

WINTER 2026 VOLUME No.13

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

NEWSLETTER

LET'S TALK ABOUT:

NEW YEARS AROUND THE WORLD

INUIT THROAT SINGING

MULTICULTURALISM



FROM THE COMMITTEE

Welcome to the Winter 2026 edition of the PHSS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion newsletter. As winter invites reflection, connection, and care, our DEI journey continues with intention and purpose. This season reminds us of the importance of community, resilience, and belonging, especially as many cultures observe meaningful holidays and new beginnings. Through stories of cultural expression, shared traditions, and lived experiences, we celebrate the diversity that strengthens PHSS and the community. As we move through the winter months together, let's continue to honour the voices, perspectives, and experiences that bring warmth and meaning to our shared work.

Thank You!

PHSS DEI TEAM

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WINTER CALENDAR

January

Pongal	14-17
New Year's Day	1
National Ribbon Skirt Day	4
World Braille Day	4
Epiphany	6
Orthodox Christmas	7
Lohri	13
Orthodox New Year	14
World Religion Day	18
Vasant Panchami	23
International Holocaust Remembrance Day	27

March

Purim	2-3
Laylat al-Qadr	9-19
Neurodiversity Celebration Week	16-22
Lantern Festival	3
Holi	4
International Women's Day	8
St. Patrick's Day	17
Navaratri	19
Eid Al-Fitr	20
Spring Equinox	20
International Francophonie Day	20
World Down Syndrome Day	21
Palm Sunday	29
International Transgender Day of Visibility	31

February

Black History Month	
World Interfaith Harmony Week	1-7
Tu Bishvat	1-2
White Cane Week	1-7
Lunar New Year/ Spring Festival	16-17
Ramadan	Feb 18-March 19
Lent	Feb 18- April 4
Thaipusam	1
World Hijab Day	1
Family Day	16
Nova Scotia Heritage Day	16
Pink Shirt Day	26

New Year, New Starts: Fresh Beginnings Around the World

As we step into 2026, many of us are using this time to reflect, reset, and move forward with renewed intentions. Across cultures, the idea of a “new year” does not arrive at the same time or in the same way. Around the world, communities mark the beginning of the new year according to different calendars, traditions, and beliefs. Exploring these traditions reminds us of the richness of our diversity and the shared human desire for renewal.

While January 1 marks the start of the year for the Gregorian calendar, countless cultures observe the New Year based on lunar, solar, or seasonal cycles:

Lunar New Year (Spring Festival)

Falling between January 21 and February 20, this is a major celebration in many East Asian cultures. Families gather for festive meals, exchange red envelopes (Hongbao), and usher in luck and prosperity with vibrant dragon and lion dances.



Nowruz (Persian New Year)

Celebrated around March 20–21, Nowruz aligns with the spring equinox. Symbolizing rebirth, traditions include a deep “spring cleaning” of the home and setting the Haft-Seen table, which features seven symbolic items representing renewal and health.



Hindu New Year

Because of India's vast regional diversity, the New Year is celebrated at different times. Many observe it in the spring (such as Ugadi or Baisakhi), while others, particularly in North India and Gujarat, mark the New Year during Diwali, the Festival of Lights, in October or November.

Islamic New Year (Hijri New Year)

Based on the lunar Hijri calendar, this marks the beginning of the month of Muharram. Observances are often quiet and reflective, focusing on the history of the faith and spiritual renewal.

Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year)

Celebrated in September or October, Rosh Hashanah is a time of prayer and introspection. Traditional customs include blowing the shofar (ram's horn) and enjoying symbolic foods like apples dipped in honey to represent a "sweet" year ahead.



Western New Year (January 1)

From fireworks and countdowns to personal resolutions, January 1 serves as a symbolic moment for many to leave the past behind and welcome new opportunities.



Across cultures, the New Year is more than just a date; it is a symbol of hope and new beginnings. These transitions encourage reflection, gratitude, and a renewed sense of purpose. Within our organization, we can recognize and celebrate these diverse traditions by keeping the following tips in mind:

- 1. Be mindful of timing:*** Not everyone marks the new year in January. When colleagues choose to share that they are celebrating a cultural new year, taking a moment to acknowledge it can be a thoughtful and respectful gesture.
- 2. Stay curious:*** If a colleague mentions an upcoming cultural holiday, ask them (if they are comfortable) how their family celebrates.
- 3. Share your story:*** Does your family have a unique tradition for the start of the year? Sharing these stories helps us see the person behind the professional.

