



## January 2022: Returning to YONA

by Kyra Droog

After a lengthy holiday break, the return to YONA in January is always a joyous occasion for students and teachers alike. The sheer energy that bursts out of each student when they put down their bag and begin chatting excitedly with the friends they haven't seen in weeks is unrivaled. One student ran up to their instructor, telling them that "I was so excited to come back to YONA that I couldn't sleep last night!"

**"I was so excited to come back to YONA that I couldn't sleep last night!"**

- YONA Student

From having students update their teachers on their lives over the holiday break, to groups of

students that would prefer to practice their violins instead of going outside for recess, the power of the YONA program has never been clearer. "It has been wonderful, having the students in-person for the past few weeks," says Jacquie McNulty, YONA Acting Lead. "The power of making and sharing music really comes across in those moments."

Sarah Jacques, Acting Manager of YONA and Event Production, just recently joined the Winspear/ESO team, and got to experience YONA for the first time this January. "I knew what a Sistema program looked like in theory, but seeing it in action and in-person is really meaningful," she says. "Each site has its own culture and atmosphere, and it's really quite special."

Of course, COVID-19 has complicated in-person gatherings, but the YONA team is dedicated to keeping its staff and students safe, both in-person and online. When classes are in-person, YONA

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staff and students are encouraged to wear KN95 masks and are required to keep them on at all times unless they are eating, drinking, or playing a woodwind or brass instrument. HEPA filters in each classroom help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. When possible, students take their breaks outside to get some fresh air. YONA also has plans in place to move online to support classes and students that cannot gather in-person, ensuring that YONA is always available to them.

**“There’s a great moment at YONA each and every day.”**

**- Jacquie McNulty**

“There’s a great moment at YONA each and every day,” says Jacquie, when asked what her favourite YONA moment is since returning after the holidays. “It means so much to these kids to have a safe place where they can celebrate music and togetherness.” The YONA team has many fun and exciting plans in store for YONA students over the next few months - stay tuned to YONA’s social media accounts and to our Quarter Notes newsletter to receive all the YONA news. 🎵





# Kipohtakâw YONA: Pilot Program Taking Flight

by Kyra Droog

Before YONA, students at Alexander First Nation had no access to in-school music instruction. Now, approximately 75 students receive instruments and music lessons twice a week within school hours through the Kipohtakâw YONA program. How did this program begin? Kipohtakâw YONA Site Manager Lauren Dykstra takes us back.

“We started building a relationship with Alexander First Nations approximately two years in advance of starting the pilot program,” says Lauren. “After meeting with them and determining how we could best support them, we decided to move forward with an in-person, in-school model – something that other Sistema programs in Canada have also done.”

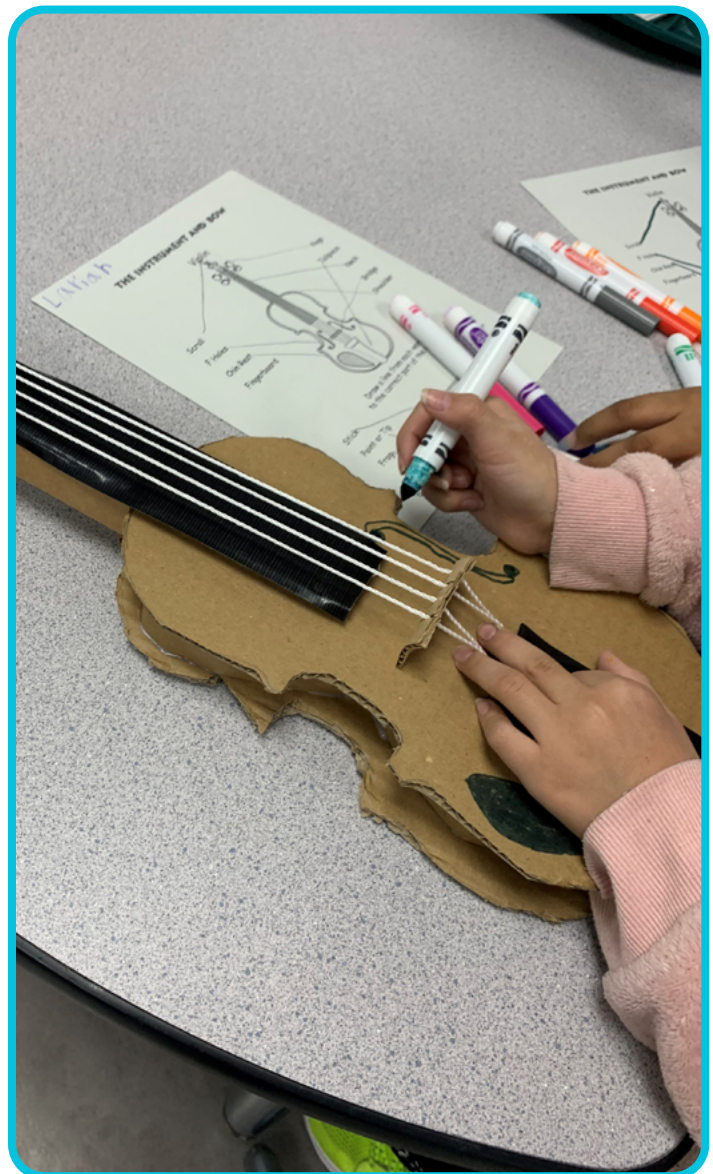
When Kipohtakâw YONA launched in 2018, all students at Alexander First Nation in grades two or three were offered the opportunity to join YONA and learn to play the violin. From there, the three-year pilot program began, supported by founding sponsor MNP. Two days a week, YONA instructors travelled to Alexander First Nation from Edmonton and provided musical instruction within school hours. The program was such a success that once the pilot program ended, plans for expansion began.

