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## MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

**FROM:** Pearl Schachter, Cultural Program Producer

**DATE:** July 19, 2023

**MEMO NO.:** BEC-2023-003

**SUBJECT:** Halton Hills Culture Days: 2022 Impacts and 2023 Preview

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### **PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:**

The purpose of this memorandum is to present Council with a report on Halton Hills Culture Days 2022, and a preview of Culture Days 2023.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Culture Days is an annual national celebration of arts and culture that aims to increase public awareness of, and participation in, arts and culture year-round. The Town has participated in Culture Days since 2016. Cultural Services took on the role of Community Coordinator for the celebrations in 2018.

Culture Days provides a unique event framework that:

- is inclusive – programming for all ages, skills, and levels of experience and reflective of diverse experiences;
- is accessible – free or by-donation activities delivered in a range of options including self-led, virtual and in-person at multiple indoor, and outdoor venues;
- builds community – provides opportunities for new collaborations and connections, and;
- supports local – encourages residents and visitors to engage with and discover new artists, cultural organizations, and creative businesses.

Since 2018, Town staff have supported activity organizers in Halton Hills to offer 350 Culture Days experiences to 13,950 participants in a range of disciplines including visual arts, music, dance and movement, theatre, heritage, literature and more.

Town support for activity organizers includes:

- free space at Town venues
- funding through The Artist Next Door (coincides with Culture Days) and Culture Days microgrants
- professional development in digital skills, social media, event planning, etc.
- participatory activity idea generation
- programming and logistical support
- technical expertise for virtual events
- networking and partnership opportunities
- marketing & communications assistance and materials
- on-site volunteer and staff support

Historically, Culture Days was a three-day in-person event. In response to COVID-19, it was expanded to a 4-week mostly digital event in 2020. Since 2021, Culture Days has transitioned to a 3-week hybrid format that incorporates in-person, DIY and digital events.

The resilience and adaptability of the local arts and culture community is clearly demonstrated in Culture Days participation data pre-, during and post-pandemic.

Year	Length of Event	Number of Activities	Participating Artists	Attendance
2019	3 Days	81	141	2,700 in-person
2020	4 Weeks	75	160	5,350+ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-person: 350</li> <li>• Digital programming views: 5,000+</li> </ul>
2021	3 Weeks	76	165	2,500 + <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-person: 1,300</li> <li>• Digital programming views: 1,200+</li> </ul>

The arts and culture sector found innovative ways to engage the community despite challenges caused by lockdowns and capacity limits. The number of activities offered, and artists engaged in Culture Days remained fairly consistent demonstrating the engagement of the cultural community. Public participation almost doubled during the lockdown period and returned to just below pre-pandemic numbers as in-personal events and capacity limits increased.

Cultural Services supported the arts and culture sector through these challenges with new funding programs and professional development opportunities for artists to effectively develop and deliver digital programming and marketing campaigns.

Halton Hills consistently ranked in the top 5 participating mid-size cities across Canada, and in the overall top 10 national Culture Days rankings, regardless of changes to activity delivery methods and festival format.

Halton Hills has also been recognized by Ontario Culture Days for its programming quality through the annual Ontario Culture Days Spotlight Awards. Since 2018, eight programs and artists have been acknowledged through this awards program as category winners or runners-up. Winners include:

- Best In-Person Program 2021 – Pauline Gladstone ‘On the Table’
- Best Exemplification of Theme 2019 – Nia
- Best Hub 2019 – Credit Valley Trail ‘First Steps along the Path’
- People’s Choice Award 2018 – KAIROS Blanket Exercise

## **COMMENTS:**

### **1. Culture Days 2022: Reporting and Impact\***

Halton Hills presented a diverse and impactful slate of activities for Culture Days 2022. The successful seventh consecutive year of Culture Days saw increased in-person programs alongside digital and DIY options to increase accessibility and engagement. Program highlights included:

- The Woman Who Fell from the Sky - Short Film and panel with the Aunties Dandelion (virtual)
- Steel Pan Performance and Workshop with Luckystickz
- Film screenings including Peace by Chocolate, Il pleuvait les oiseaux, and Healing the Scars of Colonialism
- Franco Ontarian Flag Day hosted by Le Coin Franco
- Blackout Poetry Grab and Go Kits assembled by the Halton Hills Public Library
- Open studios at the Williams Mill Creative Studios and Credit Valley Artisans Cottage

Halton Hills was designated an Ontario Culture Days Regional Hub for 2022 resulting in additional profile and funding and marketing support from the provincial organization.

2022 event accomplishments include:

- Robust engagement of the arts and culture sector: 120 artists presented 56 activities
- Support for artists and cultural groups: \$3,200 in funding provided
- Effective public engagement: 1,500+ participating residents and visitors
- Strong audience retention and attraction: 41% first-time participants and 94% of participants reported their intention to return for 2023
- Quality participatory programming: satisfaction levels for local in-person and digital programming exceeded 90%
- Positive community impacts: 84% of participants reported that attending Culture Days increased their pride in and care for Halton Hills

- Successful tourism attraction: 27% of participants travelled over 40 km to attend Culture Days activities
- Provincial support: Secured approximately \$6,000 in funding through ReConnect Ontario to support Culture Days programming, marketing and event staff
- National recognition: ranked 4th nationally amongst mid-sized cities in terms of number of programs

Additional reporting on Culture Days 2022 including photos, quotes and statistics is provided in Appendix 1.

\* Data from Culture Days, Ontario Culture Days, Halton Hills Culture Days and the 2022 Halton Hills Culture Days survey (conducted by Culture Days).

## **2. Sneak Peak: Culture Days 2023**

This year, Culture Days will take place from September 22 to October 15. The 2023 Halton Hills theme for Culture Days is “Fusion”- selected to inspire collaboration, new experiences, and creative partnerships.

