

## ALAS Dufferin realizes the true value of art

By Constance Scrafield

At the Orangeville Public Library's Mill Street branch this past weekend, performers with ALAS (Active Lives After School) presented a dance and drama showcase.

"We had two drama and a few dance routines," said Kim Van Ryn, Program Manager for ALAS. "The dance was by eight participants, who have been working for about seven months with Jenee Gowing, to learn their dance pieces. There were some solos and some group dances. They did that with their staff who have been working with them."

She told us, "There was no theme; Jenee works really well with each of them to figure out what suits the individual."

ALAS is not generally a performance-oriented program. She said the showcase happened because "I feel like our groups work really hard to learn their dancing. Just with our program, we had 15 people there who came to see the show: their friends form the group, parents. Three representatives from the Ontario Brain Institute were there today."

The Ontario Brain Institute has recently given ALAS a grant and the three representatives were attending to see the programs in action.

"They also went to the three volunteer sites," Ms. Van Ryn explained, "the library, Orangeville Food Bank and the Food Bank Garden, where our own people are showing Active Lives, Active Giving (so ALAG) " that program is what we received money for. And so we could teach other people how to do the kind of work that we're doing."

Dance is another way of keeping fit and creative.

"That and the drama program," she continued to say. "We have partnered with Theatre Orangeville. Some of them were with Theatre Orangeville Exceptional Players (TOEP) but they've grown up and are adults. Now there's an adult TOEP with Community Living Dufferin (CLD) and Theatre Orangeville.

"Chandra Pepper is their director. She knows many of the participants from doing earlier work with Theatre Orangeville and my staff."

At the presentation this past Saturday, "They actually showcased some of the Improv, some of their Improv skills. That's really about communication, thinking on your feet; it was funny too " made us laugh."

The dance and drama is one of the programs of ALAS: "We have a group drama once a week September to June, then, we take a break over the summer. It's a core group that do those activities once a week. They pay per day to be here. For the activities fees, we do fund raising, which is going very well. We're growing; we're serving 25 local families. We've increased since I was here and we're growing even though there's a funding crisis. Our staff is growing because we need more staff to help with the people. The funding from OBI is adding a whole new level."

Because the dance and drama are not about performance, "for us, it is mainly for its own sake. It's part of all the daily sets that we do. After all, we're not a theatre company. It's not results orientated; it's not skill-based. We can take as much time as we like to get it all together. It's just for the sake of it."

Drama, dance, what about hands on art, painting ....

"So, we have an artist on staff. She's studied art at university. She's doing actual technique; they do their art with Brook at least twice

a month. Everybody does that.

?We have one person who is super into photography, who has an amazing camera.

?The other thing that we do here is we do quite a lot of sensory things with them, making crafts that have a real sensory side to them. So, people on the autism spectrum make things that have sensory appeal. They do well with activities that are easier for your body to engage with ? sand ? paints that have essential oils, so that they have a smell ? painting with their hands.?

Ms. Van Ryn is a ?very hands on administrator. Eighty per cent of my work is management; twenty per cent is support work. What I want with ALAS is that it is just going to keep growing and be a part of this community, to help any individual that has developmental disability.

?All the programs that help this will shift and change. We're in a really great position - we have a fee for service and do all our own fund raising and we are really flexible because about what we do and we can change as our group changes or evolves to see what else, what different we can do.?

It is obvious to her: ?They are human the same way I am human. It is because I have the blessing of working with them all the time that I just see them as humans the way I do the rest of the world. That's why I want to do this ? indefinitely.?

She told the Citizen, ?Ninety percent of our clients still live with a family caregiver. We have created a place of belonging. Everybody wants that ? we all look for that. ?Wherever people go to find that, there's communication. Everybody in Orangeville has someplace to go. The food banks do that; Lighthouse does that.?

As for art: ?Art's important, it's an alternate outlet for communication. I think that you don't have to [create masterpieces]. It doesn't matter what your abilities are; it's a very inclusive activity. Some won't carry on a conversation with you but they can sing, carry a tune, stay on pitch, remember the words, even if they haven't spoken for years.?

Kim Van Ryn said, ?Everybody can make beautiful art and that ?s why we include so much of it into our programming. As a human, it doesn't matter what your brain looks like.?