



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

October 12, 2022

### **\$79,900 OTF Grant helps Critical Mass build resiliency, create outdoor programming space and experiment with innovative art experiences to lead Port Hope community out of pandemic**

**Port Hope** – With a \$79,900 investment from the OTF Resilient Communities Fund, Critical Mass consulted with professionals to stabilize its future and invited artists to help map its direction by addressing real change on a personal, collective and institutional level.

“OTF’s Resilient Communities Funding has empowered us with the opportunity to evaluate what has been working, and identify what we need to adapt or change in order to stabilize our organization as we plan for our next 10 years,” said Debbie Beattie, Program Director of Critical Mass Art.

“The Ontario Trillium Foundation has had a profound impact on our organization over the past few years. This grant gave Critical Mass the time, opportunity and tools to reset, refocus and reimagine how we operate, deliver programming, and meet the needs of the community. We also identified new revenue generating models and strategies, and developed donor and volunteer management tools to set us up for long-term growth. Building these foundational plans and resources was critical for us, to continue to do the work we love – *bringing art to our community, to make it a vibrant and more inclusive place for all its members.*”

Through this Resilient Communities funding, Critical Mass invited multiple artists to lead us in generating conversations about diversity, inclusion, equity and innovations in art; and to lead safe community engagement art activities that shift all of our thinking about contemporary art and our place in the world.

Critical Mass was also able to create outdoor programming space and invest in a commercial projector to bring public art and programming outside the traditional gallery space. This was a response to the pandemic, keeping social distancing in mind and the need to remove barriers for individuals to access art experiences. It also opened up exciting new programming versatility and mobility to reach Port Hope’s urban and rural audiences. And, has created opportunities for Critical Mass to highlight and develop programming around Port Hope’s natural, historic and cultural assets. Having this new resource inspired Critical Mass to develop a new projection festival launching this winter on Port Hope

landmarks like the Little Station House, the CN Railway Trestles, Mary J. Benson Branch Carnegie Library, and Knights of Columbus Hall.

The artist-led activities directly impacted 4,568 community members throughout the duration of this grant. 7 workshops, 3 community events, and 2 artist speaker panel events were held. 194 community members engaged with an arts impact survey. 199 new volunteer hours were generated. 65 neighbourhood postcard comments were shared revealing how the pandemic impacted folks around issues of housing, food security, transportation, access to healthcare, and where community connections were found during the pandemic. 169 in person craft kits were shared. 41 online craft kits were downloaded to make crafts at home, and 1 spring/summer public art was installed in a high traffic area downtown Port Hope with daily passers over 4 months viewing and engaging with the installation's mental wellness text prompts.

One of the projects developed during this grant with community input was *Life of a Small Town* – a hacked knitting machine with motion sensors. It will visually record (knit) the community emerging from the pandemic and physically engaging with Critical Mass art activities during its 10th year, and culminate in a final installation (a pooling knitted river of blue yarn, with the shade of blue varying each month). The knitted visualization will result in a tangible record of Port Hope, including both the collective and individual memories gathered throughout this extended recovery year.

Critical Mass' updated Strategic Plan focuses on building its organizational and financial capacity; stewarding relationships, collaborations and partnerships; bringing contemporary art and critical conversations into public spaces to address social issues such as systemic inequities; and continuing to remove barriers to accessing art to provide a way in for all community members to participate, connect with one another, and build a sense of belonging. Art is essential. Art is for everyone. Art opens minds and hearts and connects us all.

Critical Mass kicked off its 10th year in September, 2022. For more information about the curatorial direction '*Where do we go from here?*' and thrust behind the Resilient Communities funded artist activities and programming see backgrounder (attached).

For more information, send inquiries to Debbie at [info@criticalmassart.com](mailto:info@criticalmassart.com).

## **BACKGROUNDER**

### **'Where do we go from here?' – Curatorial direction and thrust behind the Resilient Communities funded art activities and programming:**

All of our lives have been shaken by both the pandemic and the important cultural and social issues brought to the forefront this past year. We are now at a time and place of change.

Critical Mass believes art challenges how we see the world and our place in it. We bring contemporary art to Port Hope so that everyone in our community can have that opportunity. As we move into our second decade as a centre for contemporary art in Port Hope, Ontario, we are looking at positive ways to move forward by addressing these cultural shifts/pressing issues as we expand?

We want to look widely, think deeply, discuss and activate programming important for our community right now and that will help shape Critical Mass and Port Hope in the future.

What have we learned? How have we adapted? What do we carry forward? What do we leave behind?

### **About the Artists:**

#### **The Art Leaders:**

[Jenn Goodwin](#) led us in a physical procession out of the pandemic, inviting us to consider how the pandemic has affected not only our mental health, but also our bodies and movements, and encouraged us to take better care of ourselves.

[Greta Grip & Lee Jones](#) provided video tutorials of DIY knitting activities over the winter months to get us thinking about and knitting our personal data (like recording how many episodes of a show we were watching, each time we went out for a walk, etc with knitted rows). Knitting can be an isolating activity, much like our experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. So, our art leaders envisioned a project '*Life of a Small Town*' to help us emerge from the pandemic together. They hacked a knitting machine that responds to the physical activity of Port Hope and their interactions with Critical Mass. The machine records both collective and individual memories over the course of one year to create a tangible knitted record of Critical Mass' 10th anniversary year.

#### **The Art Innovators:**

[Andrew Maize](#) raised big questions about where we want to go together post-pandemic through the use of kites and language. We were invited to get away from our computers and tethers to our technology devices and asked to play with language and large text banner kites, to consider what keeps us grounded, and how we confront an uncertain future and weather unprecedented storms? Kites fly in opposition to the wind. They invite us to extend ourselves, to look up to the sky, to pause, to wonder.

[Jessica Thompson](#) created dialogue about social issues and inequities impacting our neighbourhoods through the use of sound and data. Her research team developed a series of maps to identify borderlines in the community, and she led a soundwalk through the downtown core and facilitated a design fiction workshop to help Port Hope imagine innovative, equitable futures for the community. An online [community notebook](#) was also created to enable members of the community to share their lived experiences of Port Hope with one another.

**Learn more about the artists and these projects at [criticalmassart.com](https://criticalmassart.com).**

---

**Critical Mass** believes art changes how we see the world and our place in it. We bring contemporary art to Port Hope so that everyone in our community can have that opportunity. For more information about our programming, and upcoming events please visit [criticalmassart.com](https://criticalmassart.com).

The [Ontario Trillium Foundation \(OTF\)](#) is an agency of the Government of Ontario, and one of Canada's leading granting foundations. OTF awards millions of dollars to projects each year to build healthy and vibrant communities in Ontario.

---

**For more information, contact:**

Debbie Beattie, Program Director  
Critical Mass Art  
905-269-2120 | [info@criticalmassart.com](mailto:info@criticalmassart.com)