



Transforming Communities Through the Arts:

A Study of Three Toronto Neighbourhoods

Margo Charlton with Deborah Barndt,
Katherine Dennis, and Rosemary Donegan

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TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE ARTS

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Toronto Arts Foundation

Toronto Arts Foundation's vision, *Creative City: Block by Block*,¹ is to connect every Toronto neighbourhood with the transformative social and economic benefits of the arts.

Since 2007, Toronto Arts Foundation has been applying research and corresponding initiatives to support this vision; identifying and building capacity in areas of the city that will benefit from increased arts activity.

Toronto Arts Foundation initiatives include the Neighbourhood Arts Network, North York Arts, East York Arts, Toronto Arts Foundation Awards and Toronto Arts Research.

In 2011, the Toronto Arts Foundation received funding from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to lead a partnership development grant with Art Starts, OCAD University and York University. The team explored academic-community partnering, trained student researchers, tested research tools, explored community-based research methodology, and created reports and a research website.

The insights and suggestions brought forward in this report will build on previous research findings and be used by the Toronto Arts Foundation and the Toronto Arts Council to inform future policy and funding decisions.

Research Partners

At York University, the faculty of Environmental Studies and the Faculty of Fine Arts have cooperated in the development of the Community Arts Practice (CAP) certificate program. CAP has made significant contributions to the training of community arts practitioners and the study of the field. OCAD's growing interest in community arts combined with their examination of public engagement in the arts

¹ www.torontoartsfoundation.org/Our-Programs/Block-by-Block

CHAPTER ONE

Research Overview

Neighbourhoods are filled with creative energy! From local festivals bringing people into the streets and parks, to art classes for children and knitting circles for adults; from showcases highlighting fashion design and urban dance, to community gardens festooned with colourful fences, to graffiti artists using buildings as canvases; from people meeting up to make music together, to individuals quietly working on their calligraphy; from plans to open cultural hubs to enterprising people finding a way to sell their art – there is no shortage of vibrant expression in the communities we researched. The question is rather how the work can be supported and encouraged and how residents can become more in touch with the creative potential of their neighbourhoods.

From June 2011 to July 2013, the research team conducted a research study to explore arts involvement and the impact of arts in three neighbourhoods in Toronto.

The goals of the study were to:

- ▲ gain a better understanding of how residents engage with the arts at a community level;
- ▲ explore barriers to arts access; and
- ▲ identify ways to strengthen local arts engagement.

Working with community organizations and community liaison workers, 17 researchers made 300 connections and conducted focus groups, interviews and surveys with close to 200 residents, artists, arts groups and social service organizations working and living in three communities: Malvern, St. James Town and Weston Mt. Dennis.

Selecting Research Neighbourhoods

The research teams were presented with three different city regions in inner-suburban² and downtown locations. The objective was to study neighbourhoods from contrasting areas of the city to examine differences and similarities in their engagement with the arts. Each team was given three neighbourhoods within each region and asked to conduct an initial scan of community history and assets. After researching and visiting the three locations, one neighbourhood from each region was selected to be the focus of the study.

Some of the questions, initial observations and concerns raised early in this exploratory process were echoed in the interviews carried out later. For example, in Malvern initial observations raised the challenges of transportation in a car-focused culture. The research team was also immediately aware of the porous boundaries within the expansive suburban geography of Scarborough. In contrast, the downtown team visited their three neighbourhoods by bicycle, ultimately choosing St. James Town because of its unique history and current cultural diversity – a world within the city, exemplifying the city's official slogan, Diversity: Our Strength. The mid-town research team were drawn to the rich history of Weston Mount Dennis, noting that its town-like feel is a good example of why Toronto is commonly referred to as a city of neighbourhoods.

Before making contact with people from each neighbourhood, the research teams examined their initial reactions and observations through questions such as:

- ▲ How can we find what's under the surface?
- ▲ How is change possible when arts endeavours are funded for the short-term, and then fold up, when we know that social change is a long-term endeavour?

² Outlying neighbourhoods in Toronto are frequently referred to as inner-suburbs to distinguish them from the suburban municipalities that ring the city.

- ▲ What assumptions do we make when we look at a place/a neighbourhood? What signifiers and clues do we read and how are our individual readings culturally shaped by our own experiences?
- ▲ Some areas have received community development money and a number of community arts projects have been conducted. What happens after a project? How do projects move the neighbourhood forward?
- ▲ Is there a link between involvement in art projects and improved mental health/well being?
- ▲ How does knowledge/information move between communities and within neighbourhoods?
- ▲ Who gets to access arts programs? What is the cost involved in participating in arts programs?

These queries informed team discussions and shaped the research questions.

Planning

We chose a community-based research approach which strives to be community-situated, collaborative, and action-oriented (Reason and Bradbury). See Appendix One for information on the objectives and hallmarks of community-based research. Our process included:

- ▲ Consulting with the communities
- ▲ Getting input back from the communities
- ▲ Providing information on arts activities and resources to community contacts
- ▲ Hiring residents as community liaison workers
- ▲ Returning results to the communities
- ▲ Using the results to advocate for community-engaged arts

Once the team of researchers and community liaison workers from each neighbourhood was in place, a process of training and community outreach was started. The team

organized public meetings to announce the research project and to start our conversations with the community. Before launching into the field work we asked community members and organizations for feedback on how the research can contribute to local initiatives, and the best wording for surveys and interview questions. The interview questions were modified as a result of community input. See Appendix Two for more information on the research questions.

We encountered "healthy cynicism" about researching in areas that have been subjected to many studies. We were urged to find a better way of merging the academic/research world with the needs of people and to avoid taking people's experiences and stories without returning benefits to the community.

Field Work

The research team's job was to find out what arts activities are going on and who the local leaders are. They contacted key organizations and attended community meetings, gallery openings, museums, community dinners, libraries and bazaars to meet as many people as possible. In addition, the teams organized events to link local artists and arts groups to the Toronto Arts Foundation's Neighbourhood Arts Network and the grants programs of the Toronto Arts Council.

Through interviews, focus groups and surveys, we learned how people participate in the arts, what they consider arts activity, how new ideas and groups are emerging, why arts are important at a neighbourhood level, what barriers limit participation, and how community agencies are working with the arts. The research team met regularly to report on their work. Overall, the researchers noted the energy and dedication of the interviewees and the pride they have in their communities but also the frustration that results from working with insufficient resources.

The research team gathered basic demographic information about the interviewees and their positions in the community. The majority of respondents were neighbourhood residents. Research contacts were mainly adult and female. 22% identified as youth or young adults.³ Two thirds of the research participants were artists and/or representatives of community agencies or arts organizations.

³ Definitions of youth vary. ArtReach Toronto, a youth arts funding groups defines youth as 13 to 29 year olds; we didn't provide a definition of youth and respondents self identified.

TABLE 1: AGE OF RESPONDENTS

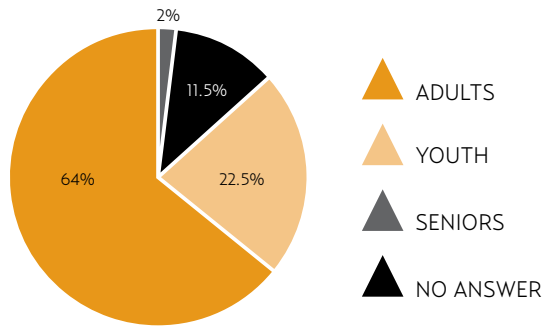


TABLE 2: GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

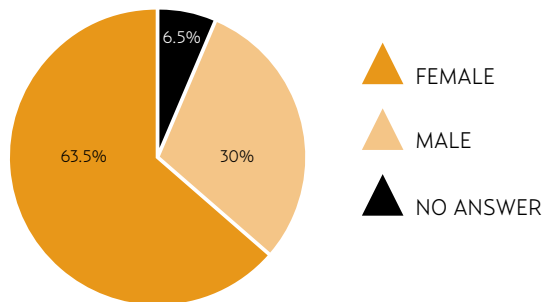
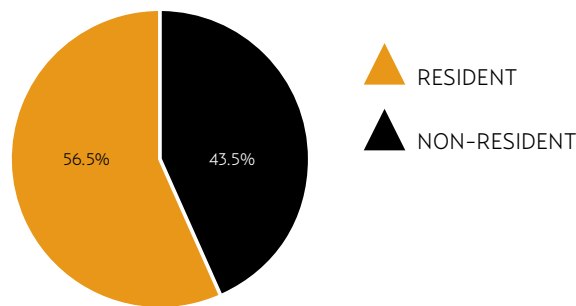


TABLE 3: RESIDENCY OF RESPONDENTS



Designing Research Tools

Our literature review identified a number of studies on the social and economic impacts of the arts in a national and international context, including comparisons and critiques of quantitative and qualitative research methodology. The impact of the arts on city economies through direct or indirect employment, the spin-offs of tourism, and the commercial benefits of cultural industries, have been well documented by proponents of the Creative City movement.⁴ Economic impact studies deliver impressive numbers.⁵ A more difficult task has been to capture the social value of the arts.

In 1997, François Matarasso delivered a groundbreaking work in the United Kingdom called *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*.⁶ Matarasso pioneered the use of surveying to capture personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment and self determination, local image and identity, imagination and vision, health and well-being. His study was championed by policy makers as a way to draw causality between the arts and social change and to champion community arts as a cost effective way to invest in communities. The time constraints of our research, a focus on training student researchers, and working in neighbourhoods with few established arts programs meant that any extensive surveying would be difficult. However, we were interested in how surveys are perceived by respondents and how to best word the surveys. We consulted with 20 people from community agencies and arts organizations working in the neighbourhoods on the wording of the questions. With this feedback we designed and collected 54 surveys filled out by interviewees at meetings and at public events. This provided us with the opportunity to test out the survey tool but the number was too small in relation to

⁴ Richard Florida's book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, directs attention to how cities can undergo a creative renaissance if the creative capacities of the population are nurtured. His view of creative cities revolves around economic growth stemming from: technology, talent and tolerance. According to Florida, places that have the 3T's have an economic advantage to harness the creative capabilities of a diverse population (Florida 1-26).

⁵ Toronto's ...creative sector is also big business, generating more than \$9 billion of Toronto's GDP. The broader cultural workforce ... currently employs 5% of the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area's workforce or more than 130,000 people. Creative occupations, a subset of the cultural workforce, are growing more than twice as quickly as the overall labour force. Creative industries are growing faster than financial services, the medical and biotechnology industries, and the food and beverage industry. (*Creative Capital Gains, An Action Plan for Toronto 8*).

The most comprehensive study on the contribution of the arts to the Canadian economy is *Valuing Culture: Measuring and Understanding Canada's Creative Economy*, published by the Conference Board of Canada in August 2008. The Conference Board estimates that the economic contribution of the cultural sector is \$46 billion annually, which represents 3.8% of the total GDP. <http://www.canadacouncil.ca/en/council/resources/arts-promotion/arts-promo-kit/part1>

⁶ The study looked at 60 projects in different contexts (rural, urban and suburban) in England. A questionnaire was given to participants to try to identify the following: personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment and self determination, local image and identity, imagination and vision, health and well-being. Questions asked for a No/Yes/Don't Know response. Results were tabulated providing percentages and statistics around indicators such as the ability to "reduce isolation by helping people to make friends; develop community networks and sociability; promote tolerance and contribute to conflict resolution; develop contact between generations; and provide a route to rehabilitation and integration for offenders" (Matarasso 27-37).

the community population size to provide significant data. We focused on gathering information through one-on-one interviews varying in length from 30 minutes to one hour, and focus groups varying in size from three to nine participants. In addition to interviews in the neighbourhoods we spoke with 11 representatives from funding organizations and arts groups that have a city-wide focus and held a focus group on the topic of support for newcomer artists. The focus group was attended by 9 people representing organizations from across the city. See Appendix Three for a breakdown of respondents by neighbourhood.