As we move through the coming months, let's celebrate the variety of ways we mark fresh starts. While our customs may differ, the universal desire for hope and renewal connects us all.

More than just music: Inuit throat singing and resurgence

Artistic expression - such as music, dance, carving, painting, and storytelling - is a powerful way of expressing identity and celebrating shared culture. Every culture has unique artistic traditions that are passed down through generations, creating a shared understanding of who we are and fostering a deep sense of belonging.

One such artistic tradition within Inuit culture is throat singing, known as katajjaq. This traditional form of music uses guttural rhythms, panting, and breath patterns to create harmonies that often imitate sounds of wind, water, and animals. Katajjaq is typically performed as a duet by two women and originally developed as a form of entertainment while hunters were away from their communities. It also helped keep participants mentally engaged and physically warm during long, cold periods. In its traditional form, the two women face one another, standing close and holding each other's arms, sometimes incorporating rhythmic body movements. The performance is often a game: the first singer to laugh or stop is eliminated, and the winner is the one who outlasts the others.



Despite its cultural importance, throat singing fell out of practice for many decades and nearly became extinct. In the early 1900s, Inuit and other Indigenous artistic expressions such as throat singing and drumming were banned in schools and public spaces. In Canada, missionaries and the government did so to suppress Indigenous identities, outlawing languages, music, and spiritual practices. Cultural celebrations such as the Potlatch, Powwow, and Sundance were prohibited, along with drumming circles, traditional dress, and singing in Indigenous languages. Those who continued to practice their culture faced the risk of arrest, imprisonment, and the confiscation of ceremonial objects.

In recent decades, however, throat singing has experienced a notable revival. Families and communities have worked to reclaim the tradition, and younger generations are sharing the art through social media, generating renewed interest. In this context, modern-day throat singing carries deeper meaning - not only as an artistic practice, but as an act of cultural survival and resistance.

Artists such as Tanya Tagaq and PIQTIQ blend ancient throat-singing traditions with contemporary compositions, transforming katajjaq into a radical form of decolonization and systemic disruption. For others, the practice is more intimate and personal, serving as a way to reconnect with ancestral knowledge and affirm cultural identity.

One such example is Shina Novalinga, a 27-year-old social media influencer who gained recognition for sharing videos of throat singing alongside her mother, Caroline.

Caroline taught Shina how to throat sing when she was 17 years old, and the practice has become a deeply meaningful bond between them. In a 2021 BBC article, Shina describes throat singing as an intimate art form so emotionally connected that laughter often arises naturally during performances. Through their shared singing, Shina and her mother demonstrate how cultural expression can foster connection, healing, and continuity across generations.

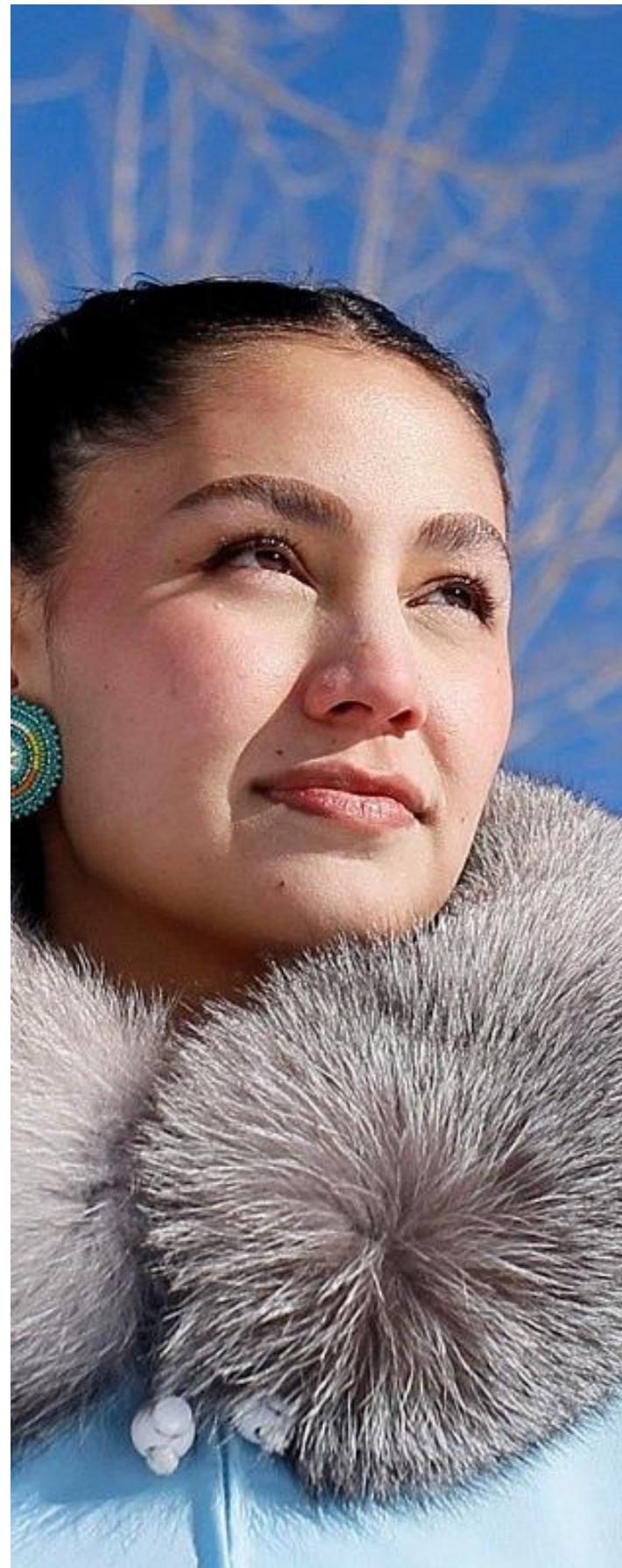
As is true for many cultural art practices, throat singing is more than music; it is a living expression of resilience, identity, and belonging. Through the revival of katajjaq, Inuit communities are reclaiming traditions once threatened by erasure and reaffirming their cultural identities. When art, music, dance, and storytelling are shared, they become powerful reminders of our roots. Beyond artistic expression, these performances stand as a testament to the strength of community, connecting across generations.

