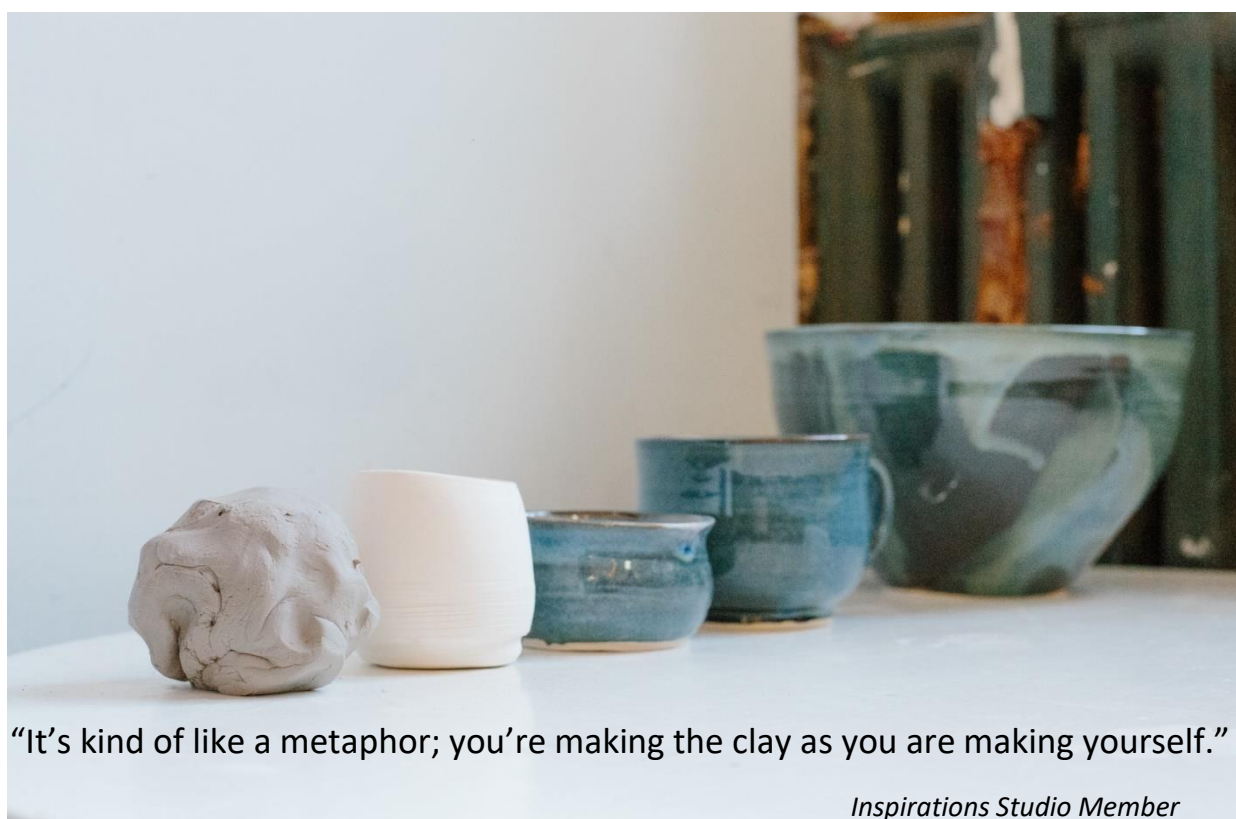


Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget (2021)

By: Inspirations Studio



“It’s kind of like a metaphor; you’re making the clay as you are making yourself.”

Inspirations Studio Member



2480 Dundas Street West
Toronto, ON M6P 1W9
416-367-2728

hello@inspirationsstudio.org
@inspiredpottery

Recommendations

- RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Government of Canada provide financial supports to social enterprises run by and for women.
- RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Government of Canada provide funding in the amount of \$375,000.00, over five years, for the Inspirations Studio program.

