

Reflections of success for Sadie's Showcase at Alton Mill Arts

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

Last weekend, the Alton Mill Arts Centre hosted an art show that set a new bar. It established for all time, really another stage where inclusiveness and an equal billing, as it were, will become part of the rich fabric of what happens at the Mill.

This was Sadie's Showcase, which ran from Aug. 8 to 12, with an Opening on Aug. 9. It featured Sadie Godfrey and Nathan Gatten, both people with special needs and both benefitting from the mentorship of Facilitation Wellington Dufferin.

What made its mark in the minds of so many people who attended was the energy in the space where the event took place.

Said Jodee Jack, the FWD Lead Facilitator, who initiated the idea for the event: "We have done some things like this before but this is what we do but the energy, the way it was that night, the community coming together to put this together. That somehow was just beautiful.

"We have done a couple of photography exhibits but nothing as grandiose as this."

"The actual event was the result of everyone coming together. This was the energy of caring and sharing..." commented Pete Paterson, well known photographer, who, as well as with Paul Morin, mentored Sadie in her work.

"Each of the other artists in the Mill were very supportive too," Ms. Jack told the Citizen. "They all came to check on her."

Sadie, with her mother Leslie Godfrey, has started a business selling her own designs on prints, T-shirts and cards. They were available for purchase at the showcase and people were happy to buy them.

However, when they asked Nathan if he too had cards or prints for sale, he had not. Now, Leslie and Sadie are going to help him and his father learn how to do the same as they have done with prints and cards.

Another connection established; another opportunity opened.

From every point of view, Sadie's Showcase was a grand success. A large number of people attended; the artists themselves were feted and praised; their work was made entirely public where it had not been heretofore.

Good news for any artist but, whereas only now has such an exhibition taken place, it is encouraging to realize this can and very likely will happen again, perhaps, as a regular event with other artists. Such shows may begin to be a part of other galleries and arts centres.

Said Jeremy Grant, co-owner of the Alton Mill: "We've never had anything quite like this. When I walked into the [Falls] Gallery, it was the first time I had seen her [Sadie's] art. I thought it was a tremendous way to help in a way that we could.

"It was a natural fit," he continued. "It was a relatively easy way for us to contribute. The space deserves to be used for people to display their work. [Sadie] obviously has support to help her to be an artist with her family, friends and the artists who mentored her.

"Overall, it was a wonderful experience. I actually made a connection with Facilitation to talk about other such events."

He wanted to make a point about the show, in particular, "It had an impact on several artists in the Mill. It introduced to people: there's more to art there's the whole exercise of bringing people up to their potential and the importance of cooperation with other people."

He said, "When people want to help each other, more people want to help it kind of encourages people."

Adding to that, "if those unintentional consequences are the result of doing renovations, all the brick and mortar work, dealing with officials and governments to get permits when we were renewing the mill, who ever thought all of it could help provide an outlet for such artists? That is the fun of the Alton Mill.

"Of course, in terms of the actual exhibition, I don't know why her work was out of there so soon. I would have liked it to stay there longer but I was sincere to the facilitator - I don't think this is a one-off."

As for Sadie, she is very pleased and grateful to Pete Paterson and Paul Morin, who also mentored and painted with her before the show, and, of course, Jodee Jack. Leslie Godfrey did tell us it was quite a thrill for Sadie to have her art on show at the Alton Mill. Ms Godfrey, speaking on behalf of Sadie, that she "feels very proud of her showcase (especially "Moon Eclipse") and very happy that people liked it so much. She's especially proud that it was so colourful and that people wanted to take her art with them to have in their homes. The newest Sadie Shirts - "Moon Eclipse" and "Butterfly" in particular - were big hits. That makes her especially happy.

Her praise of the Alton Mill was heart-felt: "I loved its energy, light and the many gracious and creative people there who made us feel welcome. Our opening reception/celebration was an enormous success and everything we might have hoped for - an overwhelmingly supportive and celebrative microcosm of our vibrant local arts community."

Nathan Gatten, was likewise, quite ecstatic about his work being shown at the Alton Mill. He was so pleased that Sadie asked him to be the guest artist in her showcase.

They have become good friends through this association, already knowing each other before.

In an email later, he wrote in part, "The art show was a beautiful and mesmerizing experience... Some people were really fascinated by the scientific value of [my] paintings. To have something of science have an impact in the art world. And we would talk long about looking up with the telescope toward the Stars.

"For other people I talked about how the paintings matter to me spiritually and they would tell me how the paintings connected with them emotionally. I don't get the chance to have this kind of talk with people so I was very grateful to have that experience that night. I could feel my boundaries expanding.

"Perhaps the greatest experience was finally being able to show off my illustrations publicly. Illustrations are challenging to show off because it's a more personal experience when people view them, they need to hold it like a book or photograph. So It was both relieving and satisfying that people connected with them so well and it was really cool to see which images resonated with a person the most. I think you can really get to know a lot about a person from what images connect with them. I think art has a way of communicating with one's soul, it connects not simply because of one's life experiences or genetics, it connects to who they truly are."

Furthermore, as Ms. Jack remarked, "So many good things happened behind the scenes. A lot of people don't have the means of telling their stories; so, it's so nice to read about those stories in the paper. Now, Sarah is looking to inspire other artists."

Ms. Jack also feels this has supplied the example for Facilitation FD to approach other venues.

As Mr. Paterson commented, "It's a great catalyst to create other opportunities."

He said: "I just think the actions of the community is so important."