Heart Lake Records created the following *Project Field Notes* in 2026 as part of their Balancing Act Level UP! Pilot Project.

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THE FAMILY RESIDENCY PILOT

Heart Lake Records Inc., Caledon, Ontario

Project Focus

The Family Residency Pilot is an artist residency model that supports artists with caregiving responsibilities by integrating family presence into the creative process. It provides accessible space, time, and financial support for artists who are often excluded from traditional residencies due to childcare, disability, or cultural caregiving roles. The project fosters sustainable creative practice while supporting intergenerational connection and cultural continuity.

Project Inspiration

This project was inspired by the recognition that many artists are unable to access traditional residency opportunities because they have caregiving responsibilities. Existing models often assume that artists can leave their children or support systems behind. We wanted to explore what it would look like to create a residency that reflects the lived realities of artists with families and allows creative work to happen within those conditions.

Continuing to Implement?

Yes, we intend to continue implementing this model. The pilot demonstrated that a family-inclusive residency can be delivered in a meaningful and manageable way. With the completion of a dedicated first-floor residency space, we anticipate being able to host artists beyond our personal networks and expand access to this type of support.

Planning and Implementation

Planning for this pilot began in June 2025. At that time, we intended to host the residency in a self-contained first-floor apartment within our home that was being renovated to serve as a dedicated residency space.

Unexpected renovation challenges meant that the unit would not be ready in time. Rather than postponing the project, we adapted the residency structure and hosted the artist caregiver and

her child within the main home in the guest room. Because this was a pilot and we had an existing relationship with the artist, this arrangement felt appropriate and allowed us to proceed.

The residency included Garden, a Vaughan-based emerging musician and visual artist, and her daughter Marcy. They participated alongside the hosts (Leilani and Sun Sun), who provided mentorship and technical support throughout the residency.

The residency took place February 6th, 2026 and lasted for two nights.

The Family Residency was structured around providing both practical support and creative access in a shared, family-inclusive environment. Accommodation was provided on-site so that Garden and her daughter Marcy could remain together throughout the residency. A flexible childcare stipend was also provided, allowing Garden to determine how best to support her caregiving needs during her stay. Hospitality was prioritized, with three meals per day and snacks provided to reduce logistical pressures and allow Garden to focus on creative work.

In addition to accommodation and food support, the residency offered access to a fully equipped craft room that included printers, a t-shirt heat press, a button maker, and a range of art supplies. Garden also had access to musical instruments such as guitar, kalimba, bass, and drums, as well as recording tools that enabled her to develop demo material.

Marcy participated in the residency through shared creative time alongside her mother. She engaged in art-making while listening to music and explored sound through playful experimentation with instruments such as the xylophone. These moments emerged organically within the residency environment and supported a collaborative, intergenerational creative atmosphere.

This combination of domestic stability and creative infrastructure allowed artistic work to take place in a way that integrated family life rather than requiring separation from it.

Traditional residency models often assume artists can disengage from caregiving responsibilities for a period of time. This assumption excludes many artists, particularly those parenting young children.

This pilot explored an alternative structure that allows artistic work to take place without requiring separation from family life.

Costs/Financial Considerations

Garden received a childcare stipend of $500, which was intended to support caregiving needs in a flexible way rather than being tied to formal childcare services, as well as $200 for travel to use for gas money or Uber drives to and from the residency. This approach aligns with the understanding that caregiving support can take many forms and does not always require

separation-based care. In Ontario, private childcare often ranges between $20 and $30 per hour, so providing a stipend allowed the artist to determine how best to meet her family's needs during the residency.

Hospitality was also a core component of support. Three meals per day and snacks were provided for both Garden and Marcy throughout the two-day residency. Additional modest costs included art supplies and materials used for merchandise production.

Overall, this pilot two-day residency budget was $500 for caregiving support, $350 for food, $100 for materials, and $200 for travel (gas/Uber), bringing the estimated total cost of a two-day family residency to approximately $1150.

Key Conversations

To let people know about the Family Residency opportunity, we used a combination of email and direct conversations. We reached out via email to multiple artist-caregivers within our existing networks, providing information about the residency, its structure, and the supports available, including accommodation, childcare stipends, meals, and access to creative tools. In addition, follow-up conversations helped clarify any questions and allowed potential participants to discuss their needs directly, ensuring that the residency could be tailored to support both creative work and caregiving responsibilities.

Sustainability

The pilot demonstrated that a family-inclusive residency is both feasible and meaningful, but sustainability will require intentional planning and resources. Hosting artists and their children within our domestic space worked for this early-stage pilot because of our personal relationship with the participant, but for future iterations, dedicated private infrastructure will be necessary to ensure the model can scale and accommodate artists beyond our immediate networks. Sustainability will require completing the dedicated first-floor residency unit that provides privacy and a self-contained living space for artists and their families while maintaining proximity to creative resources such as craft rooms, instruments, and recording equipment.

To make this type of residency a regular part of our seasonal planning, several elements need to be formalized. Budgeting must account for childcare stipends, meals, art materials, and modest artist honoraria. Scheduling should be flexible to accommodate both creative production and caregiving routines, allowing residents to structure their days around family needs. Contracting or agreements with participants will clarify expectations for the use of space, creative resources, and shared areas, while communications will be necessary to ensure outreach to potential participants is consistent, clear, and inclusive. By attending to these operational considerations, the residency model can move from a pilot phase into a replicable program that supports a broader range of artists with families.

Considerations for ‘Next Time’

For future iterations, several adjustments could strengthen both the participant experience and operational efficiency. A dedicated first-floor unit will provide privacy for the artist and family, which will reduce reliance on pre-existing relationships and allow artists who are not personally known to participate comfortably. Longer residency durations could allow deeper creative exploration and more substantial skill-building. Formalizing documentation and reflection processes will help capture learning outcomes, skill development, and family engagement in a way that informs future programming.

The pilot confirmed both the demand and the value of residencies that integrate caregiving with creative production, and we plan to continue implementing this model with the improvements outlined above. Future iterations will build on lessons learned, expanding the reach and impact of family-inclusive residencies while maintaining the core principles of flexibility, accessibility, and intergenerational creativity.

Other Thoughts

For organizations considering a family-inclusive residency model, the most important advice is to start with flexibility and care at the center of your planning. This type of residency works best when logistical and creative support are integrated in a way that acknowledges the realities of caregiving, rather than trying to separate it from artistic work. Providing access to safe accommodation, meals, childcare support, and creative resources allows artists to focus on producing work without added stress, and flexibility in scheduling helps accommodate the unpredictable rhythms of family life.

It is also valuable to consider intergenerational participation as a strength rather than a complication. Children can engage meaningfully in creative exploration alongside the artist, contributing to a collaborative and enriching atmosphere. Simple interventions, such as art supplies, instruments, and shared listening to music, can create opportunities for exploration and connection that benefit both the artist and the child.

Finally, beginning with a small-scale pilot allows organizations to experiment, learn, and refine the model before scaling up. Even a two-day residency can provide meaningful outcomes, clarify logistical needs, and demonstrate the viability of integrating family and creativity. Clear communication with participants, flexible budgeting, and attention to both creative and caregiving needs are key elements for success.