

Culture Builds Community ! **Engage**

Spring 2025
Volume 15 Issue 2

Sask *Culture*



Culture Days: Always growing, always innovating

Tour shares disability culture in rural Saskatchewan

2SLGBTQ+ choir creates inclusive space

Engage

Published by
SaskCulture Inc.,

is designed to

highlight
the work of
cultural leaders,
volunteers

and the

diversity
of activities

supported by the
Culture Section of
Sask Lotteries Trust
Fund for Sport, Culture
and Recreation.



ON THE COVER:

Organizers and cultural performers came together during Culture Days 2024 for Shaunavon's third annual Multicultural Festival. (Photo by FSI Studio)

Contents

Spring 2025

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 2

Message from the CEO	3
Tour breaks down barriers: Sharing disability culture in rural Saskatchewan	4
Mentorship program makes space for BPOC artists to thrive... 6	
Collaborative art unites diverse group of women	7
Music brings cultures together in harmony.....	8
2SLGBTQ+ choir creates inclusive space	10
Culture Days: Always growing, always innovating	12
Land-based canoe trip fosters intergenerational learnings....	16
Shaping open minds through debate helps youth explore new perspectives.....	18
Groundbreaking theatre addresses Reconciliation call.....	20
From celebration to connection: How one event brings communities together	22



Direct Inquiries to:

Diane Ell, Editor
dell@saskculture.ca

Ana Cristina Camacho, Publishing Coordinator
acamacho@saskculture.ca

404, 2125 11th Ave., Regina SK S4P 3X3
Tel: (306) 780.9448

www.saskculture.ca

Print copies of this publication are circulated for free to SaskCulture members, partners and through community outreach activities as determined by SaskCulture Inc. **Engage** is also available in PDF version on the SaskCulture website at www.saskculture.ca. **Engage** is published thanks to financial support from Sask Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation. The publication does not currently accept paid advertising. Article ideas for future publications can be submitted to info@saskculture.ca or by calling (306) 780-9284.

Published March 2025. Articles may be reprinted with permission.

Graphic Design:

Third Wolf Studio
Tania Wolk, Designer

Contributing Writers:

Ana Cristina Camacho, Sabrina Cataldo, Katie Doke
Sawatzky, Diane Ell, Jackie Ledingham, Nickita Longman,
and Heywood Yu.



Message From the CEO

Meaningful and impactful change requires new ways of thinking and innovation. It calls for openness to unique ideas and perspectives that may not have been considered before. For the cultural sector, innovation includes increasing inclusivity, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) and creating space for diverse voices.

One of our core principles and values is being responsive to all people in Saskatchewan. SaskCulture has always aimed to be inclusive in its programs and services. One example is the Funding Program Renewal Project, which is being approached through the lens of IDEA. Our work, over the next few years, is guided by the many organizations who are innovatively making change in our cultural sector.

This issue of *Engage* highlights some of the many cultural organizations and leaders in the province that are doing this work by advancing IDEA through innovative and unique ways. You can read about how Listen to Dis' started conversations about disability with its rural tour; how innovative thinking has contributed to the success of Culture Days over the years; learn about how a project by Burnt Thicket Theatre that handed the reins over to Indigenous playwrights resulted in creative achievements and an educational opportunity; how a celebration of culture held during Nigerian Independence Day made an impact in Northern Saskatchewan; and much more. There are so many great stories to share — these are just a few examples of the important work and conversations happening in our communities.

These stories show that meaningful change is already happening around us, and that we all thrive when our communities embrace and celebrate diverse cultures and uplift everyone's voices and perspectives.

Thanks to funding from Sask Lotteries Trust Fund, SaskCulture supports many of these cultural initiatives that are helping build a cultural community that is welcoming to all. SaskCulture is committed to making sure that these proceeds are used to support cultural activity that meets the needs of Saskatchewan's ever-growing diversity of people. Together, we will build a culturally vibrant province!

Dean Kush



From Listen to Dis' performers (top), and Culture Days organizers and participants (middle), to multicultural performers with the Latinos en Regina Association (bottom), and more, the cultural sector is advancing inclusivity, diversity, equity and accessibility in communities, thanks to funding from Sask Lotteries. (Photos by Traci Foster, FSI Studio, and Ana Hernández Reyes)

Tour Breaks Down Barriers:

SHARING DISABILITY CULTURE IN RURAL SASKATCHEWAN

BY SABRINA CATALDO

Audiences tapped their toes, laughed out loud and even shed tears during the Listen to Dis' Community Arts Organization's (LTD) recent rural Saskatchewan tour. With musicians and actors with disabilities at its heart, the performance proved that art is for everyone, while also challenging perspectives on disability.

Aileen Martin, community consultant, Prairie Central District for Sport, Culture and Recreation, one of the partners in the tour, says that, "a lot of people felt seen" at the tour. Local residents of care homes were invited, including some who have similar disabilities to the performers.

"They realized that they could do this, too," she says. "When you see Listen to Dis' on stage, it hits home that art is for everyone."

Traci Foster, artistic director, LTD, adds, "It gave them hope that they can realize their dream relative to their art form — a dream that they haven't been able to find their way into due to inaccessible programming or direction."

The response of one audience member in Humboldt stands out for Martin. A young boy was so moved by LTD performer Nathan Coppens' monologue about people living with Attention-Deficit/

"When you see Listen to Dis' on stage, it hits home that art is for everyone."

— AILEEN MARTIN

Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) that he returned for the community session later that day.

"He came back to say, 'thank you' because he didn't realize before that what was going on in his head may be ADHD," Martin says. "This was the first time he had heard about it. It was so brave for him to share that with us."



