

## Check Against Delivery

### **The Art of Autism October 16, 2014, Edmonton Honourable Heather Klimchuk, Minister, Human Services**

I am delighted to join you all to celebrate our artists tonight.

I want to start by thanking the Glenrose Rehabilitation Foundation and the Autism Society of Edmonton Area for organizing this event.

These two organizations help keep families affected by autism connected and supported.

Over the years professional caring staff and parents have built a vital support network for families in the Edmonton area.

I would also like to thank all of you for coming tonight.

Your participation shows your commitment to inclusion for Albertans with autism.

But I think we all know who the night truly belongs to the artists.

I can imagine the excitement, the nervousness and the pride you must be feeling.

On behalf of the Government of Alberta I thank you for your work.

Last week I got to read about two of our artists in the *Edmonton Journal*... Roma Kurtz' sons Ben... a photographer...and Grant...a painter.

I was eager to meet them tonight because their story was so powerful.

Roma told reporter Elizabeth Withey that her sons have new goals.

And the reporter described art as...“creating something beautiful that doesn't need to be corrected or changed.”

That really spoke to me on a personal level...because it has been my experience as well.

For many years I have pursued my passion for Ukrainian dance by helping local groups.

Having dance in my life taught me another way to see the world.

I saw that story could be shared through feeling...through history...through beauty.

I gained an even deeper understanding of the arts while serving as Minister of Culture.

I had the honour of meeting many Alberta artists...just like all of you in this room tonight.

I realized art is something very different than what we see on the TV screen.

Art is about feeling.

It is about people.

And it is about sharing our stories as Albertans.

That's why I am delighted to be here tonight.

You too are telling your stories.

You are inspiring others to have conversations.

In the Ministry of Human Services we believe that is what builds a better society.

In 2012 Human Services spoke with over 31,000 Albertans across the province about creating a Social Policy Framework.

As part of creating the framework Albertans developed a vision...that everyone contributes to making our communities inclusive and welcoming.

The framework is about reducing inequality...protecting vulnerable people...and creating a person-centred system of high-quality services.

This Social Policy Framework...shaped by Albertans...will guide decision-making in our Ministry going forward.

And...with respect to people with disabilities... inclusion will be key.

One way we're doing this right now is through the Employment First Strategy.

This strategy is focused on engaging partners like employers and people with disabilities.

It's about helping people with disabilities to enter the workforce.

The \$2 million Employment First Innovation Fund has been created to try promising new ideas to employ more Albertans with disabilities.

The Employment First Strategy also created 20 new paid internships within the Alberta Public Service.

This means new chances for adults to show their skills and to realize their full potential.

But it's only one step.

We need to continue to collaborate...and to have conversations.

Together we will build the society we envision in the Social Policy Framework.

As an example of what I mean...I encourage you to take a walk through the Alberta Legislature pedway.

There you'll find a permanent sculpture called "A Meaningful Life."

It was unveiled this summer...and is a collaboration between 24 different artists in Alberta.

It's all about how having a disability shapes a person's life.

I am mentioning this because it's another example of how powerful the arts are in telling our personal stories.

Art helps us to go beyond words...to express what we truly mean.

To the Glenrose Rehabilitation Foundation the Autism Society of Edmonton Area...and all of the parents and caregivers here today... congratulations.

Let's continue to work together.

To the artists...on behalf of the Government of Alberta...I thank you.

Please enjoy this night as a celebration of your achievement.

I look forward to seeing more of your work...and I wish you continued success as artists.

Thank you.