The questions used in the interviews and focus groups were divided into three main areas:

- ▲ Involvement and benefits of the arts
- ▲ Contribution of arts to local development
- ▲ Arts access

The diverse voices, rich stories and wealth of experiences shared in the interview process revealed ways that involvement in the arts has direct and indirect effects on the lives of neighbourhood residents and in turn on their families, neighbours and the community at large.

Analysis and Reporting

After the field work, the data was analyzed and coded for positive and negative attributes and to identify main themes. The interviews were scanned for a list of neighbourhood resources and a map created.

This report contains an introduction to the three research neighbourhoods and an overview of the larger socio-economic factors that affect them. In addition, there is a discussion of how the arts are perceived, what attracts residents to engage in arts activities, the impact of the arts on personal and neighbourhood well-being, an examination of the barriers to accessing the arts, and a vision of what can happen in Toronto's neighbourhoods if there are more resources for the arts.

We hope this research will assist residents, arts organizations and community groups in telling the story of the importance of arts in neighbourhoods and that the research findings will support efforts to strengthen arts engagement throughout the City of Toronto.

The research findings were returned to the communities via report launch events created with input and support from local arts organizations and artists. A condensed version of the report highlighting local organizations and community leaders is available as a 64 page booklet through the Toronto Public Libraries in the research neighbourhoods. A research website at www.torontoartsresearch.org houses this report, a summary version of the report, and a map of arts resources in the research neighbourhoods.

www.torontoartsresearch.org

CHAPTER TWO

The Research Neighbourhoods

The three research neighbourhoods are situated in downtown and outlying areas of the city. Although differing in appearance, the communities shared some commonalities and challenges. They are destinations for new immigrants, have high populations of children and youth, and because of socio-economic challenges have been targeted for community development initiatives.⁷ See Appendix Four for a demographic comparison of the research neighbourhoods.

MALVERN

Founded in 1857, Malvern Village has transformed into a suburban community in the most northeastern part of the city. The neighbourhood's grassy boulevards and tree-lined streets stand in contrast to the nearby multi-lane 401 highway. The Malvern Town Centre houses a shopping mall, and the area's social service organizations, community centre and library are close by. The neighbourhood has a number of parks and is close to Rouge Park, Canada's only urban national park. Compared to the rest of Toronto, Malvern has a much higher number of visible minorities and a higher number of recent immigrants, mainly from Southern Asia, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean.

ST. JAMES TOWN

Centrally located in downtown Toronto, St. James Town was first developed in the 1870s as a desirable upper middle-class neighbourhood and was transformed nearly 100 hundred years later into "Towers in the Park" style apartment buildings. The target population of middle-class professionals briefly lived there in the 50s and 60s before moving to the suburbs. Much of the neighbourhood green space has been lost and features such as swimming pools and tennis courts have been neglected. Less than a square

kilometre in size, the rental tower community is Canada's most densely populated neighbourhood with a high number of recent immigrants mainly from Southern Asia and Southeast Asia.

WESTON MOUNT DENNIS

The Weston Mt. Dennis area was first settled at the turn of the 19th century, initially as a farming community with farms later supplanted by industry. Bordering the Humber River and positioned along the rail corridor, this industrial-based town has faced hardships since the closing of manufacturing in the area, the last of which, the Kodak factory, closed in 2005. Over the last forty years this area has gone through a significant period of de-industrialization and economic crisis. It was once a thriving working class shopping area and evidence of this history remains visible in the number of stores on Weston Road. The neighbourhood retains some of the feeling of a small town, aided by active historical and conservation societies, but certain areas are visibly run down. More affluent homes along the river create a stark economic contrast for the residents living in apartment towers. Within the neighbourhood, 70 different languages are spoken. Located close to the airport, the area is a landing spot for newcomers, primarily from Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America.

⁷ Note: information about age is taken from 2011 census data; immigration and visible minority information is taken from 2006 census data.

Identification with the Neighbourhood

Involvement in art-making and attendance at cultural events were reported as ways that members of the research neighbourhoods felt a greater sense of belonging and connection to the community. In general, community connection was most strongly articulated by interviewees from Weston Mt. Dennis. In Malvern, interviewees identified as being from the region of Scarborough. St. James Town has a small geographic footprint and residents visit other areas to access shopping and services. It is a short walk to the intersection of Bloor and Yonge in the heart of downtown, and the thriving streetscape of Cabbagetown and the vast public housing revitalization project in Regent Park lie to the south. These factors might explain a somewhat lower sense of identification with the neighbourhood including less reference to the name of the neighbourhood during the interviews.

Interviewees spoke about the importance of having neighbourhood-focused events to bring people out and increase community pride. The cancellation or postponement of events such as the St. James Town Festival or Neighbours' Night Out in Mount Dennis was expressed as a loss of important connections and sense of belonging to the neighbourhood.

One Canadian study on belonging found that, on the whole, the feeling of connection to a local area is twice as strong as that of provincial or national belonging but that identification with an area does not "diminish or replace more encompassing social identities" (Helliwell, p. 9).

Our research discovered mixed reactions to questions about social/ethnic identities. Some interviewees and survey respondents did not want to answer the questions and some research team members were reluctant to ask the questions. Some interviewees linked their involvement in the arts to their ethnocultural background while others pointed out that arts programmers should consider a range of arts programs and not assume interest based solely on the ethnocultural make up or the age of the participants.

CHAPTER THREE

Local Art and Larger Issues

I like the community because it's not like going downtown and seeing a Starbucks on every corner. There is depth there. There is authenticity... When people think of Weston they strike it out and think that Weston is dangerous and high in crime... but I think in general if you were to go and talk to people at a park (I've done that) it's really nice. You meet really great people.

Laura Bolender

► artist and community arts facilitator, Weston Mt. Dennis

The evolution and growth of arts activity is subject to larger social and economic forces. Toronto is a city of three cities, says social work professor David Hulchanski in his report comparing Toronto of the 1970s and 2000s.⁸ City One includes the downtown core and subway corridors where higher income earners live while City Three is made up of the surrounding suburbs with the lowest income per family. City Two, primarily middle class, is perched uncomfortably between the two and is disappearing while the other two groups expand.

Hulchanski's report on income polarization calls for changes in public policies to address the

imbalances, and stresses the need for better transportation and tower renewal projects to improve housing stock in low income neighbourhoods. While these are needed improvements they do not address the deeper systemic inequalities.

Hulchanski's report does not address access to arts directly but the characteristics of City Three – lower education levels, higher crime rates and poor transportation resulting

in greater distance for residents to travel in order to get to work – all have an impact on the way in which cultural activities develop, the challenges faced by groups planning arts programming, and the barriers faced by residents wishing to access the arts.

Suburban Neighbourhoods

To talk about "sub-urban" imposes a city/non-city dichotomy; it invites comparison between the two and often not favourably for the suburbs. Outlying communities are seen to be at a disadvantage because they are not in the heart of the city but many interviewees emphasized things that make their neighbourhood unique, noting that local art projects add to the sense of place.

Suburban neighbourhoods have their own central locations and hubs but in the city landscape they are frequently seen as homogenous and unattractive areas. Historically suburbs are rooted in the North American utopian dream of the mid-20th century: neighbourhoods built to be an alternative to the chaos of downtown, a place to build a home, family and sense of belonging. Along the way the suburbs have lost their luster, as well as their place as a connector between rural and urban spaces. The promise of space bridging the city and the countryside has disappeared now that Toronto's suburbs brush up against other cities.

Suburbs are a space in-between, a place of transition, and an area experiencing change. Some city planners have suggested the term "in-between city" is more accurate than "suburb" and moves away from the binary of city/suburb. Today's suburbs face new criticism as difficult places to live – wide open, windy parking lots, poor public transportation, and a streetscape built to suit the needs of drivers more than pedestrians or cyclists. The suburbs are

⁸ <http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/hulchanski.html>

home to a growing number of new immigrants who need social services, places to gather, and programs for their families, including arts activities. But despite problems the suburbs have a burgeoning energy. New generations move in, make home and set up businesses. Community leaders emerge and work with residents to shape better communities to meet changing needs.⁹

In the 21st century, suburbs have a rich and varied cultural scene of formal and informal arts practices: community arts programs that reflect diverse populations, choirs, drumming circles, plays in many languages, music from around the world, dancing in parks, kite festivals, and multidisciplinary festivals like Scarborough Arts Bridging Festival that brings multiple communities and cultures together.¹⁰

Priority Neighbourhoods

The problems of City Three, including poor transportation, higher crime rates and lower incomes, influence all aspects of life including how residents access the arts. Weston Mt. Dennis and Malvern are City Three communities; in addition, they were designated as Priority Neighbourhoods by the City of Toronto and the United Way,¹¹ making them eligible for additional funding. St. James Town is an exception. Its density, high numbers of newcomers and low income renters make it comparable to City Three though geographically it is situated in prime downtown real estate. It also just missed being added to the Priority Neighbourhood list.

The Priority Neighbourhood designation has meant additional financial support for programs, the building of neighbourhood hubs, and a fair share of attention in neighbourhood studies and research. The concept of supporting a neighbourhood with challenges has merit

but it wasn't without glitches when put into practice. Some interviewees had mixed feelings about being singled out for assistance, calling the label both "elevating and destructive" because along with assistance comes negation of local assets and the arrival of "outsider" experts. This extended to the arts; interviewees shared examples of arts groups "sweeping into the community" with ideas for projects that would access Priority Neighbourhood funding. We realized that even the research interviewers themselves could be perceived in this way, and we remained very conscious of this dynamic.

The allocation of resources within the two Priority Neighbourhoods was seen by some as uneven, resulting in groups feeling left out. One resident noted the problem of connecting two distinct areas – Weston and Mount Dennis

– and labeling them as one. Others criticized the plan as not being tailored to local needs, describing the process as being too focused on "charts and logistics with deliverables" resulting in a "cookie cutter" community development approach. On the other hand, community development organizations reported that the Priority Neighbourhood

I remember phoning the city guy and I said, "Hi. I'm calling about this graffiti transformation grant - \$5000 for a mural." We were literally standing at the wall going, "God that looks ugly, what can we do to improve it?" He said: "Well... the grant money is for BIA projects." And I said: "We have a BIA. It just started 6 months ago." And he said, "Well it's more for community groups." I said, "We got that too!" And then he said, "Well it's Priority Neighbourhood initiative" and I went, "I'm from Mount Dennis." And then he said "Oh! Then I will talk to you." I thought, well I'm at the bottom of the list, this guy won't even talk to me... but as soon as I said the words "Mount Dennis," he completely changed. That's when using the Priority Neighbourhood designation helped.

Jean-Marie Boutot,

► Learning Enrichment Foundation,
Weston Mount Dennis

⁹ Introduction by Margo Charlton to *Art in the Suburbs* Panel Discussion at Neighbourhood Arts Network's Emergence Symposium, February 2012, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto. Notes based on: Richardson, Chris. "Defining Suburbs: Representation and Symbolic Violence Just Outside the City." *Public43: Art/Culture/Ideas*. Eds. Steven Logan, Janine Marchessault, Michael Prokopow. www.publicjournal.ca

¹⁰ <http://scarborougharts.com/bridge-festival-2012/>

¹¹ <http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com/whatWeDo/neighbourhoodsMap.php>

funding has opened doors and strengthened the neighbourhood including more funding for arts programs.

