

## Calgary Arts Development

# 2019-2022 Strategic Direction

A transformational increase in arts funding will assist Calgary in becoming a more innovative city, with an exceptional quality of life, a diversified economy, and shared prosperity for all.

Calgary currently places second from the bottom for arts grants per capita (2015)



The time is now for the arts to help re-invigorate our city. Increased investment will:

- ◆ Increase vibrancy throughout our city
- ◆ Increase the economic impact of the arts
- ◆ Contribute to Calgary's economic diversity
- ◆ Ensure access to more arts experiences for Calgarians including youth, and
- ◆ Better reflect Calgary's diversity advantage through the arts

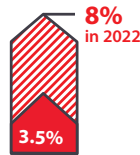
Calgary Arts Development's strategic direction 2019-2022 aligns with City priorities articulated through One Calgary, the Cultural Plan, the Civic Arts Policy, the Social Sustainability Framework, Quality of Life Strategy, Municipal Development plan, and the City Resilience Framework. It also aligns with strategies of other civic partners including *Building on Our Energy—an Economic Strategy for Calgary* (CED) and *Calgary Ultimate Hosts Ultimate Host City* (Tourism Calgary).

# What will we do and how well will we do it?

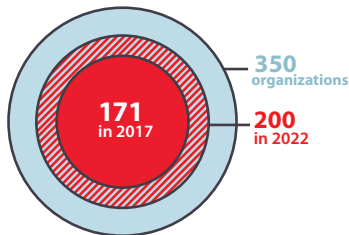
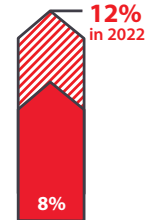
**1. SUPPORT SUSTAINABILITY OF NON-PROFIT ARTS SECTOR** = more arts experiences, more vibrancy downtown and throughout the city, greater economic impact including more jobs for artists and creative workers.

**\$12.85M**

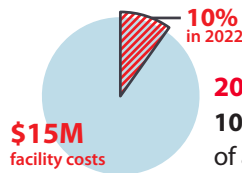
**2022 TARGET:** Increase Cornerstone investment from an average of 3.5% to an average of 8% of their budgets.



**2022 TARGET:** Increase non-Cornerstone operating investment from an average of 8% to an average of 12% of their budgets.



**2022 TARGET:** Increase the number of not-for-profit arts organizations supported by Calgary Arts Development by 9%.



**2022 TARGET:** Support up to 10% of facility operating costs of arts & culture infrastructure.

**2. SUPPORT TALENT & INNOVATION IN THE ARTS** = Calgary is recognized as a hotbed for creativity, attracting artist entrepreneurs, creative workers, and social innovators.

**\$2M**

**2022 TARGET:** Increase number of individual artists supported by 51% (103 current to 200 target).



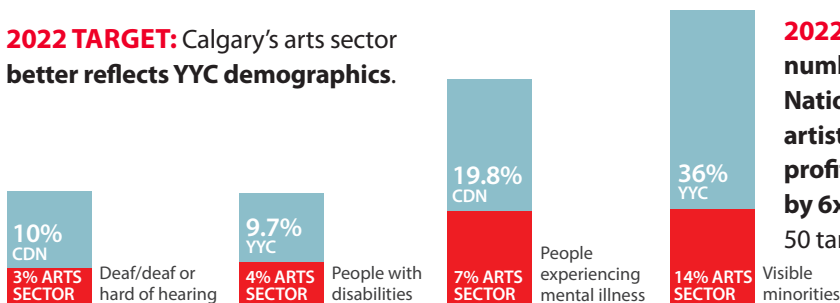
**2022 TARGET:** Increase the level of investment for individual artists supported by Calgary Arts Development to 65% of grant dollars requested.



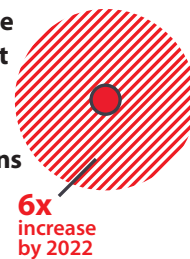
**3. CELEBRATE CALGARY'S DIVERSITY ADVANTAGE** = Diverse artists and arts organizations have access to grant investment and arts development programs.

**\$1.5M**

**2022 TARGET:** Calgary's arts sector better reflects YYC demographics.



**2022 TARGET:** Increase number of funded First Nation/Metis/Inuit artists and not-for-profit arts organizations by 6x (8 current to 50 target).