While physical access to infrastructure such as sidewalks, elevators, ramps and washrooms can be a huge barrier to participating in arts and cultural activities, Foster names “attitudinal access” as equally challenging.

“The [lack] of an open mind is the greatest barrier to creating an equitable sector,” she says. “Personal shifts need to occur for a policy shift to occur.”

The tour has created meaningful connections between aspiring rural artists with disabilities and LTD performers, with relationships forming on social media to offer encouragement, Foster says. One group from Wishart, who saw LTD perform on its 2023 rural tour, even rented a bus and travelled two hours to Regina for the organization’s *Not Just Christmas Concert*.

“We have not experienced that type of interest, commitment, community connection and relationship-building in the ten years that we’ve been a non-profit. And I haven’t experienced that in the 18 years I’ve been working. So, that’s incredible,” Foster says.

“The [lack] of an open mind is the greatest barrier to creating an equitable sector. Personal shifts need to occur for a policy shift to occur.”

– TRACI FOSTER

The tour performances in Humboldt, Melfort, Stanley Mission and North Battleford in 2024 were part of *The Axis of Access* project, a collaboration between LTD and the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance (SAA). The tour was undertaken through partnerships with four of the seven Districts for sport, culture and recreation in the province: Prairie Central, Lakeland, Northern, and Rivers West. In addition to performances, community discussions were held at each location. The resulting input is helping LTD and SAA craft a living document, which will guide arts and cultural organizations on how to create more inclusive, accessible opportunities for people with disabilities.



This project received support from SaskCulture’s Multicultural Initiatives Fund – Project, funded by Sask Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation. The Districts for Sport Culture and Recreation are also funded by Sask Lotteries Trust Fund.

The Listen to Dis’ tour stops in Humboldt, Melfort, Stanley Mission and North Battleford gave audience members a space to feel seen, share their experiences and find community. (Photos by Traci Foster)



MENTORSHIP PROGRAM MAKES SPACE FOR BPOC Artists to Thrive

BY HEYWOOD YU

Girlynnne Gascon has been drawn to art from an early age. As a newcomer adjusting to a new country, finding the space and support to pursue her art felt like a distant dream. That changed when she received a mentorship opportunity. She is now back on track with her artistic journey.

The Regina-based printmaking artist is exploring her art and Filipino heritage with guidance from mentor Patrick Fernandez, an established artist from the Philippines, who immigrated to Canada in 2017. Through this mentorship, Gascon is able to delve into the world of traditional symbolism, folklore, and artistic practices, deepening her connection to heritage while refining her craft.

Gascon says, “This mentorship has filled those gaps and helped me create work that’s more meaningful and authentic. I’m combining my experiences from the Philippines and Canada to create narratives that honour both sides of my heritage.”

From Fernandez’s perspective, the mentorship program is about more than cultivating growth for an emerging artist — it offers an opportunity to preserve culture for future generations.

“Sharing traditions isn’t just preservation; it’s an act of celebration. Every tradition you pass on is a thread in the tapestry of your community, Fernandez says. “Representation isn’t just about being seen — it’s about making space for others to thrive.”

Thanks to these new relationships, Gascon was able to contribute to a commemorative print project for the Philippine Madrigal Singers’ visit to Regina in 2024.

The Building Arts Equity Program offers support to artists and collectives of African, Black, Asian, Latin American, Caribbean, and Middle Eastern descent (BPOC) in Saskatchewan to create new work, access mentorships, exhibit, and

“Representation isn’t just about being seen — it’s about making space for others to thrive.”

– PATRICK FERNANDEZ

build partnerships. Gascon believes that this program is important for all the underrepresented artists who need a platform to share their voices.

“It’s my first grant, and it’s been a confidence boost. Knowing that I’m welcome and supported means so much,” she says. “This program shows that opportunities exist for BPOC artists. It’s about giving people the chance to shine.”

The Building Arts Equity: BPOC Program is offered by SK Arts, in partnership with SaskCulture, with funding from the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation.

Girlynnne Gascon grew as an artist and deepened her relationships in the art community through a mentorship made possible by the Building Arts Equity Program. (Photo by Patrick Hernandez)



Collaborative Art Unites

DIVERSE GROUP OF WOMEN

BY KATIE DOKE SAWATZKY

In her exhibition, visual artist Yasaman Tarighatmanesh asked participants to share what it means to be a woman. To explore this, she invited five women to collaborate on a single piece of art while sharing their personal answers. Through the process, the women found connection and community.

Tarighatmanesh, from Iran, and her co-leader Elham Zafaremili brought together five female artists from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ukraine, Lebanon and Canada to work on the art piece. The creative process was part of Tarighatmanesh's 2023 exhibition "Portraits of Liberation". The women gathered over several weeks in a studio provided by the Saskatoon Open Door Society and shared stories about their experiences as women in their home countries.

"Art is a reason to connect us together," she says. "The piece brought us closer together. We didn't find many differences or borders between us. We were all in the same country, the same place."

Canadian artist Susan Muench, one of the contributors, found the collaborative process to be a journey in finding commonalities across cultures. She painted a red circle on the canvas to represent menstruation, and texturized the background with handwritten script detailing inequalities and stigma around menstruating. She then decouped photographs of her co-artists' eyes onto the circle and had them write in their own language around it.

"There are these threads connecting women and when I notice them it can

"We didn't find many differences or borders between us. We were all in the same country, the same place."

— YASAMAN TARIGHATMANESH

be very powerful," Muench says. The exhibition was inspired by the Iranian women's movement of 2022, which began after the death of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian woman, who died in police custody in Iran after refusing to wear a hijab.

Through her art, Tarighatmanesh aims to draw on the strength and resilience of women exercising their rights within Canada and around the world. Hearing the stories of the contributing artists helped her to examine her own struggles.

