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**ANNUAL REPORT**



## Message From Founder

Dear OWTA supporters,

During the last 12 months, we went from adapting to new circumstances to thriving, using virtual platforms. Although the bulk of our programming was online, we still had the opportunity to see the beautiful smiling faces of our participants in a handful of in-person workshops. From songwriting workshops to Sing-a-Longs, spoken word poetry to visual arts workshops, the arts have never been more important for the well-being of our youth and our community. For many years, our most popular program hands down has been our Black History Month School Tour. Initially, we were worried that schools would not be interested in virtual presentations. However, to our surprise, the transition to virtual presentations was a blessing in disguise and saw us go from approximately 50 in-person presentations in 2020, to over 150 virtual presentations in 2021.



The response was so positive that schools wanted to know if we had other presentations to offer. We specifically received a lot of positive feedback from the Lester B. Pearson School Board who then hired us to create a new presentation to tackle the often uncomfortable subject of racism. With this in mind, we created “Unpacking the N-Word” to educate high school students and staff about the origins of the N-Word and the implications of using it. The presentation was well received and important, and long overdue conversations were had. These conversations even sparked the idea of creating a new presentation called “P is for Privilege”, which is an anti-bullying presentation for elementary school students that encourages them to recognize and understand their own privilege.

2021 also saw another Covid-friendly Winter Wonderland gift distribution where we gifted toys, books, food baskets, etc. to families who needed a helping hand during the holiday season. We mobilized dozens of volunteers to sort, wrap, and deliver the gifts to families in the West Island. A few lucky families even received their gifts from Santa Claus himself, (aka a wonderful volunteer dressed in an adorable Santa suit). After almost two years of hosting virtual activities, we’re all Zoomed out! We’re so grateful that we were able to continue to offer workshops virtually, but we are all very much looking forward to seeing all of our participants in person again in 2022. Thank you to all of our incredible staff, board members, volunteers, supporters, and funders for making 2021 another amazing and memorable year!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Akilah Newton".

**Akilah Newton**  
Founder & President



## Mission

Overture with the Arts (OWTA) is a non-profit organization based in the West Island, offering education in music, dance, drama and vocal training. Our free and low-cost programs enable young people to pursue their passion in the performing arts when they wouldn't otherwise have the financial means to do so.

## Vision

OWTA encourages youth to express themselves creatively and use the arts as a tool to empower their artistic inspirations and communicate in the areas of social justice.

## Values

Professionalism • Youth •  
Community • Diversity • Respect

## Board of Directors

- President: Agnes Katsouros
- Vice President: Tina Wentzell
- Treasurer: Diane Bates
- Secretary: Alessia DiGiorgio
- Director: Kelvin Newton
- Director: Danielle Leggett
- Director: Allison Saunders
- Director: Erika Rath

## Programs

To carry out our goal of engaging youth, OWTA runs several programs throughout the year. The programs are diverse in nature, including music, dance and radio broadcasts. Additionally, we focus on building partnerships with local organizations. This allows us to create a strong network of committed volunteers, partners and participants who continue to benefit from our activities.

### Tracking Black Canada Part 2

For the 11th consecutive year we provided schools with an edutainment (education and entertainment) presentation in celebration of Black History Month. The 2021 presentation focused on the often forgotten histories of early Black communities across our country. We provided virtual presentations to schools in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, and delivered over 150 presentations.

### Unpacking The N-Word

"Unpacking the N-Word" is a new Anti-Racism presentation for High School students, staff and administration. In light of the global uprising in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, OWTA has created a presentation to help students and educators address the often uncomfortable, but necessary topic of racism. These conversations are so important to have, as racism is still very prevalent in Canada today. The virtual presentation explores the origins and evolution of the N-Word. Through an edutainment style that combines slam poetry, video content, audience participation and interaction, participants will learn to put one of the most loaded words in the English language into proper historical context.

## Programs

### P Is For Privilege

"P is for Privilege" is a new Anti-Bullying presentation for High School students that encourages students to recognize and understand their own privilege. By defining what privilege, unconscious bias, racism and intersectionality means, students will better understand the challenges that marginalized groups face. Using OWTA's trademark edutainment style that combines video, slam poetry, and audience participation and interaction, students will learn how to be allies and feel empowered to speak out against injustices.

### Virtual Songwriting Workshops

Participants had the opportunity to work directly with a music industry professional to learn how to write a song. Following the completion of the songwriting sessions, participants had the incredible opportunity to record their original song at a recording studio.

### Sing-A-Longs

In November and December, we hosted a free Sing-A-Long at the Pierrefonds Library. Children sang along to their favourite songs with OWTA's former program participant, now employee, Christina Koikaran.

## Events

### 10th Annual Winter Wonderland Brunch

On Sunday, December 12th, we gifted 35 West Island families in need to food baskets, fruit & vegetable baskets, books, toys, brand new shoes and more. Our incredible board members and over a dozen volunteers delivered gifts to each family in person while respecting Covid protocols. The event was sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Lakeshore Montreal Foundation.

### Unpacking The N-Word

Due to the popularity of our new "Unpacking the N-Word" Anti-Racism presentation, we hosted a virtual event open to the community and raised over \$6,000.

# Impact

Through various fundraising activities OWTA cultivated new donors, reached new supporters and raised some much needed funds. As a result of this we were able to continue running our regular programs and introduced a new program.



## Support and Networking - Members And Partners

- Riverdale High School Community Learning Centre
- Pearson Educational Foundation

- Canadian Red Cross
- Lester B. Pearson School Board
- Baylis Medical
- City of Pointe-Claire
- Di Giorgio Family Foundation

## Supporters

- The City of Pierrefonds-Roxboro
- Sameer Zuberi, MP for Pierrefonds/Dollard-des-Ormeaux
- Francis Scarpaleggia, MP for Lac-Saint-Louis
- The Department of Canadian Heritage
- Kiwanis Club of Lakeshore Montreal Foundation
- Monsef Derraji - MNA, Nelligan
- Carlos Leitão - MNA, Robert-Baldwin
- Geoffrey Kelley/Greg Kelley - MNA, Jacques Cartier

## 2022 Objectives

- Increase funding by 25%
- Hire an additional full time employee



## **We Need Your Help!**

While we receive some government support, we depend on the generosity of individuals and corporations to continue to run our programs. We are a non-profit organization supported primarily by donations. To keep running programs, we need your help. We kindly ask you to consider donating to OWTA. No amount is too small.

## **Volunteer**

Not everyone can make a financial contribution, but there are other ways that you can help OWTA. We are grateful for any involvement as it helps us to achieve our goal of providing free and low cost arts workshops to our community's youth. Please contact us if you would like to volunteer for OWTA, plan a fundraiser event, etc.





## Thank You!

To all our partners, board members, sponsors and volunteers for your continued support. Every year we will reach new heights with the energy, passion, and the commitment to change the lives of youth through art.

## Contact Information

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