**4. BUILD ON ARTS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS** = Meaningful research, knowledge hub, central arts information hub, engagement & events, support of cultural tourism experiences, creation of a digital strategy for the arts sector, and contribution to a creative industries development strategy for Calgary.

**\$2.45M**

**ADMINISTRATION & OVERHEAD**

**\$700K**

**TOTAL**

**\$19.5M**

# How are Calgarians better off?

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

- ◆ Calgary is seen as an innovative, creative city with a vibrant centre city and great community spirit, making it more attractive to creative workers, businesses and visitors
- ◆ Calgary has a more diversified economy
- ▶ Increase the number of artists hired by funded organizations by 25%
- ▶ Increase the annual value-added or GDP impact of funded organizations by 15.3%

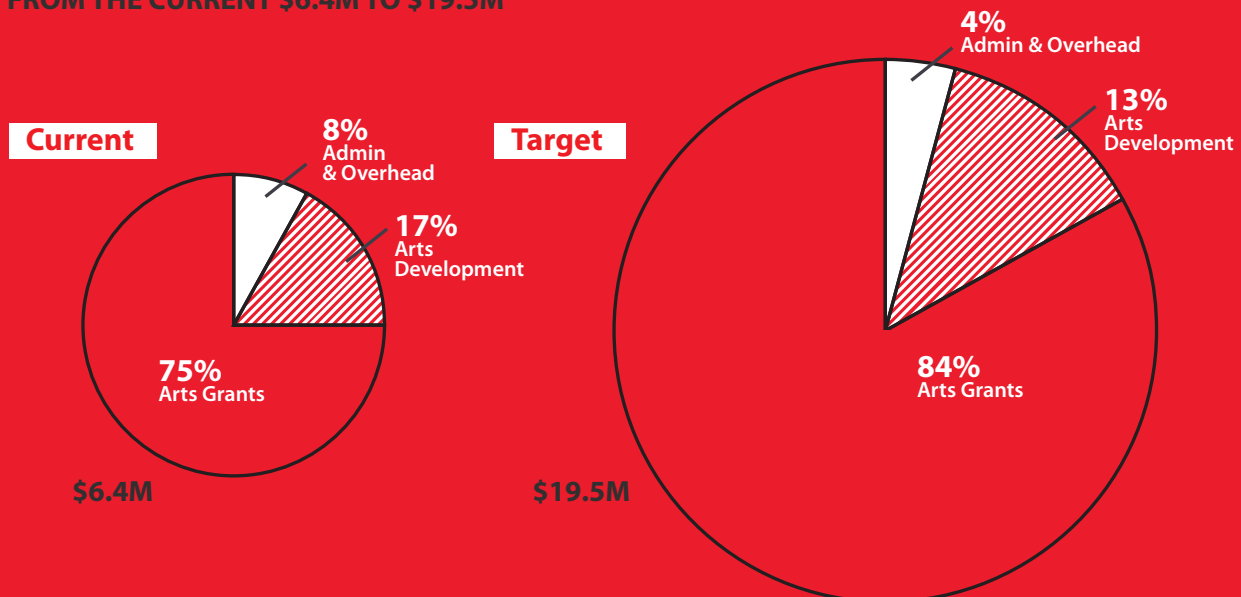
## SOCIAL IMPACT

- ◆ More arts experiences are available to Calgarians and visitors in all corners of the city
- ◆ The arts provide ways to celebrate our diversity advantage, participate in civic life, and create a sense of belonging
- ◆ The arts contribute to Reconciliation efforts
- ◆ The arts build bridges, increase understanding, empathy and resilience
- ▶ Increase the number of arts events and programs by funded organizations by 16%
- ▶ Increase the number of people attending and participating by 23%
- ▶ The arts better reflect YYC demographics

## YOUTH IMPACT

- ◆ Calgary's youth have more ways to participate in the arts
- ◆ The arts benefit youth academically, socially, personally, and creatively
- ◆ Youth become more engaged citizens
- ▶ Increase number of youth participating by 60%

**WE ARE SEEKING A TRANSFORMATIONAL INCREASE TO MUNICIPAL ARTS FUNDING IN CALGARY FROM THE CURRENT \$6.4M TO \$19.5M**





**92%**

of Calgarians engage with the arts in some way, either through arts attendance, arts creation or through media<sup>1</sup>

**80%**

of Calgarians believe that support for arts and culture including festivals is somewhat or very important<sup>4</sup>