"For me, collaborative work surpasses individual artwork because it carries a valuable life lesson. It's not just a visual piece; it's about the lessons I carry forward to shape my future," Tarighatmanesh says.

Tarighatmanesh created an environment where the women felt free to express themselves individually — offering support, but letting the artists build their connection and the art piece on their own. Muench calls it "one of the most beautiful processes I've ever experienced with a group of women."

Muench says, "it came organically. I felt a feeling of connectedness and community."

This project received support from SaskCulture's Small Grant Accessibility Program, with funding from the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund.



Five women from different cultural backgrounds came together in Saskatoon to create an art piece for Yasaman Tarighatmanesh's exhibition "Portraits of Liberation". (Photo by Ahmed Karimi)

MUSIC BRINGS CULTURES Together in Harmony

BY HEYWOOD YU



From the rhythmic beats of the drum — symbolizing the heartbeat of Mother Earth — to the intricate footwork of traditional Latin American dances, seamlessly blending with Indigenous hoop dance, the sounds speak as one, drawing everyone into the shared rhythm.

The Multicultural Musical Fusion event, held by the Latinos en Regina Association, brought together artists from different backgrounds and cultures to show how music and dance can transcend borders. The event combined sounds and performances including drumming, hoop dancing, Mexican and Chilean music, and more.

Ana Hernández Reyes, president, Latinos en Regina Association, says the motivation behind planning the event was to show the possibility of cultures coming together in harmony.

“It’s about celebrating our similarities and honouring our differences,” Hernández Reyes says. “This project is not just about performance; it’s about building bridges and creating understanding.”

Terrence Littlelent, a former World Hoop Dance Champion, was a featured guest of honour at the Multicultural Musical Fusion event. Born in Regina,

Littlelent is from the Kawacatoose Cree Nation. He says that the creative process behind the production was marked by an atmosphere of mutual respect and camaraderie, where rehearsals became spaces of cultural exchange, and traditions were shared and connections deepened.

“When we show love and respect to one another, whether between two people or a group of diverse cultures, it creates a bond,” Littlelent says. “We sat, talked, and got to know each other. Ideas started flowing naturally, and everything came together like puzzle pieces.”

The result was a vibrant event that painted a vivid picture of unity within diversity. Hernández Reyes says the performance “was just magical.”

“People [in the audience] did not understand the lyrics, but some were crying just by listening to the song,” Hernández Reyes adds.

Beyond its artistic achievements, the project brought together artists and audiences in a shared celebration of cultural diversity. For Littlelent, it showed the importance of listening and understanding for Truth and Reconciliation.

“It’s about listening to each other’s stories and watching each other’s journeys,” Littlelent says. “By sharing through dance, we painted a beautiful picture of two diverse cultures that are Indigenous. Under the heavens, we’re all family — it just so happens we’re all different.”

“When we show love and respect to one another, whether between two people or a group of diverse cultures, it creates a bond.”

– TERRENCE LITTLELENT

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



Artists and performers from across different cultures, including (L-R) Ana Hernández Reyes, Vinicius Linhares, Terrence Littlelent, and Martín González, came together in an evening of cultural exchange and deepening connections. (Photos by Ana Hernández Reyes)

2SLGBTQ+ CHOIR CREATES Inclusive Space

BY KATIE DOKE SAWATZKY

In the heart of Regina, a vibrant community is coming together every week to find their voice, build connections, and make music. The PRISM Choir creates a safe space for Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (2SLGBTQ+) members to express themselves freely, embrace their identities, and create harmony — both in music and in the community.

The non-auditioned choir, led by music educator Brendan Dickie, is a low-pressure group where members sing the parts

they feel fit them best, regardless of how they present or identify. Dickie founded the PRISM adult choir and a PRISM youth choir after noticing a need among Queer students in public schools for a more inclusive space to sing. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the two choirs merged into one group. Today, the choir has 25 members, ranging in age from 15 to 60, mostly from Regina, with one member commuting from Wolseley.

“It’s a very community-oriented choir because members can go wherever they

fit best according to them. They’re not stuck in a role based on who they are or what they look like,” Dickie says. “I might have a bass that’s singing an octave higher because that’s where it fits in their vocal range, if that’s the group they’re identifying with.”

Tionna Ackerman joined the choir in the fall of 2024 after watching a PRISM concert in 2023. The welcoming atmosphere and the fact that the audience was invited to sing along made her want to join. As a member, she has appreciated that her



“It’s a very community-oriented choir because members can go wherever they fit best according to them. They’re not stuck in a role based on who they are or what they look like.”

– BRENDAN DICKIE

sexual identity does not matter in the group, which is a type of acceptance she has not felt in other Queer spaces.

“Since joining the choir, I haven’t even been asked how I identify,” Ackerman says. “It’s just ‘be there, be welcome, be accepted.’ You don’t have to have that conversation unless you want to have that conversation.”

The choir’s repertoire often celebrates Queer lives and stories. PRISM’s last spring

concert, titled “Stories of Pride”, focused on the story of Matthew Shepard, whose death in 1998 brought about needed change to hate crime legislation in the U.S.

“I think it’s important even for us, as 2SLGBTQ+ community members, to make sure that we know our history and can celebrate some of the wins that we’ve had,” says Dickie. “It’s nice to have something like that to look forward to and share together.”

Ackerman says that the choir is its own little family. PRISM’s concert in December at F.W. Johnson Collegiate in Regina was on the theme of growing old and community. Members brought baking to share, artists sold crafts and small children danced to the music.

“Almost every single seat was filled. It was lovely to see the whole room full of people who are there to support their loved ones and just be in a comfortable, safe environment. That was really awesome.”

