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Laurier's Arts Express camp celebrates 20th anniversary

WATERLOO – Nearly 50 children with special needs, along with their friends and family, will create and perform an original dramatic, dance and musical number for the annual Arts Express recital. The recital, titled "Under the Big Top," takes place Friday, July 12 at Wilfrid Laurier University's Waterloo campus.

This year's production marks the 20th anniversary of Arts Express, the culminating event and Community Service-Learning placement for the Laurier course MU380E: Creative Arts for Children with Special Needs. Students enrolled in the course review theories in creative arts therapies and strategies for working with individuals with special needs. The course closes with the weeklong Arts Express camp, where students become camp leaders and put theory into practice. The campers – children aged six to 14 – experience creative music, drama, dance and art during the week.

"The impact of Arts Express on both the students and campers' lives is remarkable," said Elizabeth Mitchell, a part-time instructor of music therapy at Laurier, as well as the Arts Express course and camp coordinator. "For many university students, the experience impacts them both professionally and personally."

Mitchell recalls one recital during which a 10-year-old boy went to the microphone and led his group in song. "This child's diagnosis of autism had made the sensory experience of performing both challenging and very special. His mother later expressed that Arts Express allowed others to see her son as capable and creative."

Arts Express is organized through Wilfrid Laurier University's Music Therapy program in conjunction with the Carousel Dance Centre, Conestoga College, KidsAbility and the University of Waterloo.

"Everyone involved would like to generously thank those who have sponsored the Arts Express program over the years," said Mitchell. "A special thanks to Laurier professors Leslie O'Dell and Rosemary Fischer for their vision in creating this program 20 years ago."

Friday's recital and 20th anniversary celebration will begin at 1:30 p.m. in the Maureen Forrester Recital Hall.

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