**86%**

believe the arts bring people together and enable people to connect to each other<sup>2</sup>

**79%**

believe that a strong arts and culture scene is key to creating a vibrant, safe and prosperous city<sup>3</sup>

# Calgarians Value the Arts

Even the littlest audience members get in on the fun at the Calgary Folk Fest | Photo: Mike Tan

1. 2016 Calgarian Engagement Survey; 2. Ditto; 3. Ditto; 4. Citizen Satisfaction Survey

# Economic Impact

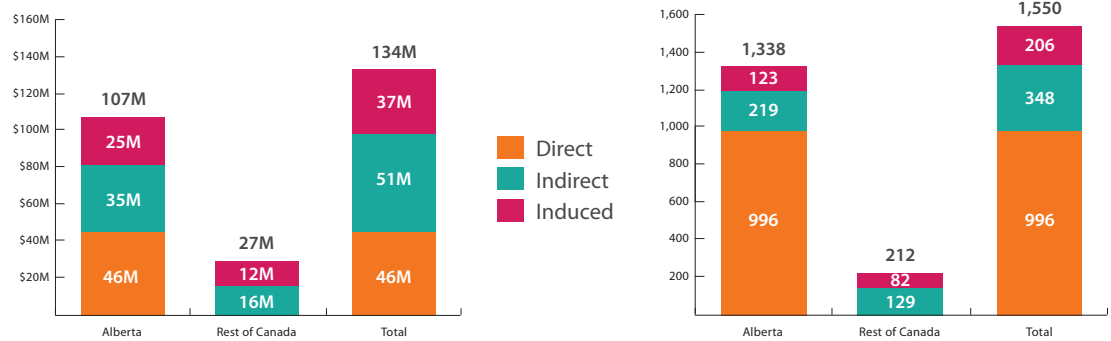
## Value-Added GDP<sup>1</sup>

The collective impact of not-for-profit arts organizations receiving funds from Calgary Arts Development provided an estimated \$134M in value-added GDP impacts to Canada from annual operating expenditures, with \$107 million annually of GDP impact to Alberta alone predominantly in the Calgary region. This is sustained, ongoing, year over year impact.

The sector also generated an estimated 1,550 full-time jobs, including close to 1,000 direct full-time equivalents.

### Economic Impacts of Arts Operations in Calgary

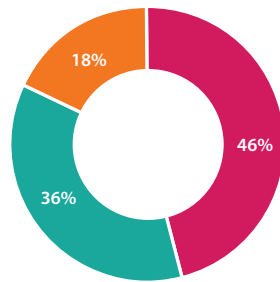
(2016/17, millions of \$, full-time equivalents (FTEs), rounded)



### Economic Impacts of Arts Operations in Terms of Government Revenues

(Direct & Indirect Impacts Only)  
(2016/17, millions of \$, rounded)

- Municipal Revenue (\$3M)
- Provincial Revenue (\$6M)
- Federal Revenue (\$7.7M)



### Government Revenues from Calgary Arts Development funded Not-for-profit Arts Sector<sup>1</sup>

Significant taxes/revenues go to government from ongoing operational expenditures, with direct and indirect impacts on government revenue estimated at \$16.6 million, with \$3 million generated for municipal government.

## Attracting & Retaining Businesses & Knowledge Workers

**64%** of businesses agree that a thriving arts cultural scene is something that makes it/would make it easier to attract **top talent** to their community.<sup>2</sup>

**2/3** of skilled workers agree that a thriving arts and cultural scene is something they look for when considering **moving to a new community**.<sup>2</sup>

Skilled workers are **4x** more likely to look at the local arts and culture scene before **considering moving** to a new community.<sup>3</sup>

## Cultural Tourism

Recreation and entertainment accounted for

**\$120,925,470**

in **visitor spending** in Calgary in 2014.<sup>4</sup>

Tourism Calgary's destination strategy framework includes a recommendation to attract, develop, promote and activate events year-round.<sup>5</sup>

Recent research indicates that Calgary's overall urban culture is not perceived as a competitive strength for the destination. This is an indicator that Calgary's overall vibrancy and energy could be increased with the successful implementation of the destination strategy.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Calgary Arts Development. "Economic impact assessment of the annual operations of Calgary arts organizations." 2018. <sup>2</sup> Business for the Arts. "Comparison of skilled workers and businesses." 2016. <sup>3</sup> Business for the Arts. "Skilled workers' impressions of the arts." 2016. <sup>4</sup> Tourism Calgary. "Visitor spending by sector." 2014, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7eh45N-VCodYUJBZ2c5QXNtNDg/view>. <sup>5</sup> Tourism Calgary. "Calgary: Ultimate hosts, ultimate host city. Destination strategy." 2018, <https://files.acrobat.com/a/preview/059d9cc2-7804-4ae6-95fc-0507a78d3210>. <sup>6</sup> Tourism Calgary. "Brand evolution project: results and recommendations." 2017.



