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Monthly Message: Becoming visible through art and community

As I write this, I am sitting outside the closed doors of Shelburne's Grace Tipling Hall, surrounded by art.

Youth artwork is all around me, hung alongside pieces from artists in the community, including some of our teachers, our program coordinator, Megan, and even a few of my own. On the other side of the doors, Finding Nemo Jr. is unfolding onstage. I can hear the audience cheering from where I sit, and I am waiting for the doors to open again.

My heart is swelling with pride.

I already know people will come out of that theatre thrilled by what they have just experienced. Not because every line was perfect or every note landed flawlessly, but because something deeper is happening in that room.

Young people are becoming visible.

That is one of the things art does. It helps children become visible to themselves.

Sometimes that happens quietly, in a rehearsal room or at an art table. Sometimes it happens all at once, under lights, on a stage, or framed on a wall. A child offers something of themselves, something they have made, practiced, risked, or imagined, and in the sharing of it, they begin to see more clearly what may have been there all along. A confidence. A spark. A voice.

Last week, we saw it at our student showcase, where Streams music students shared what they had been working on all year. What made the evening beautiful was not perfection. It was the atmosphere in the room. The audience created the safety required for confidence and self-assurance to germinate. They listened generously. They applauded warmly. They made space for courage.

And that matters more than we sometimes realize.

Children do not only grow through instruction. They also grow through affirmation. Through being witnessed. Through discovering that what is in them can reach other people.

That is what Streams Month is about.

Yes, it is a month of events: showcases, exhibitions, theatre, fun, and open doors. But underneath all of that is something deeper. Again and again, this month, our community is being given the chance to support and affirm the creativity of young people. To be the kind of audience, neighbour, parent, teacher, donor, volunteer, or cheerleader that helps keep the stream flowing.

And by that, I do not just mean financially, though that matters too. I mean emotionally. Socially. Creatively. In the hearts of children and youth who are learning, little by little, to recognize their own capacity and capability.

So come out. Fill the seats. Walk through the gallery. Cheer the kids on. Spend some time with us. Help us create the kind of atmosphere where young people can become visible to themselves.

You can find Streams Month details, event information, and tickets at streamshub.org/streamsmonth.

As I sit here waiting for these doors to open, surrounded by what has been made and listening to what is unfolding, I am reminded again that this work is never just about programs. It is about people. It is about possibility. It is about making room for young people to emerge.

There is something I find quietly meaningful about sitting out here, on the other side of the door. We helped build the stage. We

helped find the teachers, raise the funds, and hold the space. But what is happening in that room right now belongs entirely to the young people inside it. That, I think, is exactly how it should be.

And tonight, in this hall, full of art and echoing with applause, that is exactly what is happening.

By Juli-Anne James, Executive Director, Streams Community Hub.