Some artists to check out:

Tanya Tagaq: <https://www.tanyatagaq.com/>
@tanyatagaq (Tik Tok, Instagram, Youtube)
YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziaqLa0uinU>

PIQSIQ: <https://www.piqsiqmusic.com/>
@piqsiq (Tik Tok)
@piqsiq_music (Instagram)
YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dC6cTjT-n64>

Shina Novalinga:
@shinanova (Tik Tok, Instagram)
@shinanovaYT (You Tube)
YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/A2Lr6V99E60>



Beyond Myths: The Everyday Benefits of Immigration

In today's political and cultural climate, conversations about immigration are often complex and emotionally charged. Public debate can spread misinformation, create negative stereotypes, and raise concerns about economic or social impacts, fueling unnecessary skepticism and fear. Yet a closer look at everyday life in Canada reveals how immigration and multiculturalism strengthen and enrich our society. Exploring the value of diverse communities serves as a reminder that multiculturalism is necessary for a strong, inclusive, and thriving country.

Canada has a long-standing commitment to diversity. In 1971, it became the first country in the world to adopt an official multiculturalism policy, which was later formalized through the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988. The Act recognized the legal importance of multiculturalism and affirmed diversity as a defining feature of Canadian identity. Through the Act, multiculturalism became protected, guaranteeing that people of all backgrounds have the right to maintain and share their culture while fully participating in society. Canada understood that a country shaped by many cultures would be stronger and more innovative, as diverse experiences and perspectives help prevent the limitations of a more uniform society.



Immigration also plays a vital role in supporting Canada's economy and workforce. Immigrants make up a substantial share of essential sectors, including healthcare, where they account for approximately one-quarter of workers nationwide, providing crucial care in hospitals, clinics, and long-term care facilities. As Canada's population ages and more workers retire, newcomers help sustain critical services and address labour shortages. In fact, completely halting immigration would slow Canada's economic growth as the workforce would shrink, placing additional pressure on essential services.

The positive impacts of immigration go beyond economics. Culturally diverse communities introduce new languages, traditions, and perspectives that shape everyday life, through festivals, cuisines, fine arts, literature, and public discourse. These contributions help Canadians learn about the world, challenge assumptions, and broaden their understanding of different ways of life. Studies indicate that societies which encourage diversity while supporting the maintenance of cultural identities tend to demonstrate greater community resilience and an improved ability to respond to collective challenges. For children growing up in culturally diverse environments, exposure to multiple perspectives supports the development of communication skills, empathy, and problem-solving abilities. A broad range of cultural tolerance within a society can help encourage coexistence, connection, and social cohesion.