In answer to our question of whether or not art projects get imposed on the community, one artist noted that the new funding attracted "a mix of well-intentioned mediocre projects and fantastic projects." While artists bring a critical eye to the artistic form and content, many residents and representatives of community organizations were more focused on the outcome for the community. Where funding comes from, who leads the project, what is the project's legacy – are important points raised by the interviewees with differing points of view.

Fighting a Bad Reputation

Priority Neighbourhoods suffer the stigma of being seen as troubled areas. This is not surprising when we look at how the Priority Neighbourhoods were chosen. The initial list selected nine neighbourhoods but it expanded to thirteen when communities impacted by violence were added.¹²

Being labelled a Priority Neighbourhood affects the way residents feel about their home. Rapper Jason Strachan aka Jaek DeLarge says there are "a lot of things to stray you from the art ... there's a lot of things stripped away from Weston."

How the neighbourhood is viewed by outsiders has been linked to negative media images, particularly the coverage of crime events. Researcher April Lindgren mapped newspaper coverage of Toronto's high-needs neighbourhoods. Her research suggests that "in some cases this negative stereotyping can sap residents' willingness to become engaged in their 'loser' communities and reinforce the desire of those whose prospects do improve to move away as soon as possible."¹³ Members of a focus group at Scarborough Arts agreed that media articles such as "The Scarborough Curse"¹⁴ enforce the stereotype that residents live in "a bad neighbourhood."

When a neighbourhood develops a reputation as being crime-ridden, people from other areas are less likely to visit or want to move to the area and even residents are afraid to visit certain parts of the community. At times, low-income residents are called "troublemakers" and are blamed for making the community unsafe and giving it a bad reputation. Marlene McKintosh, Executive Director of Urban Arts, a youth arts organization serving Weston and Mount Dennis notes, "It's all about perceptions. Some community members won't go south of Lawrence because that's where the 'problems' take place."

According to the 2011 census figures, Malvern has one of the highest concentrations of youth in the city. Malvern, or "vern" as it is referred to by some, is the home of the Malvern Crew, a gang that has had run-ins with the Galloway Boys, a rival gang from south Scarborough. Skirmishes between the two gangs have gone on for years and sometimes resulted in tragedy. In the summer of 2012, a street party on Danzig Avenue ended with two killed and twenty-three injured when members of the Malvern Crew turned up in Galloway territory. The news was broadcast across the city.

Despite high profile and tragic events like the one above, statistics reveal that the research neighbourhoods are not as crime ridden as one might expect. There are 140 neighbourhoods in Toronto. With 1 indicating the highest incidence of crime, in 2011, the Toronto Police ranked Malvern in 75th position, St. James town in 67th, and Mount Dennis at 51st. Only Weston was in the top third, at 33rd.

Any discussion of 'crime' in low-income and racialized communities needs to consider the systemic and structural determinants of poverty, racism and alienation caused by much larger forces – both local and global – that shape the well-being of these communities. The three cities of Hulchanski's theory have come about as a result of global economic restructuring, increased migration, all kinds of displacements including gentrification, the decline of the social welfare state, as well as urban development policies

¹² "A matter of priority in Weston-Mount Dennis" by Clark Kim, InsideToronto.com, April 26, 2012

¹³ <http://localnewsresearchproject.ca/2012/07/27/news-geography-and-disadvantage-mapping-newspaper-coverage-of-torontos-high-needs-neighbourhoods/>

¹⁴ "The Scarborough Curse" by Don Gillmor appeared in Toronto Life (December, 2007). The author was criticized on the Canadian Magazine blog site for the negative tone of the article. <http://www.torontolife.com/informer/random-stuff-informer/2007/12/01/the-scarborough-curse/>

Very few people from the area want to come through to the main street as they are petrified because of the reputation of the Weston strip. I've gone to city council meetings where you can hear these people voice their concerns about the neighbourhood, and they're scared.

Focus Group Member,
► Weston Mt. Dennis

that continue to privilege a wealthy, educated, dominant culture.

Interviewees acknowledged neighbourhood challenges but many chose not to embrace the negative stereotypical descriptions of their communities. Tamla Matthews-Morgan, a dance artist, dance instructor and community arts animator in Malvern, never experienced the neighbourhood's unsafe reputation growing up there but did know youth who wanted to be perceived as 'tough guys,'

tried to act like one, and eventually became one.

Femi James, the Executive Director of a newly formed youth arts hub in Malvern, is concerned about youth in her neighbourhood but feels the neighbourhood is a positive space for her and for the local youth with whom she works. Ayesha Stewart who was the community liaison for the research project in Malvern described her neighbourhood as "peaceful and beautiful," and photographer Gillian Zidner from Weston wants to move away from "traumatized" images of the area and is looking to share the beauty in her neighbourhood.

Arts and City Building

Despite negative perceptions, interviewees emphasized the vitality of their community. They urged us to look beyond the deficits and to examine the assets of the area, elements such as local resources, the diverse histories and traditions of the residents, peoples' capacities to use what they find around them to challenge, create, and celebrate, plus more intangible things such as the spirit of the place, the determination of the people, and as one resident put it "the great community vibes."

Many of the interviewees identified the arts as an important key to turning things around, noting the talent, creativity and energy in the community as a contribution to community development. Sometimes referred to as 'asset-based community organizing' or 'creative community building,' the arts can be part of an overall approach to building from the assets and strengths of the neighbourhood and the residents (Borruip).

Researchers have found connections between culture and community revitalization, illustrating how the arts help build social networks, increase vitality (Jackson and Herranz), leverage assets (Grams and Warr) and create a greater sense of social cohesion (Jeannotte). The idea that urban neighbourhoods have all the right ingredients to be natural cultural hubs (Murray) is supported by the interviewees who see their community's potential; but "potential" needs focused city planning and coordinated action if it is to be fully realized.

It is at the margins that innovation often occurs, where there is the blending and fusion of cultures and an expression of individual and collective identity (Stern and Seifert). The city centre is the home of large, established cultural facilities but innovation and emerging art forms can come from the streets and malls of suburbia. The urban arts scene has a huge impact on popular culture, from dance styles to hair styles. Youth from the suburbs have become leading figures in a burgeoning urban fashion and design scene. Some are the products of local community arts programs. Toronto clothing designer, Benjamin 'Royalz' Kwofie, made his mark in the fashion industry with the help of ArtReach, a Toronto organization that supports youth-oriented initiatives. K'naan, a Somali-Canadian rapper, grew up in Rexdale before his music career took off. From the Culture Shock Festival and pop up galleries in Weston Mt. Dennis, to

There isn't enough positive media coverage about this area. We get labeled as "low income" and that's it. You never hear – 'this is a community that pulls together' – They don't talk to people who live here and breathe the air.

Resident,
► St. James Town

youth-led mural projects in Malvern, to public art projects in St. James Town, the research neighbourhoods are not waiting for something to happen; they are working to enliven their communities through the arts. Indeed, art of all kinds, from murals to music and fashion, was identified as being an important resource in all three neighbourhoods.

Building Community through Planned and Informal Spaces

The idea of building intentional cultural hubs has attracted the interest of city planners all over the world as a way of revitalizing abandoned factories and derelict areas by attracting cultural industries (Florida). The transformations have been praised for their stunning designs and daring concepts but critiqued (Sassen) for gentrifying areas without consideration for the local population including, ironically, artists in low cost warehouse studios who are forced to move out.

A movement of creative placemaking is now emerging as a way to "engage residents locally, enhance public space and contribute to healthy sustainable communities."¹⁵ ArtScape, who has developed cultural hubs and artist live/work spaces in central neighbourhoods in Toronto, has become a leader in this field. Recognizing the unique challenge of building cultural hubs in suburban and inner suburban neighbourhoods, ArtScape is working with other stakeholders, including Local Arts Service Organizations, Toronto Arts Foundation, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and United Way of Toronto, to address the deficit of cultural spaces outside the downtown core.

Dedicated cultural space is needed in order to provide stability for arts programs and help residents locate arts activities. Without space, programs cannot run and there are no venues to showcase art or host performances. Schools, community centres, common space in Toronto Community Housing complexes, and libraries are important sites for cultural programs, but space in these facilities is often unavailable and there are restrictions to the hours they can be used. This makes it difficult for existing programs to continue or for new ones to emerge.

Even where space can be found, poor lighting, inadequate ventilation, crowded conditions or no storage space can be some of the challenges facing arts programs in community settings. A study was commissioned by the Toronto Arts Foundation to examine the feasibility of including community arts programming in the creation of a neighbourhood hub to be led by Working Women's Community Centre in Scarborough. The study outlined potential models for developing an arts space and the technical elements to meet the needs of arts programming. In total 18 recommendations were made for future best practices in creating arts hubs. Cost was an important factor; at an average cost of \$26/square foot, arts organizations could not afford to move into the hub.¹⁶

In the absence of cultural hubs, unofficial spaces emerge for artists to meet in parks and people's homes. In addition, arts organizations use available spaces: a retrofitted store front has become a centre for children's art programs in St. James Town; and an unused space in the basement of the Yorkdale Shopping Mall has become the headquarters for Art Starts, a community arts organization that serves neighbourhoods throughout the city.

Looking at the creation of temporary spaces in the urban environment, Ana Luz argues that "the 'amorphous' and abstract space between public and private spaces is in fact a real space that is both-public-and-private" (Luz 147). Luz discusses the importance of "spaces between buildings" such as streets, alleys, squares, parking lots and green spaces as locations for "active engagement" between individuals and their environment (151). For example, green spaces in all the research neighbourhoods are used for festivals; in Weston a parking lot is used for a farmer's market; and in St. James Town residents sell arts, crafts and second-hand wares along the sidewalks in the neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood-based creative revitalization has been suggested as an alternative to top down planning, as a way to work with the local places and the people who live there (Stern and Seifert). A 2003 arts impact study of Chicago neighbourhoods linked community-oriented work to the community networks that support them. The

¹⁵ For more information on creative-placemaking see <http://www.artscapediy.org/Creative-Placemaking/Approaches-to-Creative-Placemaking.aspx#sthash.TWwgC6fW.dpuf>

¹⁶ <http://www.torontoartscouncil.org/Media/Files/Victoria-Village-Cultural-Space-Feasibility-Study-20102>

study identified "the role of the arts in leveraging assets for neighborhood improvement. These benefits are possible because of the way social networks in neighborhoods and in small budget arts activities operate. ...The emphasis of arts activities leveraging assets draws attention to how arts activities create new networks, supplement and improve upon existing networks and assist in problem-solving efforts within urban residential neighborhoods" (Grams and Warr 7).

Our research revealed ways in which the arts bring people together and enliven the community. In Weston Mt. Dennis, Urban Arts holds their annual Culture Shock Festival right in the centre of the community, at the site of the Farmer's Market, as a way to capture both sides of the community and make it an event where they can "build community spirit." In the same neighbourhood, the Artists to Artists Foundation sees their community as "a place of possibility" that has "all the right ingredients." Working with local artists, business owners and the local Business Improvement Association (BIA), the Foundation supports artists who live and work in the area and sometimes hosts international artist residencies. The research team visited two Foundation projects – an exhibition by local photographer in a pop up gallery in an empty storefront and a cultural celebration at a local Somali restaurant that featured food, music and textile art. Artists to Artists Foundation has a deep commitment to the social benefits of the arts but also recognizes the economic possibilities for the neighbourhood.

The St. James Town Festival attracts a diverse audience and features performances from the wide range of cultures living in the area. One young mother living in St. James Town hopes that the participation of the community in changing the surroundings will give the area "more colour" and "the arts will make it a better place to live." Community Matters is working with residents of St. James Town to develop and enliven public space through the arts. In the summer of 2012, they launched a Banner Contest to put the work of local artists on lighting poles. As one walks through the area, this splash of colour along the sidewalks together with the murals on buildings, telephone boxes and dividing walls, creates a welcome diversion from the concrete walls of the high-rises.

