

Five Million Funding Announcement in Support of YONA-Sistema

For immediate release

Edmonton, AB (May 4, 2022) The Winspear Centre and Youth Orchestra of Northern Alberta (YONA-Sistema) are delighted to announce a donation of five million dollars in support of the Tommy Banks Centre program from the Maclab Development Group and the de La Bruyère family. This generous gift complements community funding support for free musical instruction to youth living in priority neighbourhoods.

A profoundly impactful program, this donation will support the organization's endowment and ensure the sustainability of YONA in perpetuity. This gift, to be received over the next several years, goes a long way towards YONA's \$20M endowment goal by 2030. Generously supported by individuals and family and community foundations on an annual basis, the goal is to one day reach over 5% of children living in priority neighbourhoods with at least 50% of the program supported by sustainable revenue.

Charitable organizations play a crucial role in the social safety net by providing assistance not provided by other services. A 2021 Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) report noted that approximately 10% of Edmontonians live in poverty. In 2019, ECF noted that 34.7% single parent families lived in poverty, and 6.7% of people in couple families lived in poverty.

YONA started nine years ago with only 20 students in one school. The program has increased its reach ten-fold, and currently includes 200 students with five cohorts in the City of Edmonton and beyond.

One of Edmonton's youngest and fastest growing demographics is Indigenous families, and in 2018, YONA expanded to Alexander First Nation.

YONA is a free after-school program that runs for three hours every day. Students are offered academic time, snacks, free play time, and leadership-building activities. Students access group lessons several times a week, as well as choir, community building, and weekly individual instrument lessons for senior students. A highlight of the year is when the students share their music on stage for family, friends, and community at the Winspear Centre with Edmonton Symphony Orchestra musicians.

Through YONA, community partners come together to serve a common goal: putting the transformative power of music-making into the hands of young people who would otherwise not have access to it. Studies have shown that providing an opportunity for children and youth to engage in supportive music-centred after-school programs is a great opportunity to positively impact their health, well-being, and safety. It is also proven that learning to play a musical instrument boosts brain and cognitive function important for learning, which in turn facilitates success in school, and better life outcomes long-term. YONA is seeing evidence of this in increased focus in class and improved school attendance, in addition to a high retention rate year-to-year for participation in the program.

“YONA is an opportunity program. Maclab are grateful for everything the city has given us, and since we are committed to doing what we can to keep opportunity alive for the next generation of Edmontonians, we are thrilled to make a five million dollar gift,” says Marc de La Bruyère, Managing Director at Maclab Development Group.

“This is an extraordinary day for us, and for the children and families of our community. Knowing that Marc de La Bruyère and his family believe as strongly as we do in the value of music in a child’s life makes everything we do, each day, worthwhile. Marc is one of our city’s great leaders and philanthropists, and we thank him for his tireless efforts and for helping connect our community to music and art,” says Annemarie Petrov, Winspear Centre and ESO President and CEO.

The donation celebration took place on Thursday, April 28th with YONA Junior violin students from the St. Catherine School site, as well as a Senior YONA student from the Winspear cohort performing. Guests and supporters of YONA were in attendance to acknowledge the generous gift and experience YONA’s impact.

YONA-Sistema Quick Facts in 2022

\$750K yearly operating cost

- 8% supported by endowment
- 92% funded by donors, corporate sponsors, and foundations

200 children served

15 teaching artists plus guest artist staff

350 instruments purchased

370 hours of music education

160 homework help sessions

155 days of nutritious snacks

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About Youth Orchestra of Northern Alberta Sistema (YONA-Sistema)

YONA-Sistema believes that ensemble music-making is a transformative experience. YONA strives to have a lasting positive community impact by providing free music-centred programming for youth in Northern Alberta's priority neighbourhoods. Launched in September of 2013, students spend three hours after school each day in a safe and nurturing environment, studying music in an ensemble-based and community-focused setting. In 2018, YONA expanded to include a three-year pilot at Alexander First Nation and now serves over 200 students at five YONA sites. This program is presented by the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and Winspear Centre in partnership with the Edmonton Catholic School District and the Edmonton Public School Board. YONA Sistema is community-run and grateful for donations from individuals, foundations, and corporate partners MNP, BioWare, Imperial Oil, Cameron Corp, and EPCOR.

Media Contact: Konstantine Kurelias

e: kkurelias@winspearcentre.com

c: 780-554-9868