Diversity is often celebrated through food, festivals, and traditions, but its importance goes far beyond. Like biodiversity in nature, cultural diversity strengthens Canada's resilience. With multiculturalism at the heart of Canadian values, we encourage mutual understanding, shared responsibility, and collaboration across differences. By embracing a wide range of perspectives and experiences, Canada continues to build a society that is not only inclusive, but better equipped to grow, adapt, and thrive together.



Multiculturalism in Action at PHSS



As both an immigrant and a PHSS employee, I see the benefits of multiculturalism in our daily work. PHSS has the privilege of supporting people from many different backgrounds, and our agency is stronger because our staff team reflects that same diversity. When staff members bring their own cultural perspectives and experiences, we can better understand and support those we serve. Diversity at PHSS is not just a bonus; it is essential for providing respectful, person-centered, and effective support.

Multiculturalism at PHSS helps build trust and stronger connections. For many people, especially newcomers, refugees, or those from marginalized groups, finding support can feel overwhelming. When they see staff who share their language, culture, or experiences, it can break down barriers, boost confidence, and create real relationships. As an immigrant, I know how important it is to feel seen and understood when seeking care or support. This perspective helps our staff work with compassion, patience, and respect for different cultures, family structures, and community values.

Multiculturalism also makes PHSS a better place to learn and grow. Working with colleagues from different backgrounds leads to more conversations, new ideas, and a wider view of the world. It helps us move past stereotypes by sharing real stories and experiences. At PHSS, we see differences as chances to grow, innovate, and work together. Our diversity shows that inclusion is more than just having different people at the table, it means making sure everyone feels respected, valued, and able to contribute.

Multiculturalism within PHSS reflects Canada's values of inclusion and fairness, and it directly improves the care and support we offer. By listening to and valuing the diverse voices of staff and people we support, PHSS helps build stronger communities based on respect, understanding, and our shared humanity.

*-Mridul George Rajan
PHSS Care Coordinator*

Diversity as Strength: Our Journey at PHSS

Employee Engagement / Sense of Belonging & Community

At PHSS, diversity is deeply connected to our sense of **belonging, equity, and inclusion**, not as separate ideas, but as values that shape how we work, lead, and support one another every day.

From Opportunity to Strength (2021 → 2025)

In 2021, staff feedback identified Diversity as an area for improvement. This insight became a catalyst for reflection, learning, and action. PHSS committed to listening more closely, creating space for dialogue, and embedding equity and inclusion into our organizational culture.

By 2025, that commitment is clearly reflected in our engagement results. Diversity is now identified as an **organizational strength**, demonstrating meaningful progress in how people experience inclusion, respect, and belonging across PHSS.



DIVERSITY
People & Perspectives

EQUITY
Policy, Procedure & Practice

INCLUSION
Voices, Choices & Culture

What the 2025 Engagement Survey Tells Us

- Net Promoter Score improved from 6 (2021) to 8 (2025), reflecting stronger trust, pride, and advocacy among staff
- Staff with less than 1 year to 5 years tenure reported 82.07% satisfaction with the diversity climate
- Staff with 5–10+ years tenure reported 69.39% satisfaction, highlighting progress while also guiding future focus areas
- Engagement remains strong across employees, persons supported, and families, reinforcing alignment with PHSS's mission and values

What Our Staff are Saying

"Open to different diversity, treated equally, good working conditions, and a positive working atmosphere."

"Collaborative and supportive team environment... inclusive culture, recognition, and appreciation."

"Being able to develop a positive connection that provides a comfortable, safe environment — seeing everyone as a whole, building equality and respect."

These voices reflect a culture where people feel **seen, valued, and respected**, the foundation of true belonging.



PHSS Commitment to Diversity & Belonging

At PHSS, diversity is not a checkbox or a one-time initiative. It is an **ongoing commitment** to:

- Foster a workplace where differences are respected and celebrated
- Ensure equity and fairness in how people are treated, supported, and developed
- Create inclusive environments where everyone feels safe to contribute and belong
- Learn continuously from staff feedback, lived experience, and community voices

True belonging emerges at the intersection of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and PHSS remains dedicated to strengthening this foundation each day.

Diversity has moved beyond intention at PHSS, it is embedded in how we live, lead, and work together.

How to make

LONGEVITY NOODLES

In many cultures, food is more than just nourishment. Popular in southern China, Yi Mein (Longevity Noodles) are long, delightfully chewy noodles that represent hope, luck, fresh starts, and as the name suggests, long life. This dish is traditionally enjoyed during big celebrations, such as weddings, birthdays, and Chinese New Year. As Bill Leung of The Woks of Life explains, Yi Mein are often stir-fried with mushrooms and Chinese garlic chives, creating a flavorful yet approachable dish even for beginner cooks. Try it out for yourself and enjoy a delicious way to welcome new beginnings.

