



THE EVOLUTION OF THE CULTURAL ACCESS PASS

Over its short existence, more than 40,000 new Canadians have experienced the joys of the Cultural Access Pass (CAP) program.

It's amazing how the simplest ideas can have the most impact ...

Just over four years ago, Mary Cone Barrie, former director of the University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies and late wife of CBC Radio host Andy Barrie, had an idea to use the wonders of the arts to engage new Canadians.

She shared her idea with Susan Bloch-Nevitte, then executive director of public affairs for the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), who instantly knew Mary's idea was key to helping the AGO become more accessible and attract a more diverse audience.

Their work started with an initial program – called Citizen AGO – offering free access to the AGO for one year to new citizens sworn in at one of Toronto's citizenship offices. The Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC) became involved shortly thereafter to explore ways to expand the scope and scale of what proved to be a popular idea.

Believe it or not, at that time (and still today) there were few programs targeted to new citizens. Hundreds of very important programs exist for newcomers (those who are newly arrived to Canada), but there is little offered to support people who've made Canada their official home.

This is where the Cultural Access Pass comes in...

For new citizens, the Cultural Access Pass opens doors to welcome them into Canada's cultural communities. Launched by the ICC in 2008, the expanded program started with complimentary access to the following six institutions for one year: Art Gallery of Ontario, the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Ontario Science Centre, Royal Ontario Museum and the Textile Museum. The concept quickly caught on, and within months, more attractions had joined the program.

Today, the CAP program offers complimentary admission to more than 1,000 attractions across the country – from museums to galleries, discovery centres, historic sites, monuments and even Canada's national and provincial parks. New citizens can use their Cultural Access Pass to explore Canada from coast to coast: a new citizen from Toronto can visit the Vancouver Art Gallery or Banff National Park, while a new citizen from Edmonton can visit Pier 21 in Halifax or Saguenay St. Lawrence Marine Park.

The ICC continues to work to expand the program to include more and different types of cultural experiences.

As Mary so aptly said, "People [new Canadian citizens] who have made this kind of commitment deserve a reward. It has been a sheer joy to shake their hands and offer them this gift. Many of them come from parts of the world where there is a tremendous respect for art treasures and this really means something to them."