**“We can be an innovative arts centre, which will not only help diversify the economy, but will attract and retain the kind of talent this city needs if it actually wants to become the kind of city it aspires to be.”**

- Irfhan Rawji, Calgary resident, co-founder, Creative Calgary

## Arts Mean Business

In 2013, Irfhan Rawji and his wife Christine Armstrong were chewing over the idea of relocating from Toronto to Calgary, where he'd been offered a job.

They were both business-savvy arts lovers. Christine studied business in college, but ended up touring as an actor in a Montreal theatre company, performing children's theatre all over North America before taking over managing a small theatre back in Montreal.

“I just always loved the arts,” Christine says, whether that meant playing in a rock band, acting, managing a theatre company, working in arts administration, with Business for the Arts, or sitting on the board of the National Arts Centre Foundation.

“I've been involved in a lot of different capacities—which is nice, because I feel like I understand them from so many different angles.”

Meanwhile, when Harvard Business School graduate Rawji wasn't scouring the planet for investment opportunities in his day job working in private equity, he served as a board member at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre and as part of Business for the Arts.

One of the tripwires that nearly scuttled the whole plan came over several trips the couple took to the city prior to relocating.

“We came here three weekends in a row,” he says. “I said, let's go see where the public art gallery is.

“And we got here,” he says. “And there wasn't frankly, an art gallery of the magnitude expected in a city of this size.

“The Glenbow was the closest thing.”

The duo decided to take the plunge anyway.

## Creative Calgary

Now, five years later, Rawji is the Vice Chair and incoming Board Chair at Glenbow, while Armstrong sits on the board of the National Arts Centre Foundation.

Together, they were two of the catalysts behind Creative Calgary, which advocates for the city's arts and culture sector.

Rawji ran the data on the role the arts play in Calgary's economic life and discovered there is just as much industry to the creative industries as there is creativity.

“I've never been artistically talented,” he says. “My father was a visual artist, but like many he couldn't make a living as an artist, but that was his passion.

“He was a car mechanic in Vancouver. Like most visual artists, he used his hands—and so I think there's something in there, genetically for me, that at least inspires me to be engaged in advocating for the arts.”

There's no dividing Rawji's interests into personal and business, either.

In his view, the key to any city thriving in the digital era is to be one of those places where cream of the labour crop wants to live—including the types of highly-trained, high-income earning millennials who work for the sort of tech companies the city hopes to attract to relocate here.

“What we actually have to do as a city, if we want to be prosperous, is we have to keep and attract the very best and most productive labour.”

Scouring the continent, Rawji sees a pattern of comparables that the most tech-friendly cities—such as San Francisco, Boston and Austin—all have in common: a great university, great infrastructure, and well above average cultural life.

“If you have a cool city, a city with a great vibe, people stay after post-secondary is done—so now you've actually got the best talent to relocate to your market.”

Christine references a recent study about the most appealing Canadian cities for young people, in which Calgary finished sixth.

“They measured three categories,” Armstrong says. “One was employment, one was walkability/public transit, and the third was arts and culture.

“They (young people) want jobs,” she says. “They want to be able to get around—and they want culture.”

## There's industry in the creative industries

Over 50,000 Calgarians are employed in creative industries, and over 4,000 students graduate each year from the city's four major schools with degrees in creative-related fields—in addition to the steady stream of creatives relocating here from places like Vancouver and Toronto, as artists increasingly find themselves priced out of those cities.

Then there's this: Arts Commons, with five venues, often hosting cultural events in each of them, every weekend from September through late spring, draws thousands of Calgarians to support small business in downtown Calgary, at a time when downtown Calgary is reeling from the recession.

If there's a need to find new ways to invest in downtown Calgary's economic life, there's little doubt that one of downtown's more enduring, reliable economic engines is the arts and culture sector.