Instructions

1 Boil 3 quarts of water in a large wok or pot to pre-cook your Yi Mein noodles. Once boiling, add the noodles. The directions on the box may say to boil the noodles for 5 minutes, but we recommend no more than 3 to 4 minutes to keep them firm and chewy. Overcook them, and you will end up with a mushy texture.

Sample a noodle while cooking, and when it tastes closer to the uncooked side of al dente pasta, it's ready. When the noodles are done, immediately drain and set aside.

2 Dissolve the sugar and salt in 1 tablespoon of hot water, and add the regular soy sauce, dark soy sauce, oyster sauce, sesame oil, and white pepper. Stir until combined.

3 Heat the wok until just smoking, and spread 2 tablespoons of oil around the perimeter.

4 Add the mushrooms and the light green parts of the chives, and stir fry for 30 seconds. The mushrooms are like sponges and will soak up the oil, so add another tablespoon of oil if they look too dry.

5 Add the noodles (they still should be warm but with no water dripping), and stir fry everything for another 20 seconds. If they cooled off, just cook them a bit longer until they are warmed, because warming the noodles before adding the sauce is important!

6 Spread the prepared sauce mixture evenly over the noodles, and stir-fry everything together for 1 minute, or until the soy sauce mixture is distributed evenly. Spread another tablespoon of oil around the perimeter of the wok to prevent sticking if you feel you need it. How much oil you use is definitely a personal preference. If the noodles stick together, drizzle a bit of oil directly over the noodles. You can also add a splash of hot water if the noodles are too dry, even after adding the sauce.

7 Mix gently so you don't break up the noodles—remember, you want to have long noodles to give longevity and prosperity to whoever's going to be eating this dish!

8 Add in the remaining green parts of the chives and mix until they turn bright green and the noodles are heated through. This will take 1-3 minutes, depending on if your noodles were cold or still warm when you started stir frying, and how hot your stove and wok can get.



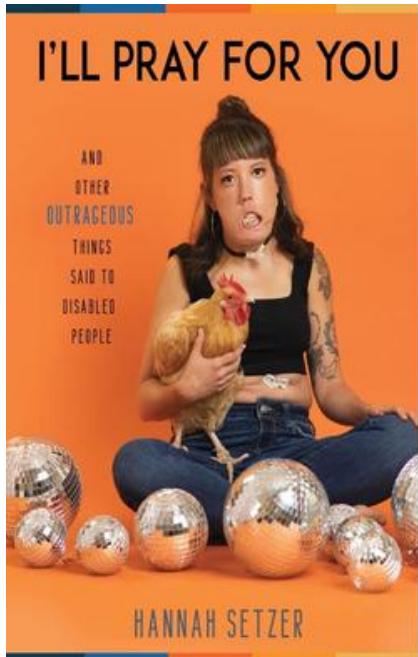
Ingredients:

- 3 quarts water
- 12 oz Yi Mein noodles
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp sugar
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp salt
- 1 tbsp hot water
- 2 tsp regular soy sauce
- 2 tsp dark soy sauce
- 2 tbsp oyster sauce
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp sesame oil
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 3-4 tbsp vegetable oil
- 5 shiitake mushrooms
- 8 oz chinese chives



Social Media Influencers

Stay connected to dialogue about DEI in media by checking out some of these powerful figures.



Hannah Setzer

Hannah Setzer is a Virginia-based athlete, author, disability rights advocate, and Instagram content creator. Born with a rare lymphatic condition that requires a feeding tube and tracheostomy, she shares fitness content that promotes accessible, inclusive approaches to health while increasing representation of disabled people. She is the author of *I'll Pray for You and Other Outrageous Things Said to Disabled People* (2023).

Instagram: [Hannah Setzer](https://www.instagram.com/hannahvsetzer/)
(@hannahvsetzer)



George the Poet

George the Poet is a British spoken-word artist, poet, rapper, author, and podcast host known for blending lyrical storytelling with thoughtful social and political commentary. His work includes live performance, music, writing, and podcasting, and explores themes of identity, inequality, and community while bringing poetry to wider audiences.