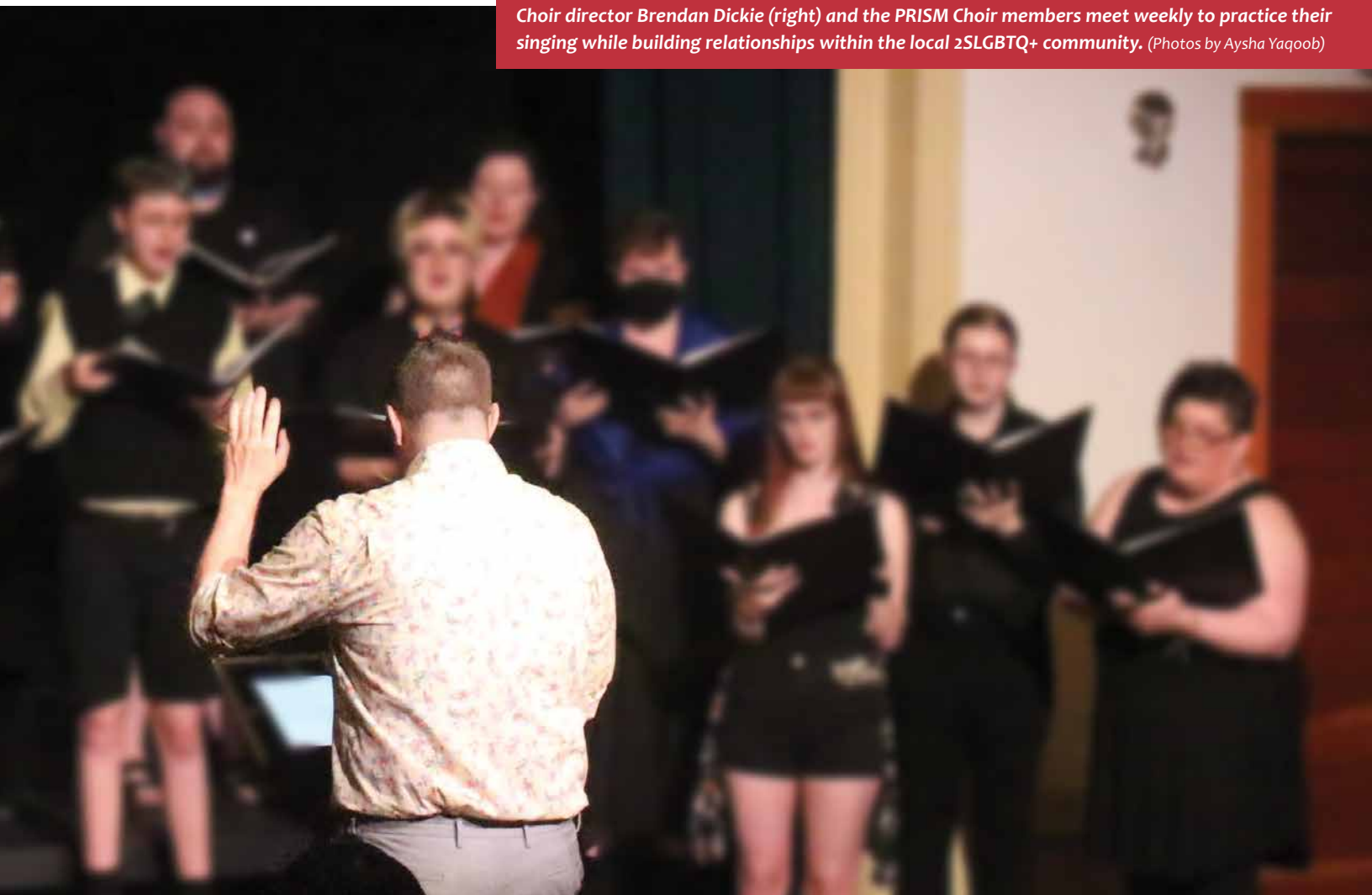
The choir recently decided to accept non-Queer community members, but Dickie stresses that joining the choir isn’t a “ticket to allyship” but rather a way to meet people, support them and learn.

“It’s a good place to just come and hang out, where you’re not really expected to be perfect at anything,” he laughs.

The PRISM Choir’s “Stories of Pride” concert received support from SaskCulture’s Small Grant Accessibility Program, funded by the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation.



Choir director Brendan Dickie (right) and the PRISM Choir members meet weekly to practice their singing while building relationships within the local 2SLGBTQ+ community. (Photos by Aysha Yaqoob)



Culture Days:

ALWAYS GROWING, ALWAYS INNOVATING

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIANE ELL, LONGTIME, OUTGOING
COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, SASKCULTURE



People of all ages tried something new at a glass mosaic-making 2024 Culture Days event hosted by the Saskatchewan Craft Council in Saskatoon. (Photo by Kevin Hogarth)

SaskCulture has always looked for ways to help people understand the value and diversity of arts, heritage and culture in Saskatchewan. Culture Days, which began in 2010, has continued to have a big role in building this awareness and uniting the cultural community in its promotion.

Since she started her role in 1999, SaskCulture's Communication Manager Diane Ell has made it a priority to help residents gain a better understanding of cultural activity, its impact, its diversity and its availability, both locally and provincially. For years, she worked with other cultural leaders in the community to promote the many benefits of cultural activity, including increased confidence, self-esteem, and opportunities for expression for individuals and increased economic benefits, pride and social capital for communities. She is extremely pleased with the impact that Culture Days has had in the province over the years.

