

Museum plans monthly sensory-friendly experience

March 2, 2020 – The St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre is offering special programming to help ensure residents – including those with sensory processing needs and their families – can enjoy a positive and inclusive experience.

The museum has introduced a new program, Sensory Friendly Sunsets, which takes place the first Tuesday of each month. During a four-hour period, from 4 to 8 p.m., the museum will offer a family-oriented programming for children and adults with sensory sensitivities in a calming and inclusive environment. The next after-hours program will take place Tuesday, March 3 and lighting and sounds will be altered to reduce external stimuli, and sensory-friendly activities will be made available.

“We really wanted to offer a welcoming and inclusive environment to ensure all visitors can enjoy their experience at the museum,” said Kathleen Powell, supervisor, historical services and acting supervisor, cultural services. “By making some simple changes with lighting and sound, and offering some additional programs, hopefully visitors who see sensitivities such as lights and sounds as a possible barrier will be able to enjoy what the museum has to offer.”

Many of the activities are tactile, such as “Hands-On Heritage”, where visitors will be encouraged to touch and match objects made of different materials, a self-directed play zone with a variety of tactile toys and activities to choose from, and a quiet zone where individuals needing a sensory break can relax in a calm space filled with blankets, large stuffed animals and observation activities.

The museum is also creating sensory-friendly materials, including a backpack that will be stored at the front desk available to children and adults with sensory-processing disorders and their families. The backpacks will include a variety of toys, learning tools, communication flash cards and noise-cancelling headphones. They have also created a pre-visit social story companion available on the museum website, serving as a tool for children with autism to help them navigate through every day social situations. The stories, written from a child’s perspective, are aimed at helping children prepare for upcoming changes in routine, de-mystify social interactions and relate academic skills to real-life experiences.

“The social story companion will help provide children with an introduction of what a museum is, what they can expect when they come through the doors, as well as some of the museum etiquette – what they can and can’t touch when it comes to the artifacts,” said Powell. “Whether it’s preparing them ahead of their visit, or providing them with a sensory backpack when they’re exploring the galleries, it’s all about engaging

individuals in a different way, that will help make them feel more comfortable – especially if they are visiting the museum for the first time.”

The Sensory-Friendly Sunsets program is open to the public by donation. No registration is necessary. For more information on the program, as well as other museum activities, visit www.stcatharinesmuseum.ca or contact the museum at museum@stcatharines.ca or 905-984-8880. The St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre is located at 1932 Welland Canals Parkway.

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