

# NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier  
University



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## **ARTS EXPRESS '96: A special camp for special kids**

Arts Express '96, the second annual integrated arts camp for children with special needs aged six to 14, blasts off the week of July 22-26.

The theme of this year's arts camp is Space, says Dr. Leslie O'Dell, co-ordinator of Wilfrid Laurier University's theatre program, and the excitement is already building.

The arts camp involves 36 local children, about two-thirds of whom have special needs. Some use wheelchairs; others use crutches or walkers. Some have cerebral palsy, autism, attention deficit disorder, or have developmental delays.

The other twelve participating children are able-bodied, and they'll all be assisted by 18 university students who are enrolled in a new course called Creative Arts With Children With Special Needs, offered jointly by Laurier and the University of Waterloo.

In the camp, being held at the Rotary Centre, 500 Hallmark Drive, Waterloo, from Monday, July 22 through Thursday, July 25, from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., the children are split into six groups around the Space theme, including moons, stars, suns, Mars, rockets and astronauts.

The children, who are being encouraged to express themselves through the arts, will spend the week working on painted backdrops, individual artwork, making masks, composing music and creating their own dances. "A child in a wheelchair can be very, very expressive through the arts," says O'Dell.

Thursday is the rehearsal and polish day, and the culmination of the week's work is Friday, July 26, when the kids take to the stage from 1 to 2 p.m. in the Maureen Forrester Recital Hall at Laurier for a full performance

"I think it's quite fun," says O'Dell. "It's a thrill to see these kids putting together and taking part in a musical production of their own. And it's a real show, not just a courtesy to the parents."

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Parents whose children were in last year's jungle safari production found that their children became more connected to music and movement through the camp, says O'Dell.

Word-of-mouth provoked so much demand for this year's camp that it was filled in two weeks, with 15 people placed on a waiting list.

The arts camp itself is a valuable community partnership, adds O'Dell. It embraces Laurier's theatre and music therapy programs, the dance program at the University of Waterloo and the Carousel Dance Studio, the early childhood education program at Conestoga College, and the recreation therapy program at the Rotary Children's Centre.

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**Note to the media:** Both Leslie O'Dell and Debra Martz Melanson of the Faculty of Music will be at the Rotary Centre July 22 - 25, and will be pleased to talk with you and introduce you to the students and participants. Photographers are welcome: consent forms have been obtained from the parents.