## Not an expense – an investment

As for Creative Calgary—Rawji borrowed the structure from the Super PACs (Political Action Committees) in the U.S.—the hope is to sell city council on the need to make a significant increase in investment in the city's arts and culture sector, which receives about half (\$6.54 per capita) of what Edmonton (\$13.54) spends on its arts and culture sector. Vancouver spends \$19.36!

“When people think about culture, or infrastructure, they think of it as an expense” he says. “I don't think of it that way. I think of it as an investment—and if it pays out, positively, why would you do as little of that as possible?

“Why wouldn't you do as much of that as possible?”

“You have to animate your city,” Rawji says, “and now that he and Armstrong have settled in and bought a house, they're doing everything in their power to make sure their two young children have the opportunity to be exposed to great art and perhaps even a career in the arts that Rawji's father may not have had.

“We're hoping,” he says, “that through all these things that we can do our part to make this a city that our son and daughter can grow up in and feel like it was the best city on the planet to be raised in.”

# Social Impact

The arts have the power to build a greater sense of belonging. From healthier and more meaningful lives; safer, more resilient and more inclusive communities; flourishing culture and identity; and greater community participation a strong sense of belonging has an extraordinary capacity to transform our lives and our communities.<sup>1</sup>

**77%** of Canadians agree or strongly agree that arts and heritage experiences help them feel **part of their local community.**<sup>1</sup>

**86%** of Calgarians agree or strongly agree that arts bring people together and **enable people to connect.**<sup>2</sup>

Canadians who rate arts, culture and leisure in their city or town as “excellent” are **2.8x** more likely to report a “very strong” **sense of belonging**, compared to those who rate arts as “poor.”<sup>1</sup>

## The Arts and Inclusion & Belonging

The Institute for Canadian Citizenship offers a Cultural Access Pass to all new Canadians during their first year of citizenship. A 2016 survey found that the majority of pass users felt “welcomed, special and included in Canada.” One in four said the Cultural Access Pass inspired them to get more involved in their community.<sup>1</sup>

The 2018 Culture Track study discovered that Indigenous peoples and people of colour are nearly 2X more likely to say they did not participate in cultural activities in the past year because the activities didn’t “reflect people of all backgrounds.”<sup>3</sup>

This is a strong indication that increased diversity and inclusion in Calgary’s arts sector is fundamental to contributing to feelings of belonging for all Calgarians.

## The Arts Contribute to a Creative Community

Organizations supported by Calgary Arts Development create community. For example, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra musicians have extremely varied networks that include **99 other institutions, professional arts organizations, community groups, non-arts organizations, and 293 music students.**

This means that municipal investment in the CPO extends well beyond the organization, creating ripple effects throughout the arts ecosystem and beyond (fig.1). The red nodes represent CPO musicians. The teal nodes represent organizations that receive municipal investment through Calgary Arts Development. The network in grey shows how the City’s investment has impact and reach beyond those organizations receiving funding.

If the CPO were to shut down tomorrow, only 30% of this community network would remain, with the majority being lost as CPO members leave Calgary to pursue musical opportunities in other cities (fig.2). The grey nodes highlight the connections that would be lost and the teal network showcases the connections and communities that would remain.

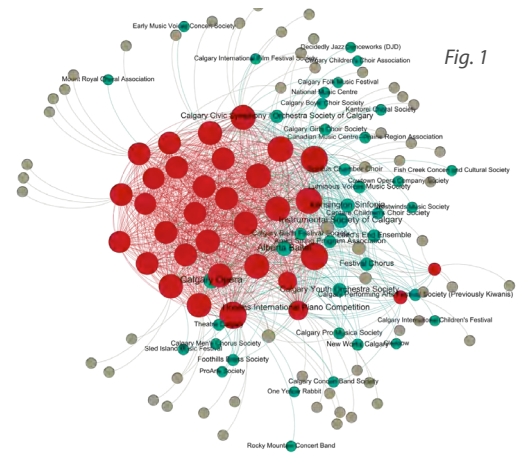


Fig. 1

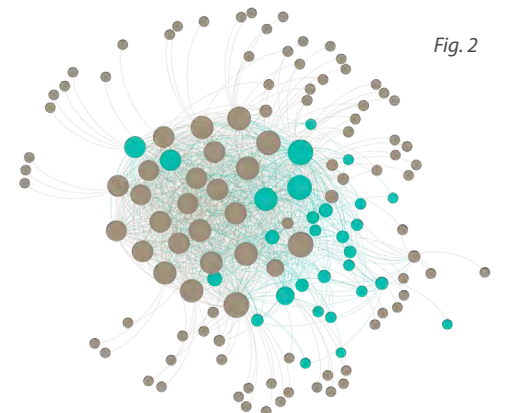


Fig. 2

<sup>1</sup> Community Foundations of Canada. “Vital Signs Arts & Belonging.” <http://communityfoundations.ca/artsandbelonging/>.