Conclusion

The arts are a key component in changing the physical and social make up of communities. Initiatives to claim, create and celebrate local public spaces counter a trend of more privatized control of public space, and reinforce the importance of place-based art that speaks from and resonates with community members.

Our ideas about Weston Mt. Dennis, Malvern and St. James Town are shaped by media perceptions and labels such as "at risk" or "priority neighbourhood." The tensions between Hulchanski's three cities and the realities of each community are shaped by larger local and global social forces and inequities. One way that the researched neighbourhoods are demonstrating their resilience and ingenuity is through the arts and in so doing they are creating a sense of place in a larger urban context.

CHAPTER FOUR

What is Art?

Art and culture are so omnipresent that they are sometimes taken for granted yet we still struggle to define them. Culture has been described as a way to make sense of “the sum total of signs, beliefs, artefacts, social arrangements and customs created by human beings” (Adams and Goldbard 9). Art is one of the ways humans try to respond to all that lies within the great envelope of culture.¹⁷

It is easy as researchers to take for granted a specialized knowledge of the arts, particularly when the research team comes from academic programs and arts organizations where art is the primary focus. However, even in these privileged spaces the ambiguity of ‘art’ persists and the historic tension between ‘high art’ and ‘community art’ remains underfoot. As a stimulus the term ‘art’ does not result in a universal response; far from it. How art is viewed depends on a variety of factors including culture, gender, generational differences, class, and where you live. Most Indigenous cultures have no word for art; Gregory Cajete, Native American educator and Tewa author, suggests that it has been “an expression of life” practiced by all the people and integral to ceremony (Cajete 154). Euro-centric ideas about art, that sometimes devalue activities that do not fit into those models, continue to influence Canadian culture despite profound changes to the makeup of our society.

What is art to you? This question is not easy to answer. Some interviewees questioned their participation because they might not know anything about “art.” A few referred to the arts as elitist and questioned who gets to call themselves an artist, challenging the “art school concept that only qualified people are supposed to judge.” For some, “art” was more narrowly defined as the creation of an art object and they assumed we were referring to visual arts. Others jumped right into the discussion and made no

distinction between commercial concerts and local not-for-profit community arts projects because for them any form of creation or expression was welcomed.

We anticipated that “What is art?” would be a difficult question because debates about the answer are alive within the professional art world as well as outside of it. The researchers explained that we were not looking for a definition of art but were interested in general impressions. We asked interviewees to share the first words that come to mind when they think of the arts. The most commonly used word was “expression”. For example: self-expression, freedom of expression, expression of experience and identity. Speaking of the arts as “expression” helped interviewees capture their personal motivation for involvement in creative activities.

Interviewees frequently explained the arts as coming out of an internal need because “it’s like a part of you.” They described art as an emotional outlet and a way to manifest “the things that you can’t tell.” The arts help individuals transcend the day-to-day realities or the “functional side of life.” Some see the arts not as specific art forms or products but as an overall creative, open and innovative approach to living.

The arts were also spoken of as a broader lived experience, playing a spiritual and intellectual role in people’s lives, helping us explore “our soul and mind.” The interviewees describe art as an essential part of living: a “meaningful engagement” that strikes to the very core of our being. The arts benefit the individual either as a way to relax or as an outlet for frustrations; in addition, the arts provide an opportunity to reach out, share with others and be engaged in life of the community. For one interviewee, getting involved in the arts felt like they were coming “out of a coma” because it increased their emotional expression and

¹⁷ Raymond Williams in *Keywords* declares culture to be “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language,” carrying traces of historical meaning and continuing to develop new meanings. There are three broad active categories of usage: 1) the process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development from 18th century onwards; 2) a particular way of life of a group of people or a period of time; 3) the practices of intellectual and artistic activity.

was a powerful counter to their previous sense of isolation.

While many people seem to have internalized the notion of "art" as an elitist activity reserved for professionals (what Gramsci¹⁸ would call "common sense"), they have also challenged that notion by identifying, embracing and promoting a wide range of artistic and cultural expressions that feed both personal growth as well as community development and social change (what Gramsci would call "good sense"). These two notions co-exist, but what is evident from our study is that there is definitely a diverse and vibrant creative energy being expressed in multiple forms at the grass-roots level.

Arts practices by neighbourhood

Interviewees discussed a wide variety of arts practices they participate in or are aware of in their community. Nearly 100 examples of creative activities were cited showing a wonderfully rich mosaic of arts practice at a local level. Interviewees used umbrella terms such as visual arts, dance, music, and theatre and some provided specific examples of discipline practice including: storytelling, drawing, painting, photography, henna art, Nepalese dance, ink brush drawings, computer graphics, reggae music and mural-creation. Some arts practices are common to all researched neighbourhoods while others were mentioned in one or two. See Appendix Five for a list of arts activities identified by respondents and the most commonly referred to arts practices.

The range of responses to our inquiries about arts practices illustrates expansive ideas about the arts. Interviewees embraced a broad definition of the arts, and one that draws on the diverse cultural practices of residents of these neighbourhoods. In St. James Town and Weston Mt. Dennis, we encountered a significant number of adults trained in visual arts who are looking for opportunities to connect with other artists and art programs.

Arts programming for children and youth were recognized as important opportunities in each neighbourhood; some referred to this as "youth arts" or "urban arts." Through organizations such as The S.P.O.T. in Malvern, Urban Arts in Weston Mt. Dennis and UforChange in St. James Town, local youth have

access to arts programming, including music creation and mixing, DJing, fashion design, hip-hop, rap and mural arts.

Arts Goals and Purposes

One way to distinguish between types of cultural practices is to look at their goals and purposes. "Speaking of our Culture: Discussion Guide" establishes three categories of culture: professional, community and commercial.¹⁹

- 1. Professional culture** includes traditional and classical forms in visual art, literature and music. This conventional type of culture emphasises the excellence of a finished product that is then evaluated based on aesthetic standards. These standards have evolved over generations and art forms are only gradually accepted as they are tested against time-honoured traditions. Sometimes this type of activity is referred to as "high culture" or the "fine arts" though it is also critiqued as dominated by European and North American aesthetics and values.
- 2. Community culture** encompasses those activities in which the process of production – the act of doing – is the main goal. Today it is associated with a whole range of community arts projects, amateur arts activities, and informal arts practices – all examples of ways people come to understand themselves through their creative expression.
- 3. Commercial culture** is created and distributed by organizations (usually corporations) whose primary aim is profit driven rather than strictly cultural. It is associated with such activities as mass-market publishing, most film and television, the recording and music industries.

The categories provided by the Applebaum/Hebert Commission remain as relevant today as in 1981. However this framework is just that – a general scaffold of theory on which to build practice. In reality, the categories blur and overlap, shifting over time to account for new developments in arts and culture and new generations of artists who break down the definitions.

In all the research neighbourhoods we found examples of

¹⁸ Antonio Gramsci was an early 20th century Italian philosopher, Marxist thinker and the originator of the concept of cultural hegemony.

¹⁹ "Speaking of our Culture: Discussion Guide" which was a part of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, commonly referred to as the Applebaum/Hebert Commission, 1981. Non-artist interviewees generally did not differentiate between the three types, moving back and forth between each when describing the arts.

the cultural categories blurring and influencing each other. For example, Tapestry New Opera Works, a professional company dedicated to fostering the growth of new Canadian opera, has turned to community arts to make connections beyond their usual audience base. The company offers "INside Opera," an opera summer camp for St. James Town youth. The participants are given the opportunity to write, rehearse and perform an opera while working with a team of professional writers and performers. Individual professional artists have also embraced collaboration with communities as part of their arts practice. Former Weston resident and artist Sarah Sharkey-Pearce created a participatory installation in Weston Mt. Dennis that explored perceptions of her home neighbourhood. Sharkey-Pearce is a documentary producer/director who collaborates with communities to create participatory media art projects. Her history of working with queer and trans youth in downtown Toronto through film festivals and media-making and her past experience working with street youth at the Toronto youth organization Sketch make community development a key component of her professional art practice.

Elements of commercial culture have been embraced in community arts programming including teaching entrepreneurial skills in order to create economic opportunities for participants. For example, UforChange in St. James Town serves newcomer and low-income youth by using the arts to deliver education and career training. The program takes place over one year divided into two phases: the first focuses on arts practices and training, and the second on pursuing further education at colleges and universities and on employment readiness. "I think the most significant thing for sure are the individual youth who become inspired and make careers out of these artistic disciplines that they have been exposed to. There are several youth who have made their own photography and videography businesses while actually working out of St. James Town," explains the UforChange Program Director. This program demonstrates how community arts, popular or commercial culture and business come together supporting the development of youth to pursue their passion.

Commercial entertainment infrastructure can also help to elevate artistic practices that aren't otherwise widely appreciated. David Walden, Secretary-General, Canadian Commission for UNESCO, has pointed out that appreciation

for art forms such as dance has been renewed with the popularity of television shows like *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance*. Testimony from Malvern-based artist Connie Tong supports this argument. Tong explains how watching dance on TV has informed her appreciation of the medium and suggests that if other disciplines had these popular outlets on TV it would help broaden her appreciation for unfamiliar art forms.

Emergence of New Art Forms and Perspectives

The influence of non-western perspectives on art in Canadian society is reflected in our research, as well as what could be seen as a decolonizing process of reclaiming the arts as integral to daily activity. The presence of people from many different parts of the world and cultural practices outside of the dominant European model has opened up a new terrain for practice and discourse. Both Aboriginal and diasporic artists have challenged dominant definitions and their privileging in funding bodies; for example, Andrea Fatona has examined the formation of racial equity policies at the Canada Council. Though hegemonic ideas still hold sway, arts councils and other institutions are learning from these perspectives; our research revealed a wide definition of art and a broad array of activities considered under its name.

Art is always emerging, changing and responding to new influences; culture is never static but is an ongoing creation, from one moment and context to another. Cultural fusion is a natural by-product of living in diverse communities; sometimes this happens through arts programs, informal jamming sessions, or the emergence of cultural hubs. One need only look at the explosion of spoken word as a dynamic and ever-changing art practice to see how it reflects both the oral practices of traditional cultures as well as the frustration of marginalized youth whose stories and voices are often undervalued in the dominant art world.

Arts programs for youth embrace popular cultural forms such as urban music and dance. In some cases, these programs reinforce the values of individualism and materialism so prevalent in a star-focused entertainment industry. However, the same expressions — music and dance — can be used to re-appropriate images and words and turn them into a critique as well as a way of using what's available to create a vision of what could be.

Arts Participation at a Local Level

There are many ways that residents participate in the arts in their neighbourhood and that arts organizations connect to residents. Within the research neighbourhoods, we identified ten kinds of arts participation which, again, are not discrete but often overlapping categories.

1) Community-Engaged Arts

As described above under definitions of culture, community arts, community-engaged arts or arts in development are programs that link professionally trained artists with residents to create art that speaks to the diverse identities, interests, needs and/or concerns of residents. Some community arts groups serve a specific neighbourhood while others work across the city carrying out projects in partnership with local organizations. The nature of the projects is as varied as the artists and communities they work in, with timeframes ranging from a few weeks to several years. Projects often culminate in exhibitions or performances – either a one-time or ongoing series of events shared with the community. The projects are initiated by artists, arts groups or local social service agencies that understand the power of the arts to address social concerns. Funding for projects comes from a variety of sources including arts councils.

2) Activist Art

Activist art is designed to address specific social, political or cultural concerns. Usually grassroots in origin and involving community members, sometimes including professional artists, activist art seeks to raise awareness and calls for action and change.

