



JURA MCILRAITH THE CARILLON

Amber Funk takes a look at what visitors have left in the Free Little Art Gallery that sits at the end of her driveway. This month's theme for the gallery is 'for the birds', but any type of art can be left for others to see.

Tiny art gallery fuels creation

by JURA MCILRAITH

A white box with a hardwood floor made of popsicle sticks sits at the end of 566 Hanover Street. Tiny clay people gaze at the miniature sculptures standing on pedestals and little paintings hanging from the gallery ceiling.

Amber Funk, the creator of Steinbach's only Free Little Art Gallery (FLAG), began the project last July.

"I wouldn't have called myself an artist before," Funk said. "I would say I'm an artist now. It feels like a part of me."

Funk first came across the idea for a FLAG on Instagram. It was an idea based off free little libraries that have popped up in the past few

years.

Funk said at the time she was going through her second miscarriage, and it was a way for her to cope with the loss and to keep herself busy.

"I was very focused on what I was going through and my own grief and trying to figure out what I wanted to fill my life with and what I wanted it to look like. I just wasn't really thinking of other people," Funk said. "I did want to add something good to the world. I wanted something beautiful. I just needed something that I could produce that would feel joyful."

Funk and her dad built the structure and continue to add more space for creation. The FLAG now has fairy lights and a central light inside, clips for hanging art, more pedestals and easels, rocks surrounding it so visitors can

sit, and Funk keeps paper and pencil crayons outside for people to use.

"It's added a lot more space for people to imagine what they might put in there," she said.

To stock the FLAG with art when she started, Funk made 10 pieces and estimates she's left 100 different items there herself. In the last year, Funk has experimented with different mediums and techniques including water colour and acrylic paint, pencil crayons and basket weaving with lily leaves from her garden.

"It's always interesting to put something out there and come out the next day and it's gone," she said. "You kind of just imagine what did someone think when they saw it and why is that something they were excited to take?"

Funk started posting monthly art prompts

for the FLAG around Halloween. The current theme is 'for the birds.'

Visitors can take something they like, leave something they have made, do both or just look.

"You do what speaks to you," Funk said. "So far there's always been new stuff coming and going. It's been very organic."

Funk likes to see people of all ages enjoying the gallery. Visitors have left clay sculptures, paintings, drawings, crochet items, sewing pieces and even a tiny book of poetry.

Now that the weather is improving, she said she's been seeing many more people stop by and take a look.

Funk said it's been a natural way to connect with her community in a low-pressure setting.

Lifting up Nicaragua one project at a time

by SVJETLANA MLINAREVIC

Local resident Deo Imani traveled to Nicaragua on behalf of an non-governmental organization to see the success of a pilot project aimed at gender equality, education, and Indigenous protections.

Working under the Fund for Innovation and Transformation (FIT) Imani saw the results of an NGO working in the area under FIT funding.

"Our program is about supporting Canadian organizations and those organizations do work with local partners around the world where they implement pilot projects in different sectors - it could be health, it could be education, and so on," he said.

Imani is the program officer for monitoring, evaluation, and learning with FIT. He went to Nicaragua to assess the work of Edmonton-based Change for Children, whose project was funded by FIT.

Change for Children works in developing nations with local NGOs on issues of poverty and solutions to ending that poverty.

FIT is a program of the Inter-Council Network of Provincial and Regional Councils made possible through funding from Global Affairs Canada and administered by the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation.

FIT is designed to support Canadian small and medium-sized organizations who working to advance gender equality in the Southern Hemisphere. Successful applicants are provided with \$150,000 to \$175,000 over a six to 12 month period to test pilot programs in partnership with local organizations.

"Working with NGOs that empower women and girls and addresses gender equality is rewarding not only in terms of promoting social justice and inclusiveness for all, but also it also gives me the privilege to contribute to improving the livelihood of individuals regardless of their location and culture. Working in the international development sector (with International NGOs) means being both an actor and witness of a positive change across the

world," said Imani.

FIT was in Nicaragua from February 15 to March 3 visiting five villages in the Bosawas region.

When it came to gender equality, Change for Children worked with its local partner to increase the awareness of female rights. One of the ways this was done was to lighten the workload of women when it came to the processing of rice.

Traditionally, women would pound the rice to get the husks off and prepare it for consumption, but the NGOs were able to get a rice processing machine that took away that labour. This gave women the opportunity to use their free time to perform other duties.

The NGOs would also teach traditional medical practitioners about gender issues to take into consideration the needs of women. Since some women were traditional medicine practitioners, and would go into the jungle to collect the plants they need for their remedies. Since this is a dangerous practice due to illegal land encroachment, the NGOs have encouraged them to plant a garden instead with those medicinal plants.

Another example of gender equality involves the schools where traditionally the girls were required to stay after school to clean the school, now the boys are required to help also.

Another aspect of the project was funding for educational technology, traditional medicine, and the use of technology for land defense mapping out indigenous territory.

Since the communities Change for Children work in are located in the jungle, with no electricity and running water, the focus on education technology required the installation of solar panels at four schools to power computers. The computers gave teachers and students access to an offline digital library with a dictionary in the Miskito language, which could be used for translation of Spanish or an increase in traditional vocabulary.

"The have all the materials related to gender equality, related to education, related to cost planning exercises, textbooks, video, audio. It will be basically an e-library," said Imani.



Deo Imani, center in the grey shirt, watches as a local NGO demonstrates the towns that will be visited in the Bosawas region of Nicaragua.

"The goal is to empower, uplift, the education system within that community. The impact is great because now they can compete with other students across the country. They used to be so behind because of the fact that in their community they have less (access to educational) materials."

Imani said the drop-out rate for the schools fell as a result of the digital library. Children enjoy using the computers and it keeps them motivated.

"They're very keen to come to school since they know, okay we're gonna learn computer and actually they perform better."

The project also gave students, teachers, and forest rangers the technology to map the Indigenous territory to prevent illegal encroachment on their land.

"The goal of our visit was to trust what (Change for Children) submitted as a proposal whether it was successful or not...The project was really successful In terms of empowering educational knowledge of teachers and at the same time as a ripple effect it will support to uplift the quality of education for young

children," said Imani.

"People in Manitoba should be proud of seeing that Manitoba is not limited to Manitoba. It can also support indigenous communities outside of the country. And indigenous communities with Nicaragua

can connect with indigenous communities in Canada....Having this partnership - having this notion of a Global Village - it's something important."

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice of dust control program

Homeowners along gravel provincial roads and main market roads in unorganized territories may apply to have dust control applied in front of their homesites at a cost of \$200 for a single application.

The formal application is available from your local Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure office. The deadline for these applications will be **no later than June 2, 2023.**

For more information, please contact one of the following Transportation and Infrastructure offices:

Steinbach	204-346-6266	Brandon	204-726-6800
Swan River	204-677-6540	Dauphin	204-622-2061

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