

THE LEARNING SERIES: CASE STUDY

KAWARTHA ART GALLERY

In the fall 2016, ArtsBuild Ontario (ABO) launched The Learning Series - a collection of workshops, webinars and resources that support our core programs, including SpaceFinder. Through The Learning Series, ABO aimed to deliver accessible and relevant information around best practices to support our creative spaces. Over the last two years, many of the areas covered in The Learning Series focused on the topic of creative space rentals.

We interviewed three webinar attendees to showcase their creative spaces, learn more about their projects and share what they gained from the program. This case study highlights the Kawartha Art Gallery and plans for a new creative hub for the community.

KAWARTHA ART GALLERY AND NEW CREATIVE HUB

The Kawartha Art Gallery is based in the rural community of Lindsay, Ontario. The gallery's roots go back to the 1960's when it was first established as the "Lindsay and Crafts Association". The gallery is currently located on the second floor of the Lindsay Public Library and run by a volunteer Board of Governors. Over the years, the gallery's Board of Governors and members have focused on presenting art to the community through art classes, exhibitions, lectures and workshops.



While the Kawartha Art Gallery has a firm foot in the community's history, it is also looking towards the future with a new creative hub. Susan Taylor, Board President of the Kawartha Art Gallery, attended many webinars presented in the Learning Series to inform both her work with the Kawartha Art Gallery and her role in realizing a new creative hub for the community. "I felt I should try to learn as much as I could through the webinars on the operations of having a building in place" shares Susan. She is also the Board Chair of the Cultural Centre Committee, a joint committee between the local Arts Council and Heritage Network who are working with the municipality to pursue a vision for a creative hub.

WEBINAR HIGHLIGHTS AND BEST PRACTICES APPLIED

The Learning Series webinars provided examples of other creative spaces that supported the work of the Kawartha Art Gallery and Cultural Centre Committee with the City of Kawartha Lakes. The “Lighting Projects for Visual Arts Facilities” webinar inspired the Kawartha Art Gallery to work with the city on a lighting retrofit project for their space. As the gallery is based in a municipal building, any changes



to the facility must be approved and completed by the city. Susan presented the materials covered in the webinar, mentioning rebates and appropriate lighting for the gallery. “Right now, in the conversations around financial support, being able to build bridges with municipal staff is really key to the gallery. The insight that I gained from the webinar created a common ground for us to start working together from,” shares Susan. The city is now working with the gallery on adjusting their lighting, as well as a grant application to replace their entire lighting system. “The little bit of education I gained from this webinar has helped cement the conversation between the municipality and ourselves,” notes Susan.

The “Contacts and Agreements” webinar proved instrumental to the Kawartha Art Gallery when they launched a rentals program in late 2017. This involved consulting with partners at the Lindsay Public Library, as both the gallery and library share the same space. The webinar encouraged the gallery to draft a renter agreement and have it vetted by a lawyer to ensure legalities were covered when renters use the space. Opening the gallery up to the community through rentals saw two benefits to the gallery; earned revenue and networking opportunities. “It brings in a little bit of money, but it also brings people in and they get a chance to see our space and meet the people in the gallery” reflects Susan. The Kawartha Art Gallery has already proved to be a popular choice for community groups, such as ArtsVest and the Chamber of Commerce.

The webinar “Marketing Your Space Rentals,” featuring Rob Zeidler of The Cotton Factory in Hamilton, focused on the topic of marketing space rentals; however, this webinar actually provided Susan with insights around how organizations are taking on adaptive reuse projects and how they are supporting their overall sustainability through space rentals. The City of Kawartha Lakes recently completed a core services review of their existing spaces, which could yield possible locations for an adaptive reuse project for a new creative hub. Susan has referenced The Cotton Factory and other similar projects in her discussions with the City of Kawartha Lakes. “I went back to the manager of building and property, and we started to have some discussion about what I had learned in that webinar and what sites were in viable enough condition that could be used as a cultural center.” The webinar helped to demonstrate how other communities were using existing space to house creative groups and it highlighted different operating models used to sustain the space.

WHAT'S NEXT

The Cultural Centre Committee received a \$50,000 donation to complete a feasibility study towards a new creative hub for the City of Kawartha Lakes. While the Culture Centre Committee assesses next steps for a creative hub, Susan stresses the importance of building a creative hub based what culture means to the community, "If we are looking at a new cultural centre, it has to go beyond our immediate needs as arts organizations, and has to speak to our community's needs." This will be an important area of focus, in addition to the feasibility study and municipal discussions, towards creating a creative hub for Kawartha Lakes.

In the meantime, the Kawartha Art Gallery is embracing what culture means in their community through programming. Hockey has deep cultural roots in the City of Kawartha Lakes, and this past Family Day the gallery saw 1,200 visitors for the Hockey Hall of Fame program. "It doesn't matter whether I like hockey or not...I want the gallery to be perceived as giving to the community, being viable to the community, and providing something for the community. We're not Toronto, we're not a cosmopolitan city, and we won't survive if we don't work harder to reinvent ourselves, to present ourselves in the community as a worthwhile service," share's Susan. The gallery plans to offer seasonal programs to grow engagement and better understand what culture means to the Kawartha Lakes community.