Q. How did Culture Days begin?

A. The cultural community has always been interested in some form of shared promotion of arts, heritage and culture — that was the idea behind the creation of *Culture Builds Community!* back in 2000. At a cultural community summit in 2006, members of the cultural community spoke up about wanting a



Animateurs, artists and performers helped spread the excitement of Culture Days throughout the province. (L-R: Sylvia Chave, Animateur; Diane Ell, Communications Manager, SaskCulture; and Erroll Kinistino, Animateur.)

more focused promotion for arts and culture. They asked SaskCulture, and its partner SK Arts, to consider a Culture Week or Day in the province. As this conversation continued, SK Arts had identified Quebec's popular *La journée de la culture*, held every September, as an idea. Other organizers in Eastern Canada had already been discussing the possibility of this type of promotion. So, by the time the coordinator, for the newly formed Culture Days initiative, called to discuss our involvement in a Canada-wide movement, SaskCulture was ready to jump on board.

What did SaskCulture hope to do?

SaskCulture was optimistic about the idea of Culture Days. It emerged as an innovative opportunity to highlight the arts in the province, including the many talented artists, performers, cultural workers and cultural experiences available. For SaskCulture, the opportunity also included highlighting the province's heritage, including museums, the land, stories, and traditions, as well as showcasing the diversity of cultures that helped shape Saskatchewan.

Culture Days offered us all a more united, persuasive call to action. It was also an opportunity to connect with cultural organizations and organizers across the country.

Key to the success of Culture Days was getting cultural organizers to jump on board. We asked them to open their doors to offer a glimpse into their area of cultural experience. As part of this initiative, they needed to identify free, interactive activities that would help the public get a better understanding of cultural activity. And ultimately, after Culture Days was over, participants would get more involved in these cultural pursuits throughout the year. In addition, SaskCulture hoped that Culture Days would build awareness of its funding programs and other opportunities in the cultural network.



When Culture Days was first celebrated in Saskatchewan in 2010, Laura Hale, a mixed media visual artist, visited communities and met with organizers to build awareness and get people involved. (Photo by Diane Ell)



A child enjoys the opportunity to dance at a 2016 Culture Days event in Prince Albert. (Photo by Kevin Hogarth)

What did Culture Days in Saskatchewan look like in the beginning?

Building momentum for any type of initiative from scratch is always a challenge. Fortunately, community leaders were ready for something that brought people together around cultural activity. There are so many creative people in this province — we only needed to share the idea, and many artists, cultural organizations, and community leaders banded together to explore possibilities.



A 2016 Culture Days event in Prince Albert gave participants hands-on drawing experience. (Photo by Kevin Hogarth)

To help share the idea and build interest and momentum, SaskCulture developed the Culture Days Animateur position. Yes, we had an Animateur right at the start! Laura Hale, a mixed-media visual artist, was hired to visit different communities and meet with organizers. As part of her work, she drove around the province in a Culture Days van and demonstrated how an interactive arts activity could engage community members, help build awareness and get people involved. She invited locals to try a wire art activity, which encouraged them to create, express themselves and contribute their creations to a larger wire art project.

In the end, the first Culture Days, held in September 2010, engaged 23 different communities offering over 180 cultural activities, resulting in over 7,000 participants attending registered activities.

What were the most notable Culture Days innovations?

SHOWCASING HOW CULTURE BUILDS COMMUNITY

Culture Days emerged during the same period of time when thought leaders, such as Jane Jacobs and Richard Florida, were encouraging everyone to remember how arts and cultural activity added value — contributing to social capital, “place-making,” and creating communities

where more people wanted to live. The province was focused on proving that Saskatchewan was a great place to settle and raise a family. We saw Culture Days as an opportunity to advocate for increased support for arts and culture in communities large and small. Along with the *Culture Builds Community!* idea, Culture Days provided tangible examples we could share with governments and businesses to demonstrate the impact of arts and culture.

ACTIVATING ANIMATEURS TO ENGAGE OTHERS IN INTERACTIVE CULTURAL ACTIVITY

Saskatchewan was the first province to introduce the Culture Days Animateur, thanks to SaskCulture’s support. The role, right from the beginning, was to help communities understand the concept, as well as encouraging creativity in sharing various activities with potential cultural participants. In the first year, we had one Animateur, by the next year, we had three artists, who helped encourage community cultural leaders and potential participants to get involved in Culture Days. The Animateurs were very helpful in demonstrating interactive ideas. And, they definitely helped to increase participation levels. Unfortunately, by 2017, resources were pared back and the program was put on hold. By 2020, the funds were designated to support a more responsive Culture Days Hub Sponsorship Program.

ENCOURAGING HUBS OF ACTIVITY WITH FUNDING SUPPORT

Although SaskCulture had experimented with a few different funding programs, the Culture Days Hub Sponsorship has been incredibly effective in building stronger arts and culture partnerships in communities. By working with other community groups, organizers were able to more effectively offer more innovative activities and reach new audiences. Since its introduction in 2020, almost 100 different communities have formed a hub and engaged thousands of people each year.

ADVANCING TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Following the launch of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in 2020, SaskCulture successfully supported a specific focus on Truth and Reconciliation as part of Culture Days by adding it as a priority in its Hub Sponsorship program. In the past few years, approximately 30 per cent of Hub Organizers have included Truth and Reconciliation activities.

COMMUNITIES SEE BENEFITS AND RETURN EACH YEAR

The key indicator of success is that organizers return year after year. These organizers appreciate how Culture Days has been part of showcasing the diversity of local arts and culture. For example, the development of Nuit Blanche — a night of artistic activity showcased outdoors, held in both Regina and Saskatoon — has been a perfect fit for Culture Days. Each community has created a Culture Days that best meets their individual needs. I get a little emotional when I hear stories of community success, such as the creativity used to engage communities, and stories of teamwork and belonging that happen each year during Culture Days. Stories about activities that engage newcomers, multi-generational activities where Elders share stories and traditions with youth, or gatherings that inspire community belonging, are frequent occurrences during Culture Days.