For example, safety concerns about railway tracks where children were playing prompted the Weston Mt. Dennis Community Association to start an outdoor art gallery running along the exposed tracks. In response, the City of Toronto funded a new fence with assistance from Urban Arts and the Safety Initiative Police Partnership. Today the fence stands strong, adorned with paintings and murals; community gardens have sprung up along the way and children now play safely in the area.

3) Arts Outreach

Some professional arts organizations, in addition to their regular arts programs, provide arts opportunities in neighbourhood settings, challenging the notion that arts should be relegated to stages, concert halls and galleries. These organizations see this as a way to connect with new audiences and to make arts activities more accessible. For example, Toronto-based outdoor dance festival Dusk Dances brings contemporary and traditional dance to neighbourhood parks, integrating amateur, neighbourhood and professional dancers to develop site-specific performances held outdoors in the host community. Over the last three years Dusk Dances has worked in Malvern. A past volunteer coordinator, Ella Cooper, explains how Dusk Dances is funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation not just to present dance in neighbourhoods but “to give the festival over to the different communities we [go] into.” Over the course of his career, Allen Kaeja, Dusk Dances choreographer for Malvern in 2012, has worked with many youth. Both Cooper and Kaeja elaborated on the importance of youth choosing to take part in a project, rather than the project being imposed on them. “They know that we are building through them, not on them,” expands Kaeja. “They are part of the creative process. This is the greatest bonding aspect of the project.”

Another example of arts outreach is the work of Smile Theatre that tours productions to seniors’ centres in neighbourhoods throughout the city including Weston Mt. Dennis and Malvern. The company makes theatre and concerts more accessible to an audience who might not otherwise be able to see them.

The Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA) through their HipTix and City Special Programs²⁰ distribute low cost and free tickets to youth via social service agencies. “This project ensures that theatre, dance and opera remain accessible to all youth across the city regardless of their social and economic backgrounds,” explains Executive Director Jacoba Knappen.

²⁰ http://www.tapa.ca/communique/hiptix_youth_outreach_program

4) Public Events

Festivals are important public events that connect artists to audiences. In marginalized communities free local festivals frequently showcase local artists, provide entertainment in communities that lack cultural spaces, and are an important contributor to arts access. For example, in 2010, twelve

Art defines our soul and mind. It also connects so many different cultures and communities together. For example, our photography class is run by a Cuban photographer and the students are from Pakistan, India, and Nepal and so on.

There are not a lot of options for people in St. James Town to get involved in the arts. It can be expensive to study the arts so we give free classes ... it makes it accessible. We start a class and it is full right away. The demand is huge but we have to start somewhere.

Ravi Subramanian,
► Executive Director,
Community Corner, St. James
Town

residents and community organizers in Weston Mt. Dennis, primarily youth, got together to find a way to celebrate the achievements and hard work of people in the community. The result was the West Won Festival that celebrates the neighbourhood and brings together music and fashion, culture and community. Combating the negative stereotypes of the neighbourhood, the West Won Fest brings people together "to celebrate the positives and successes that they witness everyday in their neighbourhood."²¹

106 & York is an Urban Arts festival showcasing everything from spoken word to theatre, beat boxing to visual arts, music and dance. The Director of Young and Potential Fathers, Benjamin De Graff, notes that "106 and York has also done a good job of opening

things up to the community and [encouraging] young people to get involved and participate." Hosted by Urban Arts, "the festival provides a platform for established and up-and-coming talent to display their art to a broader

audience and to exemplify the true culture of Toronto's urban entertainment sector."²² Marlene McKintosh, Executive Director of Urban Arts, outlines the importance of festivals for youth in the neighbourhood and for the whole community. In addition to 106 & York, they also host Culture Shock, an annual summer community arts festival where local artists and artists from across the city showcase their talents. "[It's about] bringing the community together. We have community tables. We have vendors. We have performers. We have a children's play area. It happens at various locations in the community," explains McKintosh.

Weston Mt. Dennis' Business Improvement Association (BIA) organizes an annual Best of Weston Multicultural Festival each summer featuring music and dance performances, a sidewalk sale and other community building activities. The BIA has partnered with community organizations like Urban Arts and Frontlines to make this festival an important community event.

5) Arts Appreciation

Residents who do not have their own arts practice are still enthusiastic about the arts. They support family and friends who are artists and appreciate the arts events in their neighbourhood including concerts, festivals, and dance recitals.

Art in public spaces reaches arts appreciators who just happen to be in the area. In St. James Town, local organizations are working to provide free arts activities and to install art in shared public areas. These efforts are enlivening and beautifying the neighbourhood. They could also be opportunities to encourage audience members to move from being 'spectators' or consumers of culture to discovering their own creative capacities (Mackey).

6) Individual Arts Practices

Many people like to pursue their own personal creative journey. Some interviewees have been working at one art form for years, others are new converts, and others move from one expressive modality to another. Weston Mt. Dennis artist Hawa Noor started off as a writer but now she draws and paints and has worked on mural projects for

²¹ <http://westwonfest.com>

²² <http://www.urbanartstoronto.org/>

Urban Arts. She comes from an artistic family: her father shares her love of visual arts while her aunt is “an artist in the kitchen.” Individuals who pursue their own arts practices speak passionately about the sheer enjoyment and satisfaction they get out of being creative. The arts have helped me “find my way” says a Weston Mt. Dennis resident who enjoys working on her own textile art projects.

7) Art Classes

There is a need for more accessible art classes in the research neighbourhoods. We interviewed parents interested in finding art classes for their children, adults participating in classes, and arts facilitators who teach classes because they want to provide opportunities for local youth. At the Community Corner, a local health and social service hub in St. James Town, free art classes are in high demand. The Corner is committed to providing this accessible service because it brings diverse groups of people together and helps counter isolation.

Of course, a deeper issue is the lack of arts programming within the public school curriculum. While multiple research studies indicate that the arts not only facilitate learning but develop self-esteem, creative imagination and community-building, the cutbacks to educational institutions and the prioritizing of other, more market-oriented subjects, have impoverished children and adults by limiting their opportunities to develop their own artistic skills (Kozol).

8) Arts and Cultural Expression

Some residents, particularly those who have come from other countries, look to arts activities as a way of connecting to their heritage, reclaiming their histories, recovering customs and deepening the connection to homeland, either literal or imagined. Parents especially who want their children to value their heritage seek out and register their children in arts programs that connect them to their culture.

The arts have the ability to tap memory and inspire a longing to be connected to family traditions. For example, a St. James Town artist reflected on her mother’s traditional fabric painting for weddings and religious occasions as a source of inspiration for her own work. Also in St. James Town, a growing number of Nepalese immigrants gather to practice and perform the Eastern classical songs and dances of their homeland, thus providing a significant incentive for

other Nepalese to visit and indeed to relocate to the area.

Art also has the ability to transcend linguistic barriers and connect immigrant communities to the larger community. For example the Immigrant Women’s Committee in St. James Town produces an annual public event that features dances and craft displays from artists of diverse cultural backgrounds.

While some programs reclaim historical cultural practices, they also inevitably draw new ideas and forms from the new context in which they are situated. There are infinite fusions of cultural practices as people from diverse origins share space, daily experiences, and artistic forms.

9) Arts in Daily Life

Domestic arts such as cooking, sewing, gardening or creative personal expression (such as henna hand painting, hairstyling and tattoos) are valued as art forms by the interviewees. The longstanding schism between arts and crafts, dating back to the Industrial Revolution and the alienation of people from their daily labour and creativity, is still present in some art circles but few interviewees made this differentiation.

Community agencies frequently offer classes such as cooking and knitting as a way to bring people together. In St. James Town, a group of residents run regular community cafés that serve suppers in a communal environment to encourage conversation and sharing, and each cafe evening provides an opportunity for local artists to show their work or to perform. Community gardens and farmers markets in Weston Mt. Dennis and Malvern provide opportunities for people to work and gather together. Community gardens are frequently decorated with banners, streamers, and painted objects as a way to enliven the space. Farmer’s Markets are an opportunity to sell crafts and musicians can perform.

Arts come everywhere from kitchen to stage. Just you have to name it. My aim is that arts should be developed. We should make sure that everybody is happy through different forms of arts. We encourage the different arts projects in the neighbourhood.

Chelladurai Yogarajah,
► Toronto Tamil Seniors Association

Many enthusiasts are working to reframe the growing and cooking of food as artistic practices in their own right. The Taste of St. James Town, a local festival that features food from the many ethnic communities living in the area, is described by local activist, Margaret Coshan, as "art through cooking" and an important way for people to see themselves as creative in their daily lives. Recipe for Community, a year long program delivered in 2010 by Toronto City Foundation and City of Toronto in St. James Town, offered cooking classes, creation of cookbooks and ethnocultural celebrations that included performances and

There are a lot of new immigrants in the neighbourhood ...a lot of people that come to the neighbourhood want to know about the past. They want to know the history, the surroundings, and the makeup. And it (the mural) creates a story for people to tell about their own neighbourhood.

Lennox Cadore,
► Program Manager, Urban Arts, Weston Mt. Dennis

food. The initiative was designed to build skills and increase participation and connection in dense urban communities. The project stressed local involvement in the design and delivery of programs.

Modes of dressing, tattoos, and hairstyles were also mentioned as ways of being expressive and creative, particularly in Weston Mt. Dennis. In fact, there is quite a bit of local pride in the number of hair salons and barber shops, and their styling finesse has attracted media attention and customers

from other parts of the city. A CBC radio documentary about Weston noted that "hairstyling is the new manufacturing. ...In this underserved neighbourhood, barber shops are the backbone of the economy, community centre and confessional all rolled into one."²³ Hair styling as an art form is an example of art in daily life, and a lesson in how we can learn from non-dominant art practices.

10) Art in Public Places

Murals were frequently described as local arts activity that improves the community by covering up graffiti and brightening the neighbourhood. In the Weston Mt. Dennis neighbourhood, the number of absentee landlords not maintaining their properties was considered a problem and murals were seen as a way to beautify the area through colour, inspiring images and text. Mural projects are also often ways to involve local youth in paid and unpaid positions. Toronto-based Mural Routes, the only arts service organization in Canada dedicated to the creation, development and promotion of public wall art, train youth artists, some have gone on to be hired to work on mural projects.

Murals have become a kind of symbol for community participation and urban renewal (Sharp, Pollock, and Paddisson). They are championed by local businesses, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and community groups as a way to enhance a neighbourhood: bricks walls, concrete dividers, tunnels, poles, temporary construction hoardings and even telephone boxes have proven to be good canvases. Philadelphia, with 3000 plus murals and several hundred new ones added each year, has become known as the mural capital of the United States. An exact count of Toronto's murals is not available but the numbers are growing. Also growing is the community of wall artists making connections through Canada's National Mural Symposium. Held in fall 2011, the 14th gathering was hosted in Toronto by Mural Routes at the Warden Woods Community Centre and brought international mural specialists to the city. Touching on a wide range of wall-art topics from social enterprise to mapping the art on neighbourhood streets, the conference found that "similar to the snowball effect, producing one mural engages its viewers and leaves whole neighbourhoods wanting more."²⁴

Working with community participants, often in large numbers and frequently with groups of children or youth, requires an artist with skills in group animation that go beyond artistic talent. Charmaine Lurch, an artist working at Rose Avenue School in St. James Town, is working on a five-year mural project at the school in collaboration with the Inner City Angels, and Mariposa in the Schools. The mural process involves the sharing of stories reflecting the demographics of the school and the geography of the area.

²³ Mary Wiens, CBC Morning Metro, Oct. 11, 2012

²⁴ The BIG Picture 14th National Mural Symposium, 2011 http://www.muralroutes.com/news/tbp_report.pdf , pg 9.