Podcast: [BBC Audio | Profile](https://www.bbc.com/audiodrama/george-the-poet)
[George the Poet](https://www.bbc.com/audiodrama/george-the-poet)

Website: [George The Poet](https://georgepoet.com)

Instagram: [George the Poet](https://www.instagram.com/georgethepoet/)
(@georgethepoet)



Pattie Gonia

Pattie Gonia is a drag queen, environmentalist, and LGBTQ+ advocate who uses art, performance, and community organizing to promote climate action and inclusion in outdoor spaces. Through advocacy and high-profile fundraisers supporting environmental and queer-led initiatives, Pattie works to make sustainability joyful, accessible, and intersectional.

Website: [Pattie Gonia](https://pattiegonia.com)
Instagram: [Pattiegonia](https://www.instagram.com/pattiegonia/)
(@pattiegonia)

London

Black Umfolosi

Date: February 22

Location: Aeolian Hall

Black Umfolosi is an award-winning a cappella singing and traditional dance group formed in Zimbabwe in 1982. Their goal is to preserve and share Imbube culture.

Mrs Krishnan's Party

Date: February 25 – March 7

Location: The Grand Theatre

Mrs Krishnan's Party is an immersive musical theatre production set during an Onam celebration, where the audience becomes part of the gathering as events unfold unexpectedly. Staged in a space resembling the back room of a corner store, the show blends live cooking with performance.

Dominique Fils-Aimé

Date: February 26

Location: Wolf Performance Hall

Dominique Fils-Aimé is a Montreal-based singer-songwriter and double JUNO Award winner whose work draws on themes from African American jazz, soul, and blues.

The Music of The Lion King – Live in Concert

Date: March 11

Location: Centennial Hall

The Lion King Live in Concert is a symphonic concert presentation featuring music from the film and stage musical, performed by soloists from the original Broadway productions with a full orchestra and choir.

Owen Sound

Drum Making

Date: February 15

Location: The Georgian Bay Centre for the Arts

This workshop offers participants the chance to make a 14" deer hide hand drum using traditional Indigenous techniques. Led by Kim Raven, who draws on her Haudenosaunee, Mohawk, Wolf Clan heritage, participants will stretch, string, tune, and optionally decorate their drums while learning about the cultural significance of the materials and methods.

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare

Date: February 20-22, 26-28

Location: Owen Sound Little Theatre

This fast-paced, inventive, and highly physical production condenses all 37 of Shakespeare's plays into a single 97-minute performance by just three actors. It offers a lively and engaging experience for both devoted Shakespeare fans and newcomers alike.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Ottawa

Dance Theatre of Harlem

Date: January 29-30

Location: Southam Hall

Dance Theatre of Harlem is an internationally recognized ballet company known for its diverse influences that blend classical, neoclassical, and contemporary works. Founded on the belief that ballet is for everyone, the company has spent over five decades advancing inclusion in the field.

Ottawa Fringe Festival

Date: February 4-14

Location: Various Theatres in Ottawa

Undercurrents is an annual festival presenting thought-provoking works by local and national artists across disciplines. The festival features a diverse range of performances, from experimental theatre and live music to solo and ensemble productions, and provides a platform for emerging and underrepresented voices.

Thelonious

Date: February 14-15

Location: Azrieli Studio

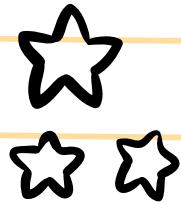
This concert features a jazz trio interpreting the music of jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk, accompanied by animated visual elements. The performance emphasizes audience engagement, drawing on Monk's unconventional approach to composition and rhythm.

Troupe Vertigo: Cirque Magique

Date: February 19-21

Location: Southam Hall

Troupe Vertigo presents a family-friendly show combining acrobatics, classical dance, and contemporary theatre. The production features symphonic favorites alongside music from Wicked, Harry Potter, and more, blending circus spectacle with orchestral music for a visually and musically immersive experience.



TALENT SHOW



Presented by The PHSS Diversity Team



WE WANT TO
CELEBRATE YOU!

Calling all persons supported, staff,
and volunteers:

Have a talent to share? We'd love to see it!
Email DiversityTeam@phsscommunity.com to claim a
spot in our upcoming Spring Talent Show.

More details coming soon!



EMPLOYER
PARTNER

As an Employer Partner with the Canadian Centre for Diversity & Inclusion (CCDI), PHSS is able to provide a number of resources for staff to support us on our diversity and inclusion journey! If you haven't already; be sure to self-register today by scanning the QR code!

(Be sure to use your PHSS staff email address when signing up!)



CCDI Registration

www.phsscommunity.com