Besides these successes, Culture Days has contributed to the development of annual planning committees and coordination, as well as a variety of cultural planning resources that are shared across the country. After 15 years, there have been over 4,000 registered cultural activities just in Saskatchewan alone. There have

been over 540 communities involved and over half a million instances of participation. These are just estimates, the real numbers are probably much higher.

What do you see as the future of Culture Days?

After 15 years, the momentum behind Culture Days continues to grow. In fact, we are seeing a resurgence of interest in recent years. People want to get out again. More and more communities are recognizing the need to get people out and involved. And, there is a good response to things to do that are “free”.

It's a good time to refocus efforts on building awareness of the benefits of cultural activity, reaching new audiences, building social capital, and even supporting new physical capital, such as community murals or enhanced venues. Audiences and participants in cultural activities come and go, so cultural organizations should always be working to get new people involved. Putting the spotlight on arts, heritage and culture during Culture Days, both locally and

nationally, is a great opportunity to attract those who might not normally be included.

Culture Days is designed to inspire creativity and innovation. Successful ideas seem to inspire even further creativity. We've already seen opportunities where participants try conducting orchestras, try different instruments at a musical petting zoo, be part of creating community murals or quilts, visit neighbourhood art pop-ups or art walks, participate in outdoor dance workshops, learn recipes for food from different countries, engage in round dances as part of concerts, hear historical stories while on a community walk or cemetery tours, and much more. These ideas, mixed with an individual community's own unique character, inspire even more new ideas, creating brand new experiences for all.

I hope more and more organizers see Culture Days as an opportunity and make it part of their annual plans. For communities, participation in Culture Days can be an investment in their community members' expression, involvement, growth and community pride.



A 2018 needle-felting Culture Days event in Saskatoon engaged kids and adults' creative side. (Photo by Kevin Hogarth)

Land-Based Canoe Trip

FOSTERS INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNINGS

BY NICKITA LONGMAN



A four-day canoe trip showed that land-based learning is a way to share Métis traditional teachings, as well as a space for kinship-building.

In the summer of 2024, the Gabriel Dumont Local 11 organized a canoe trip along the South Saskatchewan River — an event they called “Nandow aen Pambayihk aen Kanoo.” The journey hosted 18 community members, ranging from nine to 70 years old, for traditional skill-sharing. During the journey, Knowledge Keepers, language teachers, Elders, Aunties (or taants), and other community members were invited to engage with participants and foster a deeper understanding of Métis history and tradition.

Kendall Hanikenne, program lead and Michif language speaker, says that bringing a wide range of people together to learn encouraged meaningful relationship-building during the trip.



“People who were once strangers or acquaintances quickly became ‘auntie/taant,’ ‘uncle/nook,’ ‘koohkooms,’ and ‘mooshooms,’” Hanikenne says. “The interactions and inclusivity of having adults, teenagers and children on the trip forged lifelong bonds, while bringing people together and connecting them to the land and Métis history.”

The evenings turned into teaching opportunities for plant and food identification, as well as for preparing traditional foods such as bison stew, bannock, and beans, followed by storytelling around a campfire. For Hanikenne, this range of activities showed the “rich and distinct heritage of the Métis and Michif communities.”

Faye Maurice, an Auntie/taant, helper, and plant teacher involved with the event, says that land-based activities such as this canoe trip are a good space for people to reflect on their cultural identity. “We need to reclaim, celebrate and preserve, as a community,” she says.

For Maurice, having the activity include a diverse group of varied ages and knowledge levels was essential for the learnings that took place.

“Youth were able to discover new skills and strengths, build confidence and gain a sense of belonging,” she says. “As older people, we have a responsibility to pass this knowledge down.”

Supported by the adults in the group and the land around them, the youth took part in traditional activities such as language learning, storytelling, crafting, and cooking during the journey.

The learnings started even before the canoes took off, Hanikenne says. At the canoe safety lessons necessary for the planning of the trip, participants were equipped with the skills and confidence to navigate a multi-day trip on the land and water.

“We need to reclaim, celebrate and preserve, as a community.”

– FAYE MAURICE

“Canoeing itself was a cultural teaching of patience, teamwork, and perseverance, as the voyagers had long ago,” Hanikenne says, adding that participants left feeling more connected to the land, each other, and the history that shaped their journey.

The Gabriel Dumont Local 11 received support from the Métis Cultural Development Fund. The Fund is administered by Gabriel Dumont Institute, on behalf of SaskCulture, with funding from the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation.



Participants of the “Nandow aen Pambayihk aen Kanoo” event journeyed along the South Saskatchewan River with stops at various historical points, growing their connection to the land and the river system. (Photos courtesy of Gabriel Dumont Local 11)

SHAPING OPEN MINDS Through Debate Helps Youth Explore New Perspectives

BY JACKIE LEDINGHAM

In a world filled with different opinions, learning to see from someone else's perspective has never been more important. That's exactly what the Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association (SEDA) is helping young people do — one conversation and one open mind at a time.

Fiseko Musonda, executive director, SEDA, says engaging in debate is an innovative way to develop critical thinking skills and

the ability to have difficult conversations. "It truly forces you to evaluate and confront why you think about things the way that you do, or how certain positions come about and also forces you to inhabit a different space when you're participating in that debate," Musonda says.

Now more than ever, she adds, the essential skills that debate develops are necessary for youth.