<sup>2</sup> Calgary Arts Development. “Calgarian Engagement Survey.” 2016, <https://calgaryartsdevelopment.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Calgarian-Engagement-Survey-2016.pdf>. <sup>3</sup> Business for the Arts. “Culture Track Canada.” 2018, <http://www.businessforthearts.org/culturetrack/assets/reports/CT%20Canada%20Report.pdf>.

# Our Canada, Our Story

By Stephen Hunt

How do you grow a community out of a whole world full of different ones?

That's a question that popped up frequently in the offices of Marichu Antonio, the Executive Director of Action Dignity—formerly the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary—an organization dedicated to working with culturally diverse communities from every corner of the planet to negotiate what was often an unwelcoming, challenging and highly racialized Canada. Many of these communities have made Canada their home for more than a century. In Calgary, that meant working with more than 70 different cultural communities.

Antonio, a political activist who immigrated to Canada from the Philippines in the mid-1990s, was one of the founders of Action Dignity, at a time when there was little open discussion of racism faced by newcomers and racialized Canadians—and even fewer resources to help combat it.

"Racism was not openly talked about except by ethno-cultural people," she says. "Even the various anti-racism organizations were marginalized."



## We do 'systems change work'

The impetus behind the creation of Action Dignity was to bring all those disparate communities together in order to help build a community of communities, that could speak to the needs of newcomers and racialized Canadians—because if they didn't find a way to do it as a group, they would be forced to do it as a thousand splintered individuals, each being forced to navigate languages, cultural norms and a vast, often mystifying myriad of public agencies and institutions in order to be included.

In other words, if one superhero can have a little bit of impact on the system, imagine a community organization filled with Avengers!

"We're not like all the other immigrant serving agencies," Antonio says. "We don't do direct individual service. We're doing what we call 'systems change work'."

"We want to look at public awareness, public perception, the way policies are made, the historical roots of the problems and the issues—we do a lot of research, leadership training and we really want a unified voice for these ethno-cultural communities to talk about big picture change."

**"We want to look at public awareness, public perception, the way policies are made, the historical roots of the problems and the issues—we do a lot of research, leadership training and we really want a unified voice for these ethno-cultural communities to talk about big picture change."**

## Celebrating 15 years

15 years later, the organization was succeeding in its own way—in the same year Canada was throwing itself a sesquicentennial party.

"We're celebrating 15 years," Antonio says, "and we thought, what could be a more meaningful way to celebrate 15 years than to put on a show?"

She also had a sneaking feeling that some of that big picture change her organization sought to make might be achieved through art, aside from its usual way of spreading its message.

The thought was that maybe by telling a lot of different cultural stories, what would emerge was one, beautiful—and occasionally painful—big picture vision of Canada's origin story.

"There are different ways of educating people or talking about people's perceptions or talking about how welcoming or unwelcoming Canada is," Antonio says, "but the power of stories of arts or culture—especially if the actors have the lived experience—you cannot question the message that's being relayed to the audience."

Then, they decided, the show would honour the Indigenous experience as well.

"We said, if we're celebrating Canada 150, we have to start from the time—thousands of years—before the colonizers came," she says.

## Arts Commons

That impulse became a reality when Antonio connected with Arts Commons President and CEO Johann Zietsman, who offered her the use of Jack Singer Concert Hall for a weekend.

The plan was to incorporate cultural performance with a narrative exploring the Indigenous experience and also the struggles of newcomers such as Chinese, Syrian, African, Filipino, Vietnamese and Ukrainian trying to find a place in their new country.

It worked. Our Canada, Our Story told stories—through a combination of song, spoken word, theatre, dance, and multimedia presentation—that were real, in a way that revealed universal experiences.

Even though some of the stories were dark, there was an undercurrent of possibility, of humour and humanity to the entire experience.

