



OTTAWA STORYTELLERS



[Ottawa StoryTellers](#) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting the art of storytelling in this community. Since 1983 it has produced storytelling events for adults and children on an on-going basis and supported tellers at all levels of practice. As storytellers, members of OST are devoted to keeping alive the traditions of oral storytelling as passed from one generation to the next. Storytelling as a performance art is experiencing a significant revival across the county, and Ottawa Storytellers is a leader in this important creative movement.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In partnership with the Zonta Club of Ottawa, Ottawa StoryTellers is gathering stories from social workers and clients of Elder Abuse Ontario focusing on the issue of elder abuse in our communities. For the past year, Zonta has dedicated its resources to raising money in support of programs addressing this 'hidden crime'. The stories are poignant and disturbing, illuminating as they do how the most vulnerable members of our population often find themselves victimized by the very people they rely on for protection. Ottawa StoryTellers has assembled a team of interviewers, writers, and tellers who are preparing both a live presentation, and a follow-up workbook that will bring people together to hear these stories. The presentation will engage and enlighten, while the workbook will serve as a further educational tool and resource.

PARTNER SITE

The [Zonta Club of Ottawa](#) was established in 1929. It is part of Zonta International, a worldwide organization that works to improve the status of women worldwide. Zonta Club of Ottawa's value to the community lies in the service provided by our members. The focus of our program is education in the broader sense. For many years the Zonta Club of Ottawa has presented financial grants and awards to successful applicants.

ABOUT ART PLACE

Art Place is a community outreach program of AOE Arts Council, funded in part by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. In its inaugural year, the new social practice professional artist-in-residence program will enable six jury selected artists and groups of artists the opportunity to offer unique free-of-charge artistic services in collaboration with community sites across the city of Ottawa. Each artist or arts group will be paired with a non-profit organization for a period of 5 to 8 weeks. The artists will work with a

designated site partner and its participants to create an artistic project. Art Place will bring together different participants to work collaboratively and generate awareness for socially-driven issues.

ELDER ABUSE - STORIES WILL BE TOLD

December 17, 2015

Through the artist-in-residence program Art Place, [Ottawa StoryTellers](#) (OST), in partnership with the [Zonta Club Ottawa](#), is gathering stories from social workers and clients of Elder Abuse Ontario. Those stories focus on the issue of elder abuse in our communities and how some of the most vulnerable members of our population often find themselves victimized by the people they rely on for care. Ottawa StoryTellers has assembled a team of interviewers, writers, and tellers who are preparing both a live presentation, and a followup workbook that will bring people together to share what they have heard first hand. They hope that the presentation will engage and enlighten, while the workbook will serve as an educational tool and resource to seniors' organizations, homes and care centers.

[Ottawa StoryTellers' Managing Artistic Director, Laurie Fyffe](#), tells us more about the project.

How did Ottawa StoryTellers come to know about victims of elder abuse as a part of their Art Place project ?

OST was involved with the Zonta Club of Ottawa during a previous outreach initiative in 2012. We were aware of the group's commitments and its effectiveness in identifying and supporting work in the community. The Managing Artistic Director, Laurie Fyffe, also had a previous association with Zonta Ottawa, so the match up was positive on two fronts. We



knew that Zonta was focused on women's issues, and that it was an effective organization. We also knew that Zonta has a commitment to supporting women in the arts. The idea of using art to express an area of social concern is familiar to them.

Zonta introduced us to social workers Manon Thompson, Regional Consultant Eastern Ontario for Elder Abuse Ontario, and Alison Timmons, M.S.W., RSW, of the Elder Abuse Response & Referral Service of Nepean, Rideau and Osgoode Community Resource Centre. OST also had access to personal stories through our storytellers. Four of the five people involved in this project have experience working with seniors through family connections, the palliative care system, and their work as storytellers in the community.

Why is elder abuse an important issue to Ottawa StoryTellers and how did you go about finding those stories?

OST has used storytelling to address many social concerns. We were interested in Art Place was because it was a chance to learn, to stretch, to use storytelling to address an issue slightly outside or beyond areas of social interest our members were comfortable with. During 2014, Zonta Ottawa identified elder abuse as an area they wished to address. They began the process of educating their members, networking in the community, and then fundraising. OST's first



step was to talk to Zonta members, and then follow up on their connections in the community to learn more about the issue. We then began the process of weaving the stories we wanted to create using those connections, resources, and caseworkers. A process that might normally take a year was condensed into three months.



How is storytelling an effective way to raise awareness about issues such as elder abuse?

Storytelling personalizes experiences. Storytellers seek out the heart of the matter, they take a broad social issue, something that to most people is fairly abstract, and they distill it down to a personal and emotional experience. The more personal an issue becomes, the more it engages people's emotions. Emotions are the conduit to action. We see ourselves in others, but only if we can somehow know them, and true stories are a way of knowing.

What do you hope will be the biggest positive outcomes of this project?

We hope that people will attend the performances *Where are all my beautiful things?*, February 25 and June 4, and come away knowing and feeling more than they did before. Manon referred to elder abuse as a

hidden crime, we hope to reveal it. We hope that the reach of the project will extend far



beyond these particular stories into the community. We hope that people viewing a situation or a dynamic between an elderly person and someone close to them will be able to witness that situation from a different perspective. Perhaps what seems normal, or safe, is not. If that happens as a result of even one person attending *Where are all my beautiful things?* the project will have been a success.

With this project, Ottawa StoryTellers wishes to create a workbook, what will it consist of

We want the stories to exist as a permanent record. The workbook could be used to bring people together to read the stories, or perform them. The workbook will be given to seniors' organizations, homes and care centers, wherever our social workers feel that intervention about elder abuse is needed. The goal is to make the workbook as freely available as possible. In addition to the stories we have uncovered, the workbook will contain a list of organizations and resources individuals can contact for more information on elder abuse.

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