"In contemporary society, critical thinking skills are very valuable, especially with the overwhelming amount of information that's always coming our way. That skill equips youth with a way to handle that," she says. "It teaches them to take a second and take a deep breath, pause, wait, and then ask, 'where is this information coming from? Why is the story framed in this way? Who's benefiting from it? Who's being harmed? Maybe I need to investigate a little bit more.'"



“In contemporary society, critical thinking skills are very valuable, especially with the overwhelming amount of information that’s always coming our way. That skill equips youth with a way to handle that.”

– FISEKO MUSONDA

Since 1974, SEDA has been empowering youth from grades five to 12 across Saskatchewan with the tools and the confidence to engage in reasoned

discourse through debate and public speaking classes, as well as running workshops and tournaments across Saskatchewan.

Musonda says that debate provides a non-threatening way for youth to become comfortable with ambiguity, contradictions, or being in a space where you may disagree with someone, but still seek to understand.

“When debaters are forced to inhabit a space they don’t typically take, or an approach they don’t necessarily agree with, they learn to sit with that discovery,” she says. “They learn that we can disagree peacefully. They figure out how to respond and react rationally, even when confronted with strong emotions.”

That discomfort, Musonda says, indicates not only a change in perspective is coming, but also signals important realizations that contribute to the development of empathy. She believes that feeling discomfort is necessary for change.

“If you’ve never experienced discomfort, it means you’ve been comfortable this entire time, while someone else has been uncomfortable. So when you do feel discomfort, it might be the moment when someone else is finally feeling at ease,” Musonda says.

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

Young people across Saskatchewan participated in the Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association’s province-wide championship in 2024, where they got to practice their speaking and critical thinking skills. (Photos courtesy of the Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association)



Groundbreaking Theatre

ADDRESSES RECONCILIATION CALL

BY SABRINA CATALDO



We Treaty People artists **Darryl Dozlaw, Stephen Waldschmidt, Erroll Kinistino, and Josie Linka** received the Leading Together Award for **Burnt Thicket Theatre**. (Photo courtesy of Burnt Thicket Theatre)

Nine audio plays. Forty-nine artists. Working to address one Call to Action, “for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative projects and produce works that contribute to the Reconciliation process,” they created change.

Burnt Thicket Theatre in Saskatoon recently embarked on an ambitious project centred on the idea of handing the reins of nearly two consecutive seasons over to Indigenous playwrights, without curation. The result was *We Treaty People*, a fiction podcast where a diverse group of artists answered the question: “What does it mean to embrace all our relations?”

For Stephen Waldschmidt, artistic director, Burnt Thicket Theatre, the project was innovative in its approach to passing the mic to Indigenous artists and amplifying their voices.

“A Cree friend and theatre artist said to me that it’s rare for a theatre company led by non-Indigenous people to say, ‘Indigenous playwrights, write what you want about Treaty or Reconciliation, and we’ll produce it and make it the focus of our company,’” Waldschmidt says.

The results spoke for themselves. By a conservative estimate, more than 6,400 people tuned in. Burnt Thicket received the 2024 *Leading Together Award* from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan. It was also nominated for both the Innovation and Trailblazer Awards at the Saskatoon and Area Theatre Awards.

Raven Dallman, a Cree actor from Muskoday First Nation, performed in the “Taken Before Birth” episode about a child who asks their mushum, “Why don’t I have a Treaty card?”, harkening to a time when women lost their Treaty status if they married someone without status. For her, “it hit deeper, to the idea that if you don’t have status or look a certain way, you’re not seen as Indigenous.

“I faced a lot of prejudice about that growing up by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures,” Dallman says. “After that experience, I don’t want others to feel the same way as I did, and I want to help change that perception.”



The artists behind *We Treaty People*, including the cast of the “Coffee Talk” episode (above) and Raven Dallman (below) came together to make stirring calls for Truth and Reconciliation. (Photos courtesy of Burnt Thicket Theatre)



A lot of work went into the podcast behind the scenes. Before the episodes and corresponding conversations with actors aired, the creative team braced for backlash, Waldschmidt shares. How would the plays, which dealt with sensitive topics such as Gerald Stanley’s acquittal, be received?

“Each of us involved knew people who we expected to be upset. I was pleasantly surprised that the people really appreciated it. They found the stories compelling, educational and poignant,” Waldschmidt says. “The series did what we hoped it would — it pushed buttons without alienating people.”

The legacy of *We Treaty People* continues in Burnt Thicket’s play choices. Their current season features a play by Yvette Nolan, who was the mentor for the creative team throughout the *We Treaty People* project. Nolan’s *The Unplugging* is a post-apocalyptic story that deals with environmental sustainability and Indigenous ways of knowing, which has been performed all over North America, but never before in Saskatchewan.



“The series did what we hoped it would — it pushed buttons without alienating people.”

– STEPHEN WALDSCHMIDT

“We are convinced that if we want to be about positive social change and put our money where our mouths are, we have to be producing work that addresses Reconciliation in some way,” Waldschmidt says. “It doesn’t need to be everything we do, but it needs to be somewhere in our season every year.”

Burnt Thicket Theatre’s 2025 production of The Unplugging received support from the SaskCulture Multicultural Initiatives Fund – Project, funded by the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation.

FROM CELEBRATION TO CONNECTION: How One Event Brings Communities Together

BY ANA CRISTINA CAMACHO

For one group, its Independence Day celebration was not only a chance to celebrate culture, but also an opportunity to build meaningful relationships with the broader community in Northern Saskatchewan.

The Association of Nigerians in Northern Saskatchewan (ANNSASK) marked a milestone in 2024 with its largest Naija Day celebration yet. The full-day event brought warmth and colour to Melfort last fall, with vibrant showings of cultural

attire, food, music and dance. Joseph Akinjobi, president, ANNSASK, says that coming together to hold this celebration of independence and self-determination “reminds us of who we are, our existence and our purpose as a people.”



