, according to traditional ways. (Photos courtesy of White Bear First Nation)

LIVE Arts Inspires

CREATIVITY IN CLASSROOMS

PHOTO STORY BY LIVE ARTS



“It’s important to introduce students to professional artists, so that they grow up knowing that the arts are a viable pathway. I hope this lights a spark in them.”

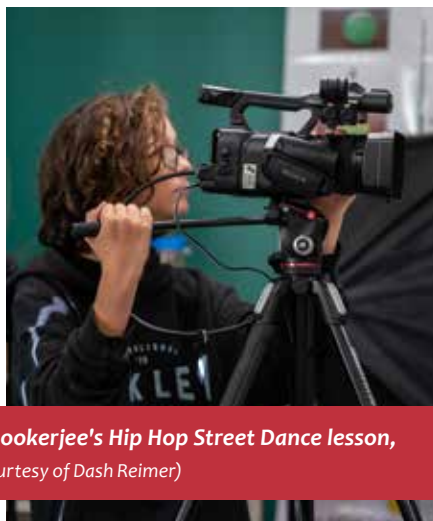
– DASH REIMER, PROGRAM COORDINATOR, LIVE ARTS

Inspiring creativity across Saskatchewan, the LIVE (Live Interactive Video Education) Arts program connects classrooms with professional artists for real-time experiences in the arts. Students explore visual arts, drama, music, and dance, discovering new ways to express themselves and connect through creativity.

“We have such an incredible artist community, and we can make those links and connections, bringing people together.”

– DASH REIMER

LIVE Arts is a SK Arts program delivered in partnership with SaskCulture and the Ministry of Education, with funding from the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund.



A classroom was engaged by artist Abhiroop Mookerjee's Hip Hop Street Dance lesson, delivered remotely through LIVE Arts. (Photos courtesy of Dash Reimer)

BUILDING CAPACITY For Inclusive Libraries

BY HANNAH WILLIAMS

For many people, a library is more than just a place to borrow books; it is where people connect, learn and belong. As trusted community hubs, libraries not only provide safe spaces for curiosity and connection, but also play a vital role in advocacy. Across Saskatchewan, new resources and grants are helping libraries highlight their impact and promote inclusion.

At the forefront of this work is the Saskatchewan Libraries Association (SLA). With its mission to be a supportive voice for libraries throughout the province, the SLA supports libraries in telling their stories, helping them demonstrate their impact, broaden the understanding of diversity, and inspire empathy in their communities.

“Libraries create awareness in communities by providing all individuals with free and easy access to resources, services, programs, and materials,” says Tina Kleisinger, executive director, SLA. “Acting as community hubs, libraries facilitate opportunities for education, critical thought and inclusion.”

To this aim, the SLA committee for Advocacy and Development has been hard at work developing tools for libraries. One such resource is the Advocacy Toolkit, which supports Saskatchewan libraries in their advocacy work as they promote the importance of libraries as a safe place for people to connect, learn, participate and grow. “Strong and vibrant libraries impact the whole community,” she adds.

The SLA also offers small grants to libraries to support targeted advocacy efforts. For example, the association is on its second year of offering a National Indigenous Peoples Day grant, which supports libraries as they celebrate and promote this important day in their communities.

While introducing these new resources, the SLA continues to build on the success of previous advocacy campaigns. For example, the Association’s One Book One Province program, started in 2017, continues to unite a wide range of Saskatchewan residents through shared experiences with the selected book.

“Strong and vibrant libraries impact the whole community.”

– TINA KLEISINGER

Each year, the SLA selects a book by a Saskatchewan author with the goal of building awareness and understanding around topics related to diversity, Truth and Reconciliation, or aspects of the province’s history.

When thinking about advocacy, Kleisinger’s main suggestion for organizations in the cultural sector is to focus on building strong relationships with stakeholders, and to use a variety of approaches to reach different audiences. Cultivating relationships with like-minded community leaders and organizations can impact the success of any initiative.

The Saskatchewan Library Association receives Annual Global Funding from the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation.



Libraries across the province harness their place in communities to spread understanding and inclusion, with the support of the Saskatchewan Libraries Association. (Photos courtesy of the SLA)

BEYOND TIPS: WHY ADVOCACY For Arts and Culture Matters

PODCAST EPISODE: CONVERSATION WITH NICHOLE YAMCHUK

In her work with the cultural sector, Nichole Yamchuk, founder and CEO of Advocate Fundraising, found that arts and cultural organizations often face a lack of understanding from the public. Her solution was to equip cultural workers with the tools they need to proactively spread awareness.

Yamchuk's perspective is also shaped by personal experience. As the mother of a former Creative Kids recipient, she has seen first-hand the impact that the arts can have on children, families, and communities. Her experiences with arts, culture, and heritage ultimately inspired her to found a consultancy that helps non-profits secure resources for initiatives, blending fundraising with advocacy to maximize impact.



*Listen to
the podcast
episode
online to hear*

*Yamchuk share her personal
story, why advocacy
matters in the cultural
sector, and practical tips for
organizations looking to
begin their own advocacy
work.*



Yamchuk's leadership and involvement in grassroots campaigns shaped her understanding of the need for advocacy in the cultural sector. (Photos courtesy of Nichole Yamchuk)



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Culture Days events such as the nêhiyaw Stories About Place sessions held in 2025 in Saskatoon, help promote and showcase local talent, culture and heritage across Saskatchewan. (Photo by Kevin Hogarth)

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