Aesthetics and Neighbourhood Art

A discussion of arts frequently raises questions about aesthetics and that was certainly the case in the neighbourhoods we researched. Aesthetics implies a subjective value judgement, an assessment of beauty and quality that many people feel under-qualified to evaluate or afraid to put on record. However, casually, people have no qualms sharing what they do and do not like or discussing whose sense of aesthetics is in play. This question of aesthetics comes to the forefront when art projects move from art-specific spaces, like galleries, to shared public sites, like mural walls.

Mural production in a community requires an organization, artist or community member to take leadership. Whomever leads the project influences content, location and of course aesthetics. Because a mural project is something the whole community will encounter, participants in a focus group in Weston Mt. Dennis expressed questions about how decisions get made. How are community members invited into the discussion about mural form and content? What is the relationship between a professional artist who is commissioned to paint the mural and the community that the mural is meant to serve? How can artists balance community participation with a strong aesthetic framework? What are the different aesthetics in contention and what happens when there are diverse cultural aesthetics in one community? Who initiates and pays for the work and how does that have an impact on its location and content?

The questions raised in the research neighbourhoods are in line with ongoing discourse about public art. Judy Baca, an American artist and activist working in public art projects in California, asks similar questions about who controls public space, reminding us that murals can be used to gloss over neighbourhood differences, glorify the past, and in some cases erase current ethnic presence in an attempt to create a uncontroversial homogenized visual culture.²⁵

Because they are public in nature, mural content and form can encourage people to "stop and think or notice" and artists can "challenge people's conventional views." But murals can have a "political side" that sometimes divides communities. For example, a mural designed to commemorate the life of a resident was contentious because

the person had lived a "grey life" resulting in a violent death. Residents in neighbourhoods labelled as "priority" or "at risk" are sometimes concerned that such a mural draws attention to gang activity and crime. For others, murals are a reminder that violence in the community must not be forgotten. In St. James Town, the Juice Mural, named after a young man who was shot in the neighbourhood, continues to be the site of informal vigils on the anniversary of his death.

There is also the question of the quality of the final project. While some residents are happy to have anything because it is more "cheerful" than a massive grey concrete wall, there are others who say they want to see more than a burst of colour. Artists living in the communities point out that repetitive images meant to represent diversity and multiculturalism are void of real meaning or local significance. Murals also last a long time and the style and content might begin to look dated. Often, due to lack of money, compromises are made such as poor quality paints that do not stand up to extreme weather, and then a mural begins to look shabby. This raises questions about the ownership and maintenance of murals. Sometimes they are left to fade and sometimes they are covered over by a new mural. Many artists are calling for more innovative approaches to public art rather than "artless art to protect against vandalism" and funders are looking for mural projects that push the boundaries of the art form.

Conclusion

Engagement with the arts at a neighbourhood level is a complex picture, and there will inevitably be different visions and disagreements. Interviewees spoke about the arts in expansive and generous terms embracing a wide range of activity. They grappled with some notions of control, content and the role of the arts in the wider community. They examined the complex reasons and motivations for their involvement in the arts and the myriad of benefits they experience as individuals and as a neighbourhood.

²⁵ <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/art7/readings/JudyBaca.htm>

CHAPTER FIVE

Discovering Local Assets

When as researchers we entered a neighbourhood, it wasn't always easy to identify what's going on or who makes things happen. St. James Town's Community Corner Executive Director, Ravi Subramanian, sums this up: "What we say in Tamil is that the fruit comes with the leaves. If we look at the leaves, you will see the fruit under that. People are here, but they are not always visible for different reasons."

In most communities, there are a handful of arts organizations and arts programs known to most residents but other aspects of the arts scene remain a hidden part of community life. This informal but vibrant work is driven by personal interests, cultural practices or the organic processes of people coming together. The local arts scene also changes depending on population shifts and migration and the emergence and departures of local leaders who are key to driving initiatives.

Population Shifts

A combination of factors, including a changing economy, loss of blue collar jobs, the high cost of single family dwellings accompanied by a boom in condo development, and an increasing disparity between opportunities for new immigrants and the standard of living for the rest of the population, is being played out in the research neighbourhoods.

Some residents identified tensions between "people born in the neighbourhood" and the "newcomers who don't stay long." While racism is not to be underestimated, one focus group member noted that often it is not so much about hostility as a "sense of longing or nostalgia for what was ... and people resist change."

Local leaders are working to bridge cultural divides. The Artists to Artists Foundation in Weston Mt. Dennis, for example, is working to bridge the cultural divides in the community by battling the "belief that if [the neighbourhood] went back to the 'old Weston'... and if all the diversities were not present, then Weston would be a perfect place," explains Jacklyn Thomas, the organization's CEO. The community is changing and Thomas believes that it is impossible and not advantageous to go back.

Yet, interviewees who have lived in an area for a long time, in some cases for generations, are able to share important history. Elizabeth Underhill is an independent art curator who grew up in Weston. Her roots in the region stretch back several generations. Her grandfather's family, Italian immigrant farmers, owned farmland property at Jane and Lawrence. Her parents lived in Rexdale and for them Weston was a downtown centre, a place to go shopping. They eventually moved to Weston to be near the shops and they continue to live there today.

Elizabeth described this as common story of the Weston area. In many ways Weston retains the feel of an old town, but today it bumps up against the new. She noted that there seem to be "less meaningful places" for the people who have lived there all their lives.

Weston Mt. Dennis has lost much of its economic vitality. Industries such as Kodak and CCM Bicycles have closed down – the workers unemployed and the buildings boarded up or turned into storage units. Along Weston Rd an old penny farthing bicycle – a connection to an era long gone – is used as a neighbourhood marker on lamp posts. It is

As an artist, it would be great to get some exposure within Canada. I am doing my painting in my studio and how many people will actually make their way over there? A system is fine; however an artist is a mad man and must break outside of it. His imagination is flying in the sky and you simply cannot cage it up.

Iftikhar Uddin Ahmed,
► artist, St. James Town

an evocative symbol but it doesn't connect with immigrant populations from Africa, Caribbean and Latin America.

In Scarborough, a focus group of Scarborough Arts staff noted divisions between "old and new Scarborough." The old Scarborough, of suburban leafy green yards on quiet streets, borders Lake Ontario and stretches to Eglinton Avenue. North from here the new Scarborough, a mix of low rise apartments, houses and light industry, begins its journey north spilling over a multi-lane superhighway whisking cars east and west across the city of Toronto until it reaches the border of the neighbouring suburb of Markham. The new Scarborough is home to more culturally diverse communities and new immigrants.

Newcomers

Immigrants are an asset to our communities. They change the landscape of the arts by bringing different cultural traditions and ways of discussing and expressing arts practices. However, the first priority for newcomers is to get settled.

Attracted by a combination of cheaper rents and the footprint of earlier migration, the research neighbourhoods are one of the first landing places for new immigrants in Toronto. Although these two factors might make the transition a little easier, it is "such a challenge to be a new Canadian – trying to make a living, sending money back home, finding a survival job," explains Margaret Coshan of Community Matters, an organization that provides settlement support in St. James Town.

In the hierarchy of needs the arts are not at the top, but over time newcomers seek out opportunities to connect to their cultural traditions and/or contribute to Toronto's dynamic and changing arts and cultural scene. The cultural vibrancy of immigrant communities is somewhat hidden from the mainstream but it is in these spaces that we might look for the "next big thing" whether that is a great chef or a rap artist (Stern, Seifert and Vitiello).

Newcomers who are professional artists face unique challenges. When artists trained in their own country move to Canada they are often not sure they can continue to be artists. Questions posed to the research team included: Is the art I made back home considered art here? Is it necessary to get "Canadian experience" in order to be

called an artist? Like other foreign-trained professionals, newcomer artists face difficulties finding work and making connections in their new home. As artists they must also learn how arts funding works, discover how to speak about their arts practice in a Canadian context, figure out presentation opportunities, and find enough time for their arts practice while dealing with settlement issues.

Laya Mainali had lived in St. James Town for only a few months when we interviewed him. A renowned sculptor in Nepal, he has been practicing bronze sculpture and landscape painting for over 25 years but wondered how his work will be received in Canada.

Bangladeshi-born Iftikhar Uddin Ahmed finds "the entire system of galleries and museums extremely limiting within this city" and feels that institutions are not representing the cultural diversity of the city's art scene. Iftikhar holds a Masters of Fine Art from Bangladesh and has been practicing mixed media, collage and painting for over thirty years. He has won numerous awards and contributed to over 75 exhibitions in the United States, South Africa, Pakistan, Iraq, China, India and Australia. He moved to St. James Town in 2011 but despite an impressive international exhibiting history he is having difficulty navigating the Canadian gallery and funding systems. However, he is finding ways to work in the community. He was hired by the Daniels Centre of Learning in Regent Park to teach painting classes to adults from diverse backgrounds and he works with Community Matters on mural projects in the St. James Town neighbourhood.

Another St. James Town-based artist, Alejandra Higuera, also found the settlement process to be challenging. But after five years of involvement with community arts, she gained the confidence to call herself an artist and believes that it is important for newcomers to tell their own stories instead of "watching someone tell it for you."

Few social service organizations are set up to support the unique needs of newcomer artists. The Neighbourhood Arts Network, an initiative of Toronto Arts Foundation's Creative City: Block by Block vision, works to strengthen community-engaged arts practices in Toronto and reach out to the diversity of artists living in the city. In 2011 and 2012, the Network brought together artists, community agencies and arts groups for a conversation about the

Newcomer artists are hidden – they put their arts practice behind them – they don't think it's going to be viable for them to make a living here. We need to build an outreach plan – need to connect to more community arts projects.

Zehra Kizilbash,

► Poly Cultural Community Services, Scarborough

relationship between the arts and settlement sectors in Toronto. Key observations included: the lack of support for adult and established artists compared to the amount of support for youth programs; the frustration of categorizing newcomer artists into silos (i.e. cultural silos or immigrant silos) rather than finding ways to integrate them into the "mainstream" arts scene; and the need for active mentoring rather than simple sharing of information.

Participants at the Network's discussion concluded that newcomer artists are hidden and the barriers they face are complex. What is needed is a more "holistic rather than fragmented" approach to supporting their needs. In addition, the mainstream arts community needs to continue examining ethnocentric ideas of "what counts as art" by developing a greater understanding of the different practices and approaches that newcomer artists bring to their new home.

The Neighbourhood Arts Network is working to address some of the needs of newcomer artists through the resources in their online Reading Room.²⁶

Local Leadership

Leaders emerge. Some stay, some move away, some get tired. With limited funding and a high dependency on volunteers, local arts and cultural programs face instability. When leaders move on they take their knowledge with them and this makes it more challenging to plan long term projects and build local capacity. In Weston Mt. Dennis and St. James Town the rate of transience is high; community development worker Jean-Marie Boutot notes this makes it difficult for programs to evolve from being intermittent to becoming a local "institution" that the residents can count

on. Short-term project-based funding also contributes to this phenomenon and makes it difficult to build long-term relationships that are needed to make substantial changes in the neighbourhood.

We interviewed dedicated local leaders who shared with us their love of their home community, their enthusiasm for the power of locally-led development, and the importance of arts in the life of the neighbourhood. Some examples of organizations and individuals who are making a difference in their neighbourhood are described below.

St. James Town

1. The Community Café is a volunteer-run group that organizes social evenings featuring affordable, healthy food that is locally produced and/or fairly traded. Nancy Slamet, one of the café organizers, calls it "an alternative island where everyone is accepted ... and an opportunity for residents to take ownership of how they access their food." Each event features the work of a local artist or group presenting anything from visual arts to music. Local blues musician Cliff Martin has performed at a number of events. Café organizers told the story of their first café event where "an older man was singing some traditional Spanish love songs and people just got up and started dancing." On the evening the research team attended the café, a local visual artist provided sketching classes and diners were invited to add to a shared drawing.

The dinners offer meaningful engagement by bringing people from diverse backgrounds and experiences together at communal tables. The group is committed to providing a venue where people feel welcome and have an opportunity to learn about, discuss and work together on issues affecting the community and wider society. The gatherings are regularly attended by upwards of 100 people in an evening, and organizers hope the café will breakdown some of the "preconceptions and stereotypes" about St. James Town by bringing people together over conversation and food.

2. Recognizing both the needs and the resources of St. James Town, Margaret Coshan and Chris Hallet established **Community Matters** ten years ago. Rooted in the idea of neighbours helping neighbours, the group's many

²⁶ <http://www.neighbourhoodartsnetwork.org/resources/reading-room>

programs offer classes on employment, settlement, healthy living and adult education. It connects community members with one another to help them build a strong network of relationships and to exchange skills and knowledge.

"The principles we promote – work, education, health and connectivity – mesh together through the arts. In fact the arts were a piece we weren't focusing on but now we see they can be an integral part of what we do. It was an 'ah-hah' moment," explains Coshan, that then led to the development of a new initiative, the Artists of St. James Town Network, to support local artists and to get them involved in art projects in the neighbourhood.

Local resident Neudis Abreu, inspired by Community Matters' art initiatives, began volunteering and became the coordinator of the Artists of St. James Town Network. Originally from Venezuela, Neudis graduated from Emily Carr University of Art & Design. As a resident of St. James Town, Neudis is "constantly thinking of ways to engage the community."

Community Matters recognizes the creative assets that exist within the neighbourhood and the valuable contribution arts can make to the area's ongoing revitalization. By connecting artists to artists and encouraging art-making in the community they are discovering opportunities for art to make a difference. They are developing an art plan that will transform public spaces in the neighbourhood through mosaics and murals, a sculpture garden, community walks, and activities such as knit bombing trees, painting Bell boxes, and planting gardens.

- 3. Eugenia Lara** has been living in St. James Town for 14 years. She was a trade union leader in Philippines and worked for the women's movement. During the oppressive regime of President Marcos, she migrated to Canada, landing first in Saskatchewan before moving to Toronto where she worked for an organization supporting domestic workers. She is one of the founding members of the locally-run St. James Town Safety Committee, a group which organizes the St. James Town Festival to celebrate the cultural diversity of the neighbourhood. In addition, they run a Christmas toy drive for the children in the neighbourhood and organize after-school programs.

Weston Mount Dennis

1. "Artists can be a shining example of what is possible when community and artists work together in partnership. That is our mantra and guiding principle," says Jacklyn Thomas, co-founder and CEO of Artists to Artists Foundation in Weston Mt. Dennis. "And we see that both artists and community are intricately woven together. The artists can draw out the community's potential – the potential is always there, but the artist more or less frames it, whether through dance, theatre, or visual arts."

Officially established 5 years ago, the Foundation has been informally operating for nearly 20 years. Recently it has collaborated with the Weston Business Improvement Association on window and office displays, worked with landlords of vacant buildings to create pop-up galleries, and connected with businesses to organize events such as a Somali food and art celebration at the Wiff Restaurant.

The AAF can be found at its home at 1 Victoria Avenue West, just south of Lawrence Avenue West and Weston Road. Renovated by the Foundation, the house is an artist run centre where members and the local community have access to a gallery, meeting space, individual artist studios and printing facilities. Their artists-members come from a variety of arts practices and cultural backgrounds and include choreographers, authors, visual artists, photographers and performers.

The Foundation has confidence that the arts are making a difference in Weston Mt. Dennis. According to Thomas, the community "has all the ingredients to make it work" and the arts have a direct impact on the lives of residents because they "draw people in without confrontation" making the arts "a natural fit" for the community.

2. **Frederick Brobbey, aka Freeway Freddy**, is a young musician, producer, songwriter and entrepreneur from Weston Mt. Dennis. In addition to his own performances, Freddy produces musicians from all across the greater Toronto area and is the founder of JustOverBrilliant Inc.

He works at Urban Arts, a youth arts centre in Weston, where he runs the recording studio and is the Head Producer of Beats.Mind.Movement, a music production and professional development program for youth. At

Urban Arts he encourages youth to pursue the arts and assists them to begin a career in music.

Freddy believes art made him who he is by giving him the confidence to pursue his passion for music.

Malvern

1. The S.P.O.T. (Success, Power, Opportunity, Teamwork), opened in 2013, is the neighbourhood's innovative response to the need for programming for youth. Providing a hub for youth 14-25 to explore their skills, network, and access facilities and equipment, The S.P.O.T. has it all. This youth-led initiative, funded by the Youth Challenge Fund²⁷ and the City of Toronto, runs under a youth board of directors and volunteer members. The S.P.O.T. provides much needed resources including a fully equipped performance space, recording studio, and youth lounge. "There has never been a dedicated space like this in Malvern," explains Executive Director Femi James. The S.P.O.T. endeavours to nurture in the youth who attend programs the qualities it stands for: success, power, opportunity and teamwork.

Beyond a physical location, the organization offers a community spirit that supports the development of Malvern's talented youth. Individual mentorships are arranged and partnerships with other organizations are developed. The S.P.O.T. also offers a safe space where people can connect with others and find a positive outlet for emotions. When reflecting on the difference The S.P.O.T. will make in the community, youth in the neighbourhood said it "will be a better outlet for youth," it will "get [youth] off the streets," and "it's exciting!"

2. Tamla Matthews-Morgan has a long history with the Malvern community. She grew up in Malvern and, while she currently lives outside the neighbourhood, she continues to run dance programming in the area. She has been working and dancing in Malvern for 25 years, is "really entrenched" in the community and never hesitates to get involved.

Tamla's background informed the creation of her dance company, Roots and Branches. The school, located at the Berner Trail Community Center in Malvern, teaches

children and youth a variety of forms including African, Indocultural and Caribbean dance forms as well as ballet, hip-hop, jazz, and contemporary dance. The goal is to help teach students about who they are and where they come from. She believes it is important for the children to see themselves reflected in their teachers so that the classroom offers a safe place to explore past, present and future identity.

Through dance, Tamla advocates the importance of diversity. She explains that "diversity works best when everyone comes to the table with a healthy sense of self." It is this sense of self that Roots and Branches School strives to provide for its students. For Tamla, identity has been "fostered here" and art has "made life meaningful." Based on her own childhood, Tamla believes that kids who grow up together through these types of programs will stay connected. The program helps the children develop "a sense of who they are and where they come from."

Under-serviced Sectors

Arts participation not only helps the individual but also contributes to the development of the next generation of leaders. In order to discover which groups of people are not getting access to these opportunities, the researchers asked interviewees, "Who is missing from arts programs?" We discovered arts programs that target children, youth, seniors, women or newcomers. But there is a lack of intergenerational programming and programming for lower priority groups such as men, working-age adults, and young adults who have graduated from youth programming and now wonder where to go.

While targeting a population helps to focus programs, assists organizations to access specific funding sources, and contributes to making participants feel more comfortable, there are downsides to having a program be too specific. For example, Muse Kulow of The Immigrant Post points out that because of language barriers, elder members of the Somali community are not being well served. In the past "they were active, they were dancing, but here they have no place to go." Intergenerational programming, on the other hand, has the capacity to give elders a valued role, build bridges between youth, adults and seniors, and allow for adults and

²⁷ The Youth Challenge Fund (YCF) is a collaborative pilot project between the Province of Ontario and United Way of Toronto. www.youthchallengefund.org

seniors to share positive ethnocultural identities with children and youth. In addition, teens looking after their younger siblings or their own children would have a place where they can participate together. This programming structure reflects a different cultural perspective compared to the age segregation prevalent in Canada's dominant culture.

Interviewees pointed out that immigrant communities live in "silos" – next to each other but apart. Josephine Grey, the Program Director of Low Income Families Together (LIFT) in St. James Town, speaks about the benefits of intercultural programming. She notes the isolation of First Nations people and suggests the creation of a link between First Nations and new Canadians because "there are times when multiculturalism [has been] used as a strategy to divide as much as it has been to promote individual cultures; this keeps [diverse groups] isolated from one another. This is why LIFT emphasizes interculturalism, where there is an opportunity for cross-fertilization. The arts can make a major contribution to this process with community events and performances with a broad audience."

Conclusion

Local arts and cultural leaders include those with deep roots and those who have just arrived; what they both share is a commitment to the role the arts can play in shaping their community.

Toronto's neighbourhoods have been and continue to be changed by waves of immigration bringing new ideas about arts and culture. When looking at the assets in a neighbourhood it is important to look under the surface so as not to miss the emergence of new leaders, to note who is being served by arts programs and who is not, the contributions newcomer artists are making to the Canadian art scene, and how intercultural programs can play a role in bridging difference. A more in-depth discussion of access to the arts is covered in Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER SIX

Drawn to the Arts: Personal Motivations

Ellen Dissanayake, in her book *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why*, looks at art as a basic human appetite and an essential component of life. Her anthropological view sees art as “biological, distinctive and noteworthy in its own right” (xiii). Disanayake’s work supports the African proverb and frequently quoted encouragement given to community arts participants: If you can talk you can sing, if you can walk you can dance. Art-making taps into urges that are deeply imbedded and, according to Dissanayake, are one of the characteristics that allowed our hominid ancestor to adapt and survive. Art invites an improvisational, playful and engaged mindset. Interviewees spoke of the energy, expressiveness and feelings of being more alive that came from participating in the arts.

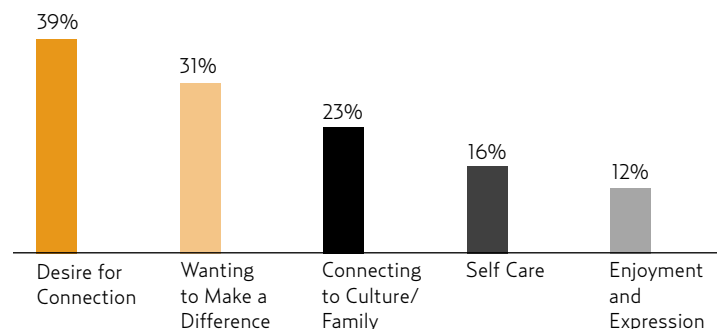
Observations that anthropologist Victor Turner has made about rituals and passages may also apply to community-engaged art-making. Turner identified a condition of being in a chaotic, in-between phase which he calls “liminality.” The bonds created with others, by sharing this state in a space separate from everyday life, he calls “communitas” (Turner qtd. in Levine 43–44). Participants in community-engaged arts programs often feel a sense of connection with the other participants and the power of creating together with others.

Liminal space, whether through solo art-making or as part of a group experience, is not a permanent state; it is a phase in “a process of destructuring and restructuring ... [its] ultimate purpose lies in the new meanings which emerge out of the ruins of the old” (Turner qtd in Levine 51). These insights can help us feel differently about ourselves and the world we live in. Ravi Subramaniam, Executive Director of the Community Corner in St. James Town, recognizes the power of arts for himself and community members when he says; “We eat every day. We sleep every day. What makes it

different is creation ... the creation of new things in artistic formats ... [this] makes life more beautiful and makes our life ‘alive.’”

A positive experience with the arts is a great motivator to continue creating, and knowing a person or situation changed through the arts is a strong endorsement to get involved or stay involved. Most of our interviewees were actively involved in the arts as practicing artists, arts facilitators and program planners. 39% said a desire for more connection to others was their prime motivation to pursue the arts and 31% got involved in order to make a difference in their community. 23% were drawn to art-making that honoured family and cultural connections. 16% embraced the self care or therapeutic aspects of the arts and a further 12% focused on pure enjoyment and self expression.