“On Naija Day, we came together to reflect on what we have been able to achieve in the diaspora, and also to showcase our culture to the people who have decided to take us among themselves and make us a home far away from home,” Akinjobi says.

The event was particularly aimed at showcasing Nigerian cultures to those who did not grow up surrounded by it. This included the children of the members of ANNSASK, many of whom were born in Canada. Segun Owonikoko, chairman of the event’s organizing committee, says that it is the group’s goal to teach the next generation to “recognize who they are and where they came from, but also recognize the country that they now [call home].

“We want them to be proud Canadians and proud Nigerians at the same time,” he says.

“On Naija Day, we came together to reflect on what we have been able to achieve in the diaspora, and also to showcase our culture to the people who have decided to take us among themselves and make us a home far away from home.”

– JOSEPH AKINJOBI



Lara Abogunrin, who was part of the organizing committee for the event, says that having a large-scale celebration was a unique opportunity to highlight the beauty of the diversity of Nigerian cultures, both to the children and to the association’s friends. During the event, people who had not been familiar with Nigerian cultures before were able to relate to it and find commonalities.

“They saw the diversity, and also the things we share. For example, Canadian people [in our communities] are big on family, which is something that we have in common,” Abogunrin says.

With the Naija celebration taking place only a few days before the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR) on September 30, the organizers also decided to include a commemoration of NDTR in the event programming. While the local Indigenous leaders that they had planned to partner with for this part of the event were unable to attend in the end, the group is committed to continuing to build relationships. Abogunrin says that this is important because “when you go to somebody’s house, you have to respect and honour the people in the house.”

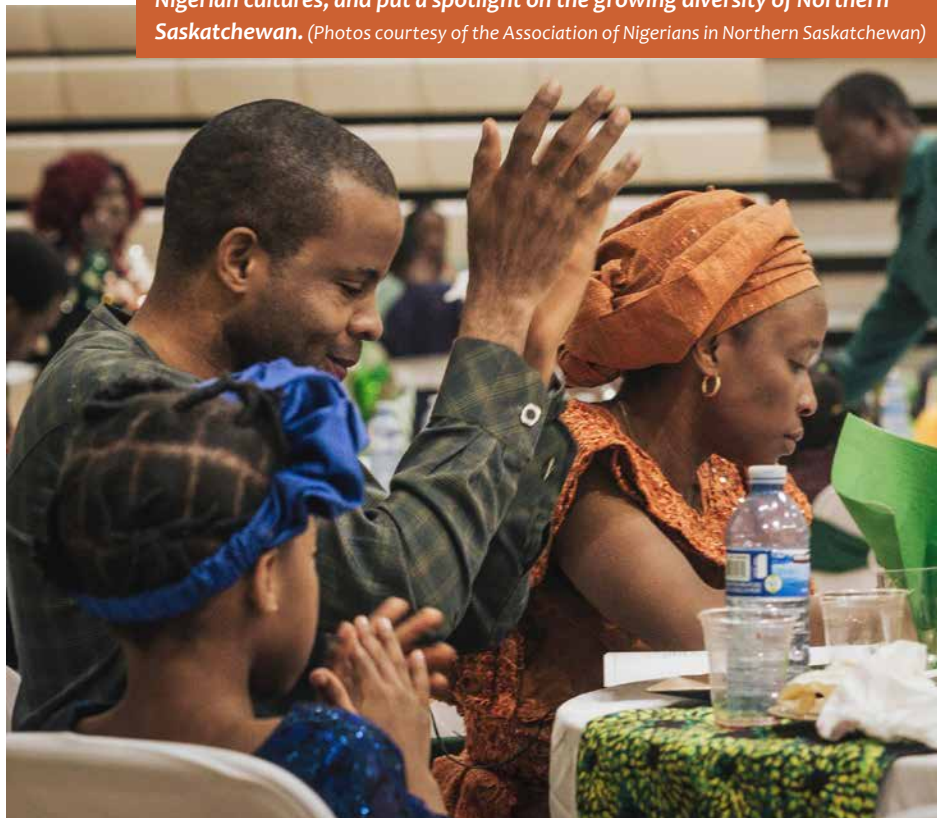
“We want to form these relationships because we can identify with what [Indigenous peoples] have been through. We can learn from each other. We want our children to learn from the stories of this land,” Abogunrin says.

Overall, the event succeeded in making an impression. Abogunrin says the children present continued to talk about it long after. As for her, organizing helped her learn more about her new home, and seeing the results — her community coming together to celebrate that day — made her proud.

“Getting there and seeing the diversity of culture in this little Northern Saskatchewan city, and the pride in that diversity... It was a highlight for me,” she says.

The Association of Nigerians in Northern Saskatchewan’s 2024 Naija Day celebration received support from SaskCulture’s Small Grant Accessibility Program, funded by the Sask Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation.

The Naija Day celebration in Melfort showcased the beauty and diversity of Nigerian cultures, and put a spotlight on the growing diversity of Northern Saskatchewan. (Photos courtesy of the Association of Nigerians in Northern Saskatchewan)





SaskCulture

404 - 2125 11th Avenue, Regina SK S4P 3X3
info@saskculture.ca • www.saskculture.ca

A Culture Days event by Métis Nation - Saskatchewan Western Region III gave people in Regina an opportunity to engage with the rich Métis heritage and oral traditions. (Photo by FSI Studio)

Publication Mail Agreement #40063014

Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to:
Administration Printing Services
111-2001 Cornwall Street
Regina, SK S4P 3X9
Email: adminprint@sasktel.net

 **SASK LOTTERIES**