### **2.1. Regional Hub & Partnership**

Halton Hills is part of the Ontario Culture Days Regional Hub program for the second year in a row. This year the hub has been expanded to include all communities in Halton Region.

As a participant in the Hub program, Halton Hills receives additional marketing and communications support including:

- a Halton Region landing page on the Ontario Culture Days website
- inclusion in Ontario Culture Days PR campaign and media pitches
- dedicated social media advertising to support regional programming efforts

To activate the Regional Hub, municipal organizers in Halton Hills, Burlington, Oakville, and Milton have partnered with Heritage Services and Regional Tourism Organization #3 – Hamilton, Halton and Brant (RTO3), to present a high-profile regional project. ‘A Place I Call Home Halton’, by well-established hybrid media artist Faisal Anwar. This participatory community art project will create a virtual archive of images representing ‘HOME’ to Halton residents and will culminate in the projection of a large-scale artwork in physical spaces across the region. The focus of Anwar’s work is connection. Anwar resides in Oakville and has an extensive network. ‘A Place I Call Home Halton’ will engage Anwar’s existing audience and invite wider participation from across Halton.

Virtual participation in ‘A Place I Call Home Halton’, is open to all leading up to and during Culture Days. In-person participation will take place in Halton Hills on Saturday, October 7 and on different days in each municipality. Residents can participate using

the hashtag #aplaceicallhomehalton and stay up to date with the project by following [@haltonartcultureheritage](https://www.instagram.com/haltonartcultureheritage) on Instagram.

## 2.2. Programming

Cultural Services is partnering across Town departments and with new and returning community activity organizers to increase programming accessibility, inclusion and diversity for the 2023 edition of Culture Days.

Confirmed highlights include:

- Theatre, dance, visual arts and music celebrating Indian Cultural Heritage led by Artist Next Door participants Rahul Kumar and Aditee Goswami
- Franco Ontarian Flag Day Celebrations by Le Coin Franco
- Singing workshop and performance with Cantando Women's Choir
- Plein Air Painting with the Helson Gallery and the Halton Hills Plein Air Painters
- Talent show at the John Elliott Theatre in partnership with Hillsvie Active Living Centres
- Live streaming of Credit Valley Artisans Life Drawing from the Helson Gallery
- School programming for K-3 (Helson Gallery), 4-8 (Heritage Services) and 9-12 ('A Place I Call Home Halton' by Faisal Anwar)
- Acton Arts Market at Prospect Park, hosted by the Acton BIA
- Musical performances by the Halton Hills Concert Band, Georgetown Folk Collective, and the Hillsvie Band
- Heritage Tours of Downtown Georgetown

Full details of the upcoming festival can be found at [haltonhills.ca/culturedays](https://haltonhills.ca/culturedays). This page is updated regularly as new activity information becomes available.

## 2.3. National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR) takes place during Culture Days. September 30 is set aside exclusively for events organized to commemorate the NDTR, including those aimed at sharing First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit experiences and perspectives, and uplifting the creative and cultural expressions of Indigenous people and communities. The Town encourages residents to explore and participate in Indigenous cultural and educational programs from across the country at [culturedays.ca](https://culturedays.ca)

Locally, the Halton Hills Public Library will host a free screening of "The Inconvenient Indian" at the John Elliott Theatre and present The Moccasin Identifier Project. Cultural Services will offer an interactive program and art installation throughout Culture Days, which will engage people to reflect on their personal learnings about and commitments to Truth and Reconciliation.

## 2.4. Support, Create & Participate 2023

There are many ways to get involved with Halton Hills Culture Days this year including:

- Be an activity organizer (host an arts-based or cultural activity for the public)
- Volunteer (support activities hosted by others)
- Provide a venue (host a Culture Days activity at your location)
- Participate in events (in-person, virtual and DIY activities offered by the Town, community groups, creative businesses, and individual artists)
- Sponsor a program, or series that aligns with your corporate values and/or focus market (e.g., children and youth, seniors, live music, visual arts, etc.)
- Promote upcoming activities and share your involvement through your networks and communication channels

## 2.5 Marketing

The Town coordinates a combined print and digital marketing strategy, leveraging existing channels and new networks to encourage participation in Culture Days and continue to reach new audiences. The 2023 campaign will include:

- Branded collateral (lawn signs, banners, rack cards, postcards)
- Print media (newsletters, newspapers, magazine event listings)
- Digital screens and marquees at Town venues
- Webpage content on [haltonhills.ca](http://haltonhills.ca), [visithaltonhills.ca](http://visithaltonhills.ca), and [culturedays.ca](http://culturedays.ca)
- Social media campaigns (organic and paid advertising)
- In-person outreach at public events including Farmers' Markets
- Outreach to schools through curriculum-specific programming
- Enews including Create Halton Hills, The Current, EFun, Invest Halton Hills

## **CONCLUSION:**

Culture Days is a valuable annual event that raises the profile of the arts and culture sector and supports the creative economy in Halton Hills. The 2022 edition built on past successes and continued to deliver positive impacts for the arts and cultural sector, participants and the community. In 2023, Halton Hills Culture Days will reach new audiences through the Halton Regional Hub, 'A Place I Call Home Halton' (regional interactive project), diverse and accessible activity offerings, and a robust marketing campaign. Culture Days is a catalyst for cultural activity in Halton Hills engaging artists, expanding access to and increasing year-round participation in cultural activities and attracting tourists who spend in the local economy.

Reviewed and approved by,

Catherine McLeod, Manager of Culture and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Erin Kaiser, Manager of Economic Development and Innovation and Acting  
Commissioner of Business, Environment & Culture

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer