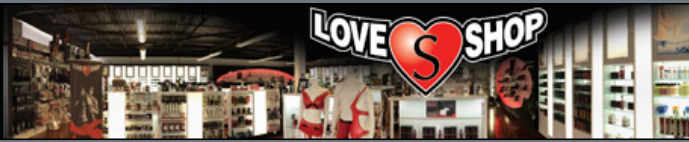


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Sister Writes program receives funding to stay afloat for three more years in Parkdale

Program has conducted more than 300 workshops in the community and has published six literary magazines

Parkdale Villager
By Hilary Caton

A creative writing and literacy program for marginalized women in Parkdale has been given a new lease on life, awarded a \$75,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to continue the workshop for the next three years.

"I can't stress enough how important this grant is. Without it we wouldn't be able to have the group," said Carol Allain, a drop-in services manager at Sistering, a women's organization that offers practical and emotional support to women in need.

"We don't have any of our own money for it, it runs on grant money. So we will be worry free for the next three years."

The workshop, Sister Writes, which runs twice a week at the Bloor/Gladstone Library, 1101 Bloor St. W., is run by novelist, freelance writer and arts educator Lauren Kirshner. She graduated from the University of Toronto's Masters of English in the Field of Creative Writing and was mentored by famous Canadian author Margaret Atwood.

Kirshner along with guest writers and novelists, teach participants valuable literacy and writing skills, develop their leadership capacity and help them learn effective communication strategies to become more active members of the community.

According to Allain, the workshops have become so popular there is currently a waiting list for the upcoming January sessions – it also helps that the program is offered to participants for free.

"The women who come to Sistering either have no income or they're on a fixed income," Allain said.

"It's also a very individual program and we work from a social justice, anti-oppressive perspective."

Kirshner founded the program in 2010 to provide women with the tools to share their stories and wisdom, while learning from awarding winning authors, poets and journalists.

"I wanted, especially, to create a space where women could write about the issues that shape their lives," Kirshner explained.

"I've benefited tremendously from mentorship myself, so I knew how important connecting to other artists is when developing a creative practice."

The women who sign up also design a magazine that contains their entire collection of work from the session. Since its inception the program has conducted more than 300 workshops in the community and has published



Sister Writes Issue 2014

Courtesy/SISTER WRITES
Since its inception the Sister Writes program has conducted more than 300 workshops in the community and has published six literary magazines.

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six literary magazines. Some more experienced participants who have learned the skills and tools from the program return to lead a workshop of their own.

"By doing so, participants have told me that they have built new artistic capacities, gained confidence and become more engaged within the community," she said.

According to Kirshner, participants have told her the workshops have provided them with "the tools, inspiration and space to tell stories that have been pent up for a long time."

"Participants have told me that by sharing stories in the magazine and at our launch, they've felt more connected within the community at large," Kirshner added.

Last year, Sister Writes launched its first Mandarin language workshop, said Kirshner, and with the grant plans to continue with Mandarin language shops as well as help the program to expand and publish more magazines.

"Most importantly, the grant will allow participants to take on a greater role in the facilitation of the program, from running workshops to planning our launches to fostering the ideas and plans that will continue to grow Sister Writes in the future.

"We're looking forward to a productive and exciting three years at Sister Writes with the very generous grant from Trillium."

For more information about Sister Writes, visit www.sisterwrites.com

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