Submission

1.0 SUMMARY

Inspirations Studio requests \$75,000.00 per year for five years (for total of \$375,000.00) to help support the economic stability and health and well-being of women impacted by poverty, trauma, homelessness, and mental/physical health and addiction issues in the City of Toronto.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 About Inspirations Studio

Inspirations Studio is a unique ceramics-based program that supports marginalized women impacted by poverty, trauma, homelessness, mental/physical health and addiction issues. The Studio's core mission is to facilitate improvements in women's lives through the making and selling of pottery. Through training, skills-building and creative practice, women gain a sense of self-confidence, dignity and stability, connection with community, earn supplemental income, and engage with the world in a new way, as artisans and entrepreneurs. The Studio is both a pottery workshop and storefront run by and for women. It is in its 26th year of operation.

Inspirations Studio is an unincorporated collective that is a non-profit social enterprise. It is under the Mentorship and Trustee Program of The Neighbourhood Group (TNG), a multi-service charity and United Way Greater Toronto agency that delivers services to thousands of people each year. TNG works with individuals and communities to identify, prevent and alleviate social and economic inequality by creating and providing a range of effective and innovative programs and services. As part of its mission, TNG trustees and mentors many unincorporated initiatives that increase the capacity of communities to address and solve a number of social issues.

2.2 How the Program Works

The program works at three levels:

- Women who qualify for the program are offered a free eight-week course, covering the basics of pottery making (wheel throwing, hand building, glazing and design).
- When women complete the course, they can apply to join the program as members. With continued support from professional potters and staff, members have free access to the studio space for up to 12 hours a week and opportunities to sell their work in the Studio's storefront. Members are responsible for all aspects of their own work as well as helping to run and maintain the studio space, paying for their clay, pricing their work, and acting as peer mentors to new participants.
- The Studio offers a range of staff and peer co-taught workshops for social service agencies in Toronto.

To support its core work with marginalized women, Inspirations Studio also:

- Runs classes and workshops for the public, which raise awareness and help fund the program;
- Operates a storefront, helping the members sell their pottery on commission (80% of each sale goes to the member whose piece sold, while the remaining 20% goes to the Studio to fund its operations); and
- Welcomes special orders and collaborations.

2.3 Program Details

The program has been operating on a budget of approximately \$175,000.00 per year. This covers staffing costs for one full-time studio coordinator and three part-time pottery instructors. It also covers the rent, utilities and maintenance costs required to house the program in a 650 square foot space (both studio space and storefront), as well as supplies and equipment, marketing and promotion, and office expenses. With this budget, Inspirations Studio is able to serve 30 members weekly and deliver classes and workshops to approximately 200 people each year.

The revenue sources for Inspirations Studio in 2019-2020 were donations, grants, class and workshop fees, and commission from the sales of members' pottery. Like many social service agencies, Inspirations Studio faces serious funding challenges. Reductions in program funding at both the municipal and provincial government level, and difficulty in securing donations as a result of COVID-19, have affected the ability of the Studio to access sustainable, long-term revenue sources. Additionally, as the program is an unincorporated non-profit social enterprise, it often falls between granting categories¹. And while it has extensive community support, the Studio is not able to rely exclusively on the donations it receives or the fees and commissions it generates.

2.4 Program Results

Through its 26 years of operation, Inspirations Studio has supported hundreds of women precariously housed and impacted by mental health issues in the City of Toronto. The program has improved and continues to improve the economic security and health and well-being of marginalized women.

Women from various backgrounds and identities have walked through the doors of Inspirations Studio to learn how to make pottery in a safe, supportive, and transformational work environment. The Studio members have contributed unique ceramic objects to the community, reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues, one piece of pottery at a time.

¹ The most recent example includes being ineligible for government COVID-19 relief funds.

