



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Telling Tales 2024: Leading the Way in Accessibility and Inclusive Programming

**Hamilton, ON – September 3rd, 2024** – Join us for the 16th Annual Telling Tales Festival, taking place on September 21st and 22nd at Hendrie Park in Royal Botanical Gardens' Hendrie Park. At the Telling Tales Festival, we believe that every child and family should have the opportunity to experience the magic of storytelling. Our 2024 Festival is designed with a strong focus on accessibility and inclusivity. This year, we are stepping up our commitment to accessibility and inclusion with a spotlight on our pioneering Inclusive Tales project, a Festival layout redesigned with families in mind, and the increased availability of ASL interpretation for programming presentations.

**Enhanced Physical Accessibility:** The Royal Botanical Gardens will host Telling Tales with AODA accessible pathways, presentation spaces, and amenities. Enhanced clear signage indicates wheelchair/stroller-accessible routes to ensure that attendees of all abilities can comfortably navigate the event. This year, we have re-imagined the Festival so that programming tents are organized by age, so cut down the rush between tents! All presentations, autographing areas, and exhibitor areas are within a two-minute walk from each other to ensure that everyone is able to reach their destination. We understand that inclusivity is an ongoing journey, and we hope every year to improve accessibility and ensure that all key locations are easy to reach.

**ASL Interpretation:** We are grateful for the support of [Silent Voice Canada](#) and Undivided Productions, who will be providing ASL interpretation services for the Headliner Presentation on the [Main Stage](#), the [Early Reader Tent](#), and the [Preteen Tent](#) on Sunday, September 22nd. In future years, we hope to continue to expand ASL coverage to the whole Festival. "It is crucial to improve ASL accessibility at events like the Telling Tales Festival to ensure inclusivity and equal participation for the Deaf community. By doing so, we're enhancing the festival experience and promoting a culture of understanding and respect," shares Silent Voice Community Liaison Gayathri Samaroo.

**Language Inclusion:** We are thrilled to be offering programming in both of Canada's official languages as we approach Franco-Ontarian Day on September 25th, in partnership with [Centre francophone de Hamilton](#). This year, our Book Swap & Shop will be offering a dedicated area for French-language titles so that Francophone families can browse to their hearts' content!

**Maternity, Quiet and Sensory-Friendly Areas:** Understanding the diverse sensory needs of our attendees, we have created designated Sensory-Friendly zones throughout the Festival. These areas, marked clearly on the map in our [Festival Guide](#) and onsite with signage, offer a peaceful environment for those who need a break from the bustling crowds. Children can enjoy presentations from an adjacent Quiet Area with drawing and sensory toys next to each Programming Tent. We are also pleased to offer a separate quiet tent for Baby Changing and Nursing .

**Inclusive Tales Project:** This year, we are thrilled to highlight our Inclusive Tales Research Project. In partnership with [Hamilton Public Library](#) and a registered Occupational Therapist, this initiative focuses on creating inclusive and multi-sensory activities tailored for neurodivergent children. We know that listening doesn't look the same for everyone! Instead of a storytime where children are

asked to sit still and listen, Inclusive Tales aims to create a “yes” space where children are invited to listen and learn while moving their bodies and using their hands. During our Inclusive Tales pilot project in the spring of 2024, this took the form of gross motor activities, sorting activities, musical instrumentation, colouring, and other imaginative play.

Inclusive Tales’ spring pilot presentations for ages 0-13+, included: illustrator **Nadia Alam** (*The Wishing Machine*) ages 0-6, and authors **Kate Jenks Landry** (*Beatrice and Barb*), **Wai Mei Wong** (*I Love Myself*), **Farah Qaiser** (*Khadija and the Elephant Toothpaste Experiment*), **Jessica Rose** (*Let’s Get Creative: Art for a Healthy Planet*) and **Vikki VanSickle** (*The Lightning Circle*). All of these authors will be bringing these exciting workshops to the Festival on September 21st and 22nd!

Emily Downs, the Occupational Therapist who consults on Inclusive Tales, shared the following: “As an OT my part in the Inclusive Tales project is to recommend ways of setting up spaces and activities during storytime to be fun for everyone. I help with “knowledge translation,” which means taking a bunch of research and theories and using my clinical experience and training to explain them.” Emily also shared, “everyone has access needs. Some people can participate even if their access needs aren’t met-it just won’t be as easy or as fun. Other people can’t participate if their access needs aren’t met. Participation is a human right. Accessibility makes participation possible for more people and better for everyone.”

Telling Tales is grateful to be able to provide free, accessible programming thanks to generous sponsors, like the [TD Bank Group](#). “TD is proud to be a returning sponsor of Telling Tales Festival,” says John Metti, District Vice President, Hamilton North/Burlington, at TD. “Through the Financial Security driver of the TD Ready Commitment, our corporate citizenship platform, we are investing in early learning programs that help children advance their reading skills, all while allowing them to experience diverse Canadian children’s authors and stories that reflect the communities we serve.”

We invite families, educators, and book enthusiasts to join us for a festival that celebrates not only the love of reading but also our commitment to accessibility and inclusion. Together, we can create an event where every participant feels welcomed and engaged.






For detailed information about Telling Tales’ 16th season of programming, events, and opportunities to donate, visit [tellingtales.org](http://tellingtales.org)

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Telling Tales is a Canadian Registered Charity committed to delivering outstanding literary programming for children and youth that raises awareness of the importance of literacy in our communities. Telling Tales season is co-hosted by Hamilton Public Library, Rotary Clubs of Burlington and Hamilton, and Royal Botanical Gardens. [Full list of supporters](#).

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