

SKETCHing Out the Future

By Emily Wierenga

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For Chad Mohr, Operations Administrator for Toronto's street outreach SKETCH, his job means more than a way to foot life's bills. It means changing people's lives.

"I have been employed by SKETCH for 3 years and had been a volunteer for 2 years before that," says Mohr. "I believe in SKETCH because it allows people to be self directed and to follow their own individual path. And because it is fun. We do not offer answers, but rather possibilities."

On Sunday, November 18 SKETCH celebrated its annual Community Feast. "The Feast is just a great way to bring all of the various stake holders of SKETCH together to celebrate. Staff, families, volunteers, funders, participants, community partners friends and participants all come together to eat, make art and have fun. It is a cozy event that really speaks to the kind of place we are: a community arts initiative."

A typical day at SKETCH consists of Open Studio Day -- the main program occurring on Tuesdays and Thursdays. "We will see between 30 and 90 youth in a four hour period," says Mohr. "There is food in the kitchen, people jamming in the studio, screen printing and painting, sewing and taking pictures, dancing and doing martial arts, talking and laughing. It is an amazing and beautiful thing to see."

While the artists at SKETCH have received national recognition for their work, Mohr says it's so much more than that. "SKETCH is about arts as a process rather than the final product. Of course we see a lot of talent here, but we also see a lot of people just enjoying the opportunity to make something."

Founded by Phyllis Novak 10 years ago, the outreach used to be run out of a little space in the Great Hall on Queen. For the past six years, they've operated out of 580 King West. With many of the staff being previous participants, the program is authentic and effective.

"Ultimately, we just give people opportunities that would otherwise not exist for them," says Mohr. "The arts offer possibilities for self exploration, self direction, self expression, self empowerment and engagement in community. It is the act of creation that is the key."