“We are planning to expand our offerings to students in grades two through seven,” says Lauren. “We will also offer the option to play a woodwind instrument – students will start on the recorder and then transition to flute, clarinet, or other woodwind instruments.” In addition to YONA, the Education Centre at Alexander First Nations recently hired a music teacher, who works closely with YONA Teaching Artists to find ways to support Kipohtakâw YONA students and their musical education.

**“There’s so much joy in being in-person, making music together, and learning new things.”**

- Lauren Dykstra

“There’s so much joy in being in-person, making music together, and learning new things.” Lauren says. “Students are so happy and excited to be playing together. Online engagement is challenging, so being in-person is really meaningful.” Though the pandemic has pushed expansion plans back, there’s no question that Kipohtakâw YONA will continue to expand and grow to support more students and share more music. 🎵



# The YONA Social Curriculum: Community Building

by Kyra Droog

Music plays a critical part in the education portion of YONA-Sistema, but there's more to the program than just music education. YONA-Sistema uses music as a vehicle for positive community impact, providing holistic care to its students and teaching the values of unity, harmony, and mutual compassion. In fact, Sistema-inspired programs across Canada, and across the globe, all demonstrate the importance of community, collaboration, and more.

"During the COVID pandemic, Sistema-based programs across Canada have become even more connected," says Jacquie McNulty, YONA Acting Lead. "We meet to discuss our programs, our mindset, and to inspire each other to grow." Because of this connection, YONA-Sistema leaders have been able to learn from other Sistema programs, like Sistema Toronto, who inspired two YONA Teaching Artists to formalize YONA-Sistema's social curriculum.

Elaine Stepa, Brass Teaching Artist, and Vicky Berg, Choir Teaching Artist, took everything they wanted to share with YONA students and found engaging ways to ensure students would feel supported as they learned about community building and community care. Now, there is a different monthly theme at YONA for students to engage with – January's theme was working well with others, and February's theme is making choices.

"Last year, when YONA online, we spent a fair amount of time focusing on our social curriculum and learning more about each other and ourselves. I think it was that combined approach that made last year such a success," says Elaine. "In YONA's mission and vision, one of our listed purposes is 'to support the development of the whole person' and these responses say to me that this social curriculum is an important part of what YONA strives to do."

**"Part of YONA's mission and vision is to support the development of the whole person."**

- Elaine Stepa

YONA's social curriculum is focused on providing YONA students a place to grow and learn – musically, and otherwise. The focus on lasting positive community impact is demonstrated in the determination to help YONA students become supportive community members, and kind and caring individuals. Part of that growth comes through the music they play, and part of that growth comes from working together to support each other and their communities. 🎵





# “My favourite thing about YONA is..”







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Through YONA-Sistema, youth in Northern Alberta’s priority neighbourhoods will experience an extraordinary opportunity for social, emotional, academic, and musical development. They will develop lifelong values and skills that will promote the future success of these youth and of their communities.

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