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Neurodivergent cast of actors to take the stage at Westminster Church for theatrical debut

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The Imagine Expressive Arts Collective, created by Branching Out Support Services, will perform Mystory of Light, a theatrical production featuring a cast of neurodiverse adults.

The show is coming to Westminster United Church in Orangeville on Dec. 12 and sold out tickets just two weeks after it was announced, showcasing strong community support.

Jane Cameron and Michelle Grierson will be leading the cast in this sensory theatre performance. The founder of Branching Out Support Services, Kimberly Van Ryn, told the Citizen that Cameron, who's directing the show, has been a part of it every step of the way.

?Jane Cameron is a creative genius. Her process is incredible. She sat with the group in a circle for quite a bit of time to hear their stories ? however they tell them ? listen to their passions, understand their lives and then created a show that highlights each actor as well as combines all their talents in group numbers,? said Van Ryn.

?The show is a masterpiece that deeply honors each neurodiverse actor. So, although Jane wrote the script, it was informed by each actor and their support circles. It is a close reflection of what the actors wanted to see in their play, how they see and experience their own lives and what they have to share with others.?

Mystory of Light focuses on how to find light in darkness and how people can show each other ?the light.?

Founded as an 11-week pilot project in October, the Imagine Expressive Arts Collective aims to address the need for more inclusive opportunities for neurodivergent artists.

?We were aware that there are already some amazing dramatic arts, music and dance opportunities for people with disabilities (or) neurodivergence in Dufferin County,? said Van Ryn. ?We wanted to add to that roster with a low pressure, community supportive collective where all people are welcome despite being able to communicate through speech or if they communicate differently.?

She added, ?It was created by a caregiver of a neurodivergent artist having a conversation with some of the support professionals at Branching Out Support Services. We then sat down with director Jane Cameron and talked with people who had lived experience of both disability and art as to what they would like to see in our community.?

The collective's end goal is to turn it into a standalone not-for-profit organization once the 11-week pilot concludes.

Reflecting on what makes this performance special, Van Ryn said it's community theatre at its ?absolute best.?

?All of the actors are neurodivergent (or) disabled, and their support professionals and volunteers merge into the set to support them every step of the way. This performance comes from the passions of people who are highly creative and experience the world from a very sensory-based perspective. Our theatre performance blends so many elements of art, courage, support and community,? Van Ryn told the Citizen.

The actors have been practicing for two to three hours each week leading up to the show, and Van Ryn said their skills are ?second to none.?

?Every Friday they come together as a group in the space where we will do our performance, the lower level of the Westminister Church. With their supporters they design sets, learn dances, practice music, practice timing, and work with the staff team as we solve problems on the fly, and make it happen,? she explained.

In addition to the theatrical debut on Dec. 12, there will be a small artisan market featuring neurodivergent artists, showing and selling their work.

Products from Branching Out Support Services' Granola Project will also be for sale, and there will be a community social after the show.