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University of Lethbridge student develops recreation opportunities for unhoused residents

February is Therapeutic Recreation Month

Tannis Chartier, a third-year University of Lethbridge student in the Therapeutic Recreation Program, is providing meaningful opportunities for unhoused people to enjoy recreational pastimes like bingo, movies and karaoke.

She got the idea for the Resilient Rec YQL program when she began volunteering at the Soup Kitchen in 2020.



“I saw this huge need,” says Chartier. “We were filling the physical needs of the people — giving them some shelter and food. But we weren’t giving them meaning and purpose and we weren’t giving them an opportunity to move up and fill their needs to socialize.”

In response, Chartier initially conceived the Resilient Art YQL program and approached the director of the Soup Kitchen about implementing the concept. The Soup Kitchen was on board and provided some funds to buy art supplies and offered their space so that, once a week, people could come to the Soup Kitchen and create art. The finished artworks were posted to a Facebook page and offered for sale, with the proceeds going to support the needs, like a new pair of boots or a new backpack, of the artist.

“We did that for about a year, and it was wonderful,” she says. “The next summer we organized a day in the park. We went to Henderson Lake and kayaked a little bit and played lawn games.”

Even though the art and park events were successful, Chartier thought more people might attend if the activities had broader appeal.

“Some people hear the word ‘art,’ and they freak out and don’t come because they think they’re not artistic,” she says. “So, we changed our name to Resilient Rec YQL and we started running things like bingo nights, movie nights, karaoke nights — all sorts of fun events. Recreation is absolutely for everyone, but art might not be everyone’s forte.”

The program operates out of the Soup Kitchen and attendance varies, with a dozen or so participants at art events and card game nights and over 85 people for movie nights.

“We wanted them to feel comfortable and at home in an environment where they feel safe to have fun,” she says. “People need to feel like someone cares about them and that they have a name and are not just someone in the line at the Soup Kitchen.”

Chartier used her experience to create a presentation about Resilient Rec YQL which she has given at Lethbridge College and a couple of other schools. Part of her message is to help people realize their privilege — that they have a place to sleep, a job that provides meaningful work and a school to attend.

“Working in healthcare for years, I saw a divide in the way we treated people when they were experiencing addiction and homelessness,” she says. “I think this is only because people don’t truly understand that addiction is a disease and that there are so many factors that contribute to addiction and homelessness.”

Chartier created a course for her co-workers at the healthcare facility to provide information about addiction. For example, staff might not understand why someone would want to sleep with one of their shoes under their pillow. However, someone who sleeps at the shelter has learned that leaving both shoes at their feet means they’ll likely wake up to having no shoes at all. The course is now part of the required orientation for new staff.

For 2024, Chartier would like to see the number of participants grow. She scheduled three events in January and is looking at planning a dance in February. An arcade night is planned for Sunday, Feb. 11 at the Soup Kitchen. Chartier depends on the help of volunteers to deliver the program, some of whom are her fellow Therapeutic Recreation students and others from her church. More volunteers are always welcome, and anyone interested in helping with the program can contact Chartier at tannis.chartier@uleth.ca. Follow Resilient Rec YQL on Facebook and Instagram.

This news release can be found online at [Resilient Rec YQL](#).

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