"Some teachers were there," Antonio says. "There were two who said, that's a good history class for our kids! Why don't you approach our principal and then we'll include it in our curriculum?"

## Taking the show into schools

Antonio now has a new task—namely, connecting with the city's theatre community to see if there's a way to shrink down Action Dignity's big, pageant-sized two-hour-long Jack Singer holiday special to a size that can travel lightly (and less expensively) to schools to be performed for children of newcomers, so that they might see and hear themselves and their stories reflected on a stage.

"Even Caucasian families said they were not antagonized by the way the history of racism was portrayed," she adds. "Because sometimes, when you talk about racism, you make people feel defensive—but not this one. They didn't feel that way. They said it promotes more empathy, rather than defensiveness, or hate—because if you talk about racism, sometimes you highlight hate—but this presentation promotes more empathy, reconciliation, change, and forgiveness."

"It's transforming people," she says.



# Youth Impact

Across all ages, research is showing a positive relationship between arts integration and student achievement—both academic and social.

## Pre-Kindergarten

Music education creates positive effects on:

**Creativity<sup>1</sup>**

**Spatial-temporal abilities<sup>2</sup>**

**IQ scores<sup>3</sup>**

**Reading & language<sup>4</sup>**

## Elementary School

Students in arts-integrated programs scored as being<sup>5</sup>:

**More creative**

**More engaged**

**More effective at problem solving**

## Junior/Senior High

Students participating in year-long arts programs show increases in<sup>6</sup>:

**Intellectual Engagement**

**Ethical Mindset**

**Entrepreneurial Spirit**



## The Arts & Cognitive Development

Music education has been linked to “verbal memory, second language pronunciation accuracy, reading ability, and executive functions” in students.<sup>7</sup> Music training and sports programs have both shown cognitive development benefits, though instrumental music training appeared to be unique in terms of long-term effects.<sup>8</sup>

## The Arts & At-Risk Youth

In a series of longitudinal studies students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with deep arts engagement were found to have improved academic and civic behaviors including higher school grades, higher test scores on standardized tests, higher rates of honors society membership, higher rates of volunteering, and higher engagement in school or local politics.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Duncan, D.J. “The relationship between creativity and the Kindermusik experience.” Unpublished Master of Science thesis, 2007. <sup>2</sup> Gromko, J.E., and A.S. Poorman.

“The effect of music training on preschoolers’ spatial-temporal task performance.” *Journal of Research in Music Education*, vol. 46, no. 2, 1998, pp. 173-181.

<sup>3</sup> Kaviana, H., et al. “Can music lessons increase the performance of preschool children in IQ tests?” *Cognitive Processing*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2014, pp. 77-84.

<sup>4</sup> Myant, M., et al. “Can music make a difference? A small scale longitudinal study into the effects of music instruction in nursery on later reading ability.” *Educational and Child Psychology*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2008, pp. 83. <sup>5</sup> O’Neal, C. “Selected findings from the John F. Kennedy Center’s arts in education research study: An impact

evaluation of arts-integrated instruction through the Changing Education Through the Arts (CETA) program.” *The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts*, 2014, [http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/~media/ArtsEdge/LessonPrintables/articles/arts-integration/KC-AE-Selected\\_Findings\\_CETA\\_v18.pdf](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/~media/ArtsEdge/LessonPrintables/articles/arts-integration/KC-AE-Selected_Findings_CETA_v18.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Martin, B.M. and A. Calvert. “Socially empowered learning in the Classroom: Effects of arts integration and social enterprise in schools.” *The Journal of Teaching and Learning*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2018, pp. 27-42. <sup>7</sup> Green, C. and D. Bavelier. “Exercising your brain: a review of human brain plasticity and training-induced

learning.” *Psychology of Aging*, vol. 23, 2008, doi: 10.1037/a0014345. <sup>8</sup> Young, L.N., et al. “Arts involvement predicts academic achievement only when the child has a musical instrument.” *Educational Psychology*, 2013, doi: 10.1080/01443410.2013.785477. <sup>9</sup> Catterall, J.S., et al. “The arts and achievement in at-risk youth: Findings

from four longitudinal studies.” *National Endowment for the Arts*, 2012, [www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Arts-At-Risk-Youth.pdf](http://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Arts-At-Risk-Youth.pdf).