The program has achieved tangible and lasting results by focusing on three key elements:

- **Creative Practice:** At Inspirations Studio, creative practice is the means through which women achieve stability, connect with community and transition towards more sustainable economic circumstances. Pottery is a great teacher. It takes time and dedication to develop this skill to the point where a ball of clay is transformed into a beautiful object that has market value.
- **Community:** At its core, Inspirations Studio is a community of like-minded artists and entrepreneurs. Its members have often been excluded from traditional forms of community, and their involvement in the Studio creates a break from isolation, a sense of purpose, and a place to go during the day.
- **Supplemental Income:** Beyond improving the emotional and mental well-being of its members, Inspirations Studio has an entrepreneurial spirit. The Studio provides the opportunity to earn supplemental income generated through sales in the shop and commissions.

Inspirations Studio is a unique program, unlike any other in Canada.

3.0 RATIONALE

The Government of Canada has made supporting women and advancing gender equality one of its key priorities. It recognizes the important link between creating more opportunities for women and advancing women's economic and social empowerment, security and prosperity.

The Studio supports populations who, due to their intersecting identities of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability and mental health status, often have difficulty in finding and retaining permanent or temporary employment. Many of the women served by the program have come through the shelter and mental health care system, and rely on provincial income support programs² to meet their basic needs. Some of the women in the program, due to their experiences with poverty, trauma and homelessness, may never be in a position to participate in traditional forms of employment experiences.

Social enterprises are a labour market model that recognize the need for alternative and non-traditional employment opportunities for marginalized women who often are not able to compete in traditional work environments. Inspirations Studio is one such model which provides marginalized women with the opportunities, resources and supports needed to participate in the economy as artists and entrepreneurs, and helps provide vulnerable women with a sense of economic and social empowerment.

Inspirations Studio is well aware of the exclusion that marginalized women face in the traditional economy. For example, Studio members are often excluded from public spaces offered to artistic entrepreneurs to make and sell their craft because they lack financial resources. Spaces are typically occupied by those who have access to the capital required to

² Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works Program.

pay for such spaces. With few exceptions, little to no space is offered at a discount to marginalized artists. Without access to financial resources, Studio members are disadvantaged vis-à-vis non-marginalized women. This affects not only their economic prosperity, but also their health, well-being and recovery. The Studio's experience has shown that when marginalized women are given an equal opportunity to participate as artists and entrepreneurs, with the appropriate resources, programs and supports in place, they feel a sense of economic and social empowerment.

As reported by numerous government and non-government entities, COVID-19 has had and continues to have a disproportionate impact on women. The pandemic has pushed women into greater poverty, has increased the precarity of housing situations and has increased reported rates of domestic violence. Due to the stresses that the pandemic has placed on women's mental health and domestic safety and stability, Inspirations Studio is in even higher demand to help the most vulnerable get back on their feet, and connect to independent income.

With the economic changes happening this year, the Studio's already long waiting list is growing. However, its current location is too small to offer the program in its current form while respecting COVID-19 distancing and safety guidelines. The organization is now faced with the difficult decision of having to find a new larger space to continue this important program. This was always on the horizon, but now it is urgent.

There are numerous services in Toronto that help marginalized women stabilize their lives, including managing their mental health, finding a home and ensuring access to basic services. However, meeting the basic necessities of life to survive is not enough. The opportunity to become a potter who sells ceramics to the public is a way to give meaning, connection, purpose, and most of all, a sense of identity to marginalized women. Inspirations Studio is a place where women flourish while battling mental illness, poverty and trauma. One member said it so beautifully, "I am not just someone with a disability, I am not my mental illness, now I can say I am a potter."

3.0 FUNDING REQUEST

Inspirations Studio requests \$75,000.00 per year for five years (for a total of \$375,000.00), starting in fiscal year 2021-2022, to allow the program to expand to a new location and continue to serve and support more marginalized women in Toronto. This funding would also allow Inspirations Studio to become an independent non-profit organization and to create a long-term sustainability plan. This amount includes the hiring of one additional part-time employee (Program Manager), the difference in rent and utility costs of relocating to a new space, the purchase of new equipment to meet demand, and related administrative costs.

The proposed budget is as follows:

Activity	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Salary – Program Manager	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$35,000
Rent	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000
Utilities and Maintenance	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$12,000
Equipment	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Office and Administration Expenses	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000
TOTAL	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000