



## 150 Rexdale Kids Take a Creative Stand Tonight as Leaders In Their Community

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Toronto, ON

As a city, besides providing our children with adequate food, shelter and safety, what can we do to close the opportunity gap for Toronto's kids and their families? How can we teach them to expect nothing but the best for and of themselves?

**Tonight, Thursday, March 5th, at 7pm, at North Albion Collegiate Institute (NACI), 150 kids from 17 Etobicoke schools will showcase their inner leadership as they sing, dance and act onstage. Everyone is welcome.** Tonight, you will see resilience and inner strength, as children creatively take a stand. Their voices will demand that the rest of us to reach their expectations of excellence. Families, TDSB teachers, principals and superintendents, politicians including Kirsty Duncan, and local police will cheer them on.

DAREarts is now directly combating the severe issues of gang violence, bullying and poverty facing the kids in the Rexdale area. It creates leaders from children who are at risk of not reaching their full potential.

Over 150 students from 15 schools from Northwest Etobicoke have attended the winter program as delegates from their school. They are then charged with the job of going back to their schools after each DAREarts Day and peer teaching their classmates what they have learned. Participating schools include Albion Heights J.M.S., Beaumonde Heights J.M.S., Broadacres J.S., Calico P.S., Claireville J.S., Elmbank J.M.S., Greenholme J.M.S., Gulfstream P.S., Hollycrest M.S., Melody Village J.S., Rivercrest J.S., Smithfield M.S., The Elms J.M.S., West Humber J.M.S. and Westmount J.S.

Schools selected up to two students from each grade who are most in need of the DAREarts opportunity to see a wider world and become leaders but are challenged for various reasons such as economic, academic and social difficulties. This is the first year in the program's history that it has served children in every grade from grades 4-8 in the Rexdale community.

DAREarts lead teacher, Laura MacKinnon, has taken the children to a number of arts venues across Toronto including the AGO, Ballet Jorgen and the Canadian Opera Company to expand their artistic horizons. She was joined by a number of accomplished Canadian artists including; Emmy-winning producer of 60 Minutes, Monika Jensen-Stevenson; Juno-nominated songwriter, Glenn Marais; Dora-winning actor, Jamie Robinson; the co-artistic director of Opera Atelier, Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg; and the first conductor of the Toronto Symphony, Victor Feldbrill. These visits were just the beginning of their experience. With the DARE values of Discipline, Action, Responsibility and Excellence, the children took up the challenge to become leaders who peer-teach their respective classes, bringing the power of the arts to several thousand more children.

DAREarts has been equipping DAREarts kids with the option to opt out of destructive behaviour and expectations of failure. Children and youth are daring themselves to succeed by accessing their passion for the arts through the programming that DAREarts provides. The kids create their own mandate for a prosperous future. *"I didn't know what prosperity meant until this afternoon."* Words from a grade five student, *"I am DAREarts because I made an effort to guess what it meant, and even though I was wrong, I learned to understand the importance of it."*

DAREarts kids and youth have described how they often are cornered by bullies, drug dealers and other threats between their schools and their front doors. They deserve to have the expectation of safety from their community. But until that can be achieved, they need the confidence to follow their own paths to success. These kids are going to stay in school. They're going to go on to secondary school. They're going to become leaders in their communities, and create a safe world for their own children.

#### Backgrounder:

DAREarts is a Canadian not-for-profit organization, which stands for "Discipline, Action, Respect, Responsibility and Excellence in Education". DAREarts' 5-year program works with 9-14 year olds from schools in high-priority neighbourhoods, empowering them to become leaders. Visit [www.darearts.com](http://www.darearts.com)

DAREarts thanks its lead supporters: Northbridge Insurance, Scotiabank, Guy Carpenter, the Ontario Arts Council and Ontario Trillium Foundation.

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For more information, please call:  
Marilyn Field, Founder & President  
o. 905-729-0097 m. 416-804-7066 [mfield@darearts.com](mailto:mfield@darearts.com)