**For youth moving into the city, transitioning from reserve to urban setting, we have a mentorship program to help form a support system, because there's a lot of things you don't know when you move to a completely new environment.**

- Canada Bridges Program Manager, Ike Kenzo

## Canada Bridges

By Stephen Hunt

Sandis Twoyoungmen discovered Canada Bridges when he was 16, living on the Stoney Nakoda First Nation in Morley with his family.

"Canada Bridges came by one day with two team members," he says, "and they were doing youth programs every Tuesday. They'd come by after school and do some sports or something— anything to keep you from getting into something bad."

He learned about a yearly event in Calgary called A Youth Explosion (AYE).

It was a combination of storytelling, sharing and performance, that they presented every year at various venues—the 2018 event being at the Big Secret Theatre in Calgary's Arts Commons, the hub of the city's performing arts scene.

Sandis, it turned out, came from a family of musicians.

"On my father's side, everyone you talk with either plays an instrument or they sing," he says.

"I saw my uncles playing guitar all the time, and I liked the sound of how they played.

My dad played the drums, my uncle played the bass, and my other uncle sang—it looked like fun, and something that I wanted to do."

Sandis started playing a little guitar himself.

"A year later—Canada Bridges asked if I wanted to present at AYE," he says.

That meant a few things—storytelling, choosing what songs he wanted to sing, and perhaps the biggest thing of all: leaving Morley to go to Calgary.

"When you grow up on a reservation, Calgary's like another world," he says.

"I didn't think about Cochrane or Canmore either—or anything beyond that," he adds. "Just more like—what's going on in Morley today?"

Sometimes, that included shooting horror films with the Nakoda A.V. Club, a film collective that has sprung up over the past decade in Morley. Twoyoungmen was also a part of that.

Twoyoungmen said yes to presenting at AYE.

Things haven't been the same ever since.

"It was the kick start to my life," he says.

"I presented my story of life on the rez growing up."

And what he discovered was that sharing his story could transform a big city full of strangers into a community.

"After I was finished, people came up to me and started giving me some feedback, and it was just this eyeopener.

"Like I didn't know about—myself," he says. "I realized what I could do with who I am."

The twist? Now that he's found out a little better who he is, his goal is to one day go back to Morley.

## From mentorship to support system

Canada Bridges Program Manager Ike Kenzo says the program worked the way they hoped it would for Sandis Twoyoungmen—who, since that debut three years ago at AYE, is upgrading academically at Mt. Royal University, where he hopes to eventually study accounting.

"For youth moving into the city, transitioning from reserve to urban setting, we have a mentorship program to help form a support system," he says, "because there's a lot of things you don't know when you move to a completely new environment."

Kenzo was stunned to discover the cultural differences between life on the reserve and life in the city.

"I didn't appreciate at first how different it actually is, culturally" Kenzo says.



## Youth Empowerment

Canada Bridges was founded in 2002 by former Nexen executive Donna Kennedy-Glans as a program in Yemen, India and Oman.

The Yemeni government invited Kennedy-Glans, whom they knew from her oil and gas background, to help train Yemeni women in professional services. The location changed over the years, but the mandate was always to find ways to empower people in order to give them the tools to help inspire and transform their communities—but only if invited to do so.

"The key to it has always been that somebody asks for this training and then we sit down with them, with our values very explicit, and their priorities very explicit," says Kennedy-Glans, "and we build it together. But it's always an invitation. That's why it works."

Years later, Kennedy-Glans received an invitation from right here in Calgary and found herself back home in 2009 developing and piloting the Unveiling Youth Potential program, first with Yemeni youth and then branching off to other cultural communities. Currently, the organization is focused on Unveiling Human Potential in youth and young adults with a focus on youth empowerment including the performance / storytelling event AYE.

## Claiming leadership space

Twoyoungmen says, "I want to get my degree in accounting and go back to my reserve and help the band to budget properly and get what they need."

For Kennedy-Glans, hearing about how a young man's plans to transform his reserve—and himself—involve studying accounting at Mount Royal, in between performing a musical storytelling showcase at the Big Secret theatre, makes perfect sense.

"I think it's claiming leadership space more than anything else," Kennedy-Glans says. "Sometimes you actually have to go someplace that's neutral and say you know what? I feel like I am a leader in this community and it's really important to me and this is what I'm willing to do about it.

"It's that as a person, you acknowledge that you want something different in your community—and you're willing to do something about it."