TABLE 4: MOTIVATION FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS



Connection

From the suburban outpost of Malvern to the city centre of St. James Town, research participants want to feel more connected. This is an overarching motivation that ties together many of the primary reasons interviewees make creative activities a fundamental part of their lives. Much has been written about isolation in large urban

centres²⁸ with some studies focusing specifically on the lack of connection at a neighbourhood level and the links between powerlessness and a sense of local disorder due to poverty and high crime rates (Geiss and Ross). Some of the interviewees expressed regret that their neighbourhoods were seen as troubled areas.

The arts provide an opportunity for connection – with neighbours, with our own history, and with the surroundings we call home. Arts programs break down barriers by addressing social isolation, helping us find others who share our creative spirit or desire to make a change. We are inherently social creatures and the arts are good connectors. Whether the practice itself is social – playing in a band, joining a knitting group or participating in a community arts project – or a solo activity such as painting, composing or writing, research participants shared how creative practices present ways of relating to others.

The demographics of a neighbourhood can determine arts programming. Laura Bolender, a dance instructor in Weston Mt. Dennis explains, "So they are going to want to learn African dance and then when they see krump they

are like, 'cool – that originated from our culture as well'...certainly the neighbourhood in which they live determines the kind of things they want, because that is what they are seeing."

We provide creative resources for people who are at cross roads in their lives; people can heal through shared creative activities.

Michael Cavanaugh,

► artist and facilitator at 6 St. Joseph House and the Bell Box Project

Making a Difference

Frederick Brobbrey, a young musician, producer, and entrepreneur from Weston, suggested many motivations and benefits

to participating in the arts including a way to "steer people clear of idleness and even participating in negative acts of crime." He believes that the arts "give an outlet to people that may not believe that they have any talent." His experience as an artist and a mentor to youth is a good

illustration of the possibilities of art to make a significant change in the life direction of a young person.

Brobbrey's ideas about art as a service not only to the individual but to the larger society were echoed by other interviewees who suggested that the arts are "a microphone," a way to help youth "find their voice" and an important part of "harm reduction."

"We channeled our energies to create cultural programs, to counsel ourselves through art...we were young men who didn't know we needed to heal," explains a community leader in St. James Town. Recounting how the arts made a difference at this critical point in his past, he recounts reading poetry and encouraging "each other to become good people and not to get involved in gangs."

Art-making invites improvisation and a certain amount of risk taking. Through the act of shaping (sound, movement, texture, colour, words) we can come to know ourselves better. When we are creative we feel we can do things in other parts of our lives. When we work with others we feel less isolated. Some arts projects are designed to bring participants who share common challenges together to create art that responds to broad barriers such as poverty, sexism and racism or to specific neighbourhood issues such as revitalization, pollution or crime. Some programs support individuals who have experienced trauma and abuse. An interviewee who works in one of these programs sees firsthand that art-making has therapeutic benefits.

Culture and Family

For some, art-making is a way to enhance connections within their own ethnocultural community, strengthen bonds between parents, children and grandchildren, and a way to pass a legacy on to the next generation. In some instances, arts programs are designed to keep a culture alive, to teach children about their heritage and to showcase work. Some immigrants feel very strongly that if the cultural traditions are not encouraged then over time "everything disappears." Somali-born editor of *The Immigrant Post*, Muse Kulow, explains, "It's the arts that define the gifts I give to my children. ...We come with talent but I have three children

²⁸ Connection and Engagement: a survey of Metro Vancouver, June 2012 <http://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/documents/VanFdn-SurveyResults-Report.pdf>

With my granddaughter, the arts are my connection with her. She is 3, and I bought her an easel for Christmas. I really enjoy that opportunity with her.

Sherry Provost,

► photographer and member of Artists to Artists Foundation, Weston Mt. Dennis

here, they don't know my culture; if I am gone that culture is missing, gone, and Canada doesn't benefit from what we bring here."

While some want to keep traditional culture alive, others encourage ethnocultural mash ups – borrowing a little from here and a little from there to create something new, reinventing culture. Toronto Arts Council Music Officer Christy DiFelice notes that

in Toronto musicians are coming together from different traditions, figuring out how to tune instruments and play together; they are creating a "whole new sound unique to our present-day, Toronto, urban experience."

A recent immigrant from India had been living in the St. James Town for only a few months when we interviewed her. She is originally trained as a doctor but decided to concentrate on raising her children and take up painting in her spare time. In St. James Town she has been able to meet other artists, many of whom are also newcomers. She gets inspiration from her cultural traditions and the memories she has of watching her mother make tablecloths for weddings and religious ceremonies. Her story illustrates the hidden art processes that are going on within newcomer communities.

Those who studied an art form as a young person in their home countries or professional artists who gave up their practice on arriving in Canada, expressed pleasure at being able to reconnect to their love of the arts, to improve or learn new skills, and to find others interested in their art form.

Self Care and Well Being

For some, being creative is not so much about pursuing an arts discipline as it is way of being. The active parts of creation (movement, sound, shaping materials) are an

excellent way to be expressive but interviewees pointed out that the arts can also be a "place to take pause" and to look inward. Some describe this as a spiritual experience while others describe it as a quiet reflective state or a kind of "sanctuary."

Involvement in the arts can change how a person perceives themselves and how they are perceived by others, often contributing to improved self-esteem and confidence. Those who did not think they were "artistic" discover self expression and creativity they did not know they had. According to a parent living in St. James Town, "Many parents in the Chinese community believe that drawing is a significant part of a child's education" because the skills acquired in learning an art form can build confidence and skills that are transferable to other situations.

Involvement in the arts can help improve mental and physical health, a fact acknowledged by the social service and health sectors through the increased number of arts activities that are part of care and rehabilitation programs. A participant in a focus group with service providers in St. James Town noted that "The arts are a way to deal with grief and loss; it's a health issue. ...We favour activities that help people be expressive and explore their own stories."

Indeed, a 2013 study on attendance at cultural

So we're talking about people who have either cognitive or physical disabilities... I helped out with the arts programs; painting, for example. I found that a lot of the people, because they're stuck in their rooms all day, stuck in wheel chairs, they don't always get to go out. With those residents, the arts gave them something creative to do. Something that they can feel like, "Oh, I can do this!"... Because in that program they modify the paint brushes and the instruments so that they can paint. I met residents there that really felt that the arts impacted their lives... something else they could look forward to during the day.

Arts program volunteer,

► Weston Mt. Dennis

²⁹ *The Arts and Individual Well-Being in Canada*, the 39th report in the Statistical Insights on the Arts series. In a statistical model of health, cultural festival attendees have a 14% greater likelihood of reporting very good or excellent health than non-attendees, even after controlling for other factors. Festival attendees are twice as likely as non-attendees to have volunteered in the past year, even accounting for other factors. In a model of satisfaction with life, cultural festival attendees have a 25% greater likelihood of reporting very strong satisfaction with life than non-attendees, once other factors were accounted for in the model. <http://www.hillstrategies.com/content/arts-and-individual-well-being-canada>

I teach a number of art classes for children from the neighborhood and this really connects me to the community – anything from drawing to painting. When I arrived in Toronto, I immediately began teaching classes from my home on Saturdays for different ages. I also did some volunteering with Community Matters at the school. ...I have a teaching background for over twenty years back in China. My specialty is traditional Chinese ink brush drawings and writing with characters.

Joyce Zhou,
► artist, St. James Town

festivals compared attendees to non-attendees for social indicators of health. The study reported significantly improved indicators in the festival attendees, including better mental and physical health and involvement in the community through volunteering and assisting neighbours.²⁹

Weston-based musician Jason Strachan succinctly captures the power of arts to help people live up to their potential when he says, "Art helps people tap into the rest of who they are." Community arts practitioners frequently comment on how arts program participants appear to be transformed by arts

engagement (Charlton 47-58). An artist, who works with many community arts programs, said "Art has made a big difference in my life. During hard times it kept me going."

Interviewees sharing stories about how participation in the arts increased their self esteem used words and phrases such as "uplifting, giving hope, cheers people up, helps express love, channels energy, relaxing, and calming" to describe the way the arts help themselves and others.

Joy and Expression

An opportunity to be "expressive" was identified by interviewees as a motivation to pursue the arts. "The arts are a visual or sonic expression of emotion!" says Freeway Freddy. Our research revealed stories about the "pure joy" of making art and a pull towards being expressive and creative. When given the opportunity and encouragement, most people enjoy being creative. In fact, the enjoyment it creates has even been used to levy criticism against the arts, as a non-essential leisure or entertainment activity. But a youth participant in a focus group at Blessed Mother Teresa Secondary School in Malvern expressed the importance of art in her life: "[Art] makes life bearable, [it's] part of everyday, [you] must do something creative every day, something you love." Interviewees shared stories about the pleasure of getting together socially with friends and family to play music and meeting others interested in the arts expands social circles.

Conclusion:

Motivations for involvement in the arts are multiple and mutable, changing over time and over changing life circumstances. Motivations depend on the type of arts practice, how an individual defines the arts, and how they see the arts in relation to their community, history and future.

Personal, economic and community changes resulting from being involved in art-making or arts engagement are strong motivators to continue one's arts practice or get involved in starting arts projects. Our discussions with interviewees about their motivations frequently led to talking about impacts – personal and social.

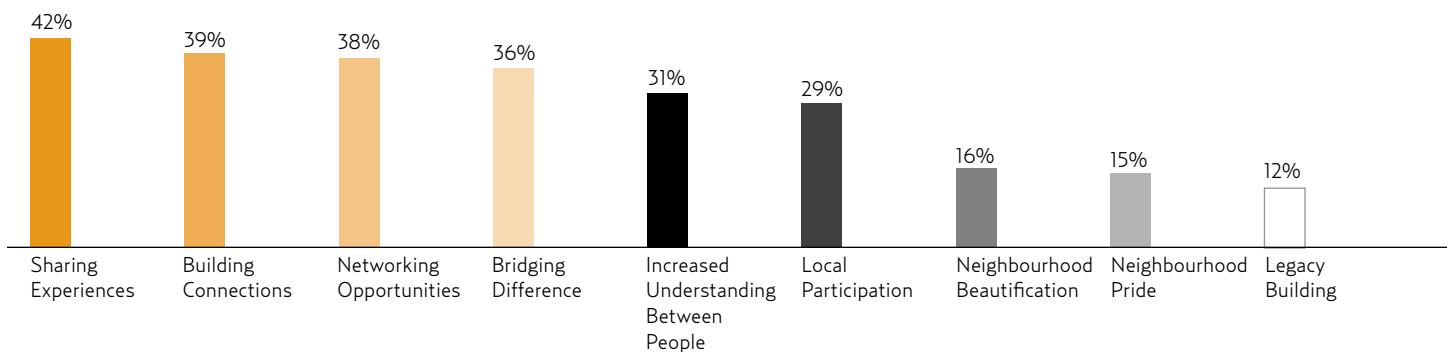
CHAPTER SEVEN

Impact of the Arts

The arts have an impact on neighbourhoods and the people who live there. Interviewees spoke of both kinds of benefits interchangeably and there are many parallels between individual change and social change. Part One discusses the impact on community life and Part Two examines changes to the quality of life of individuals.

PART ONE: Impact on Community Life

TABLE 5: TOP IMPACTS OF THE ARTS ON COMMUNITY LIFE



Sharing, Networking and Building Connection

Interviewees cited ways that the arts build community and help people discover that "this is home." Working on community projects such as community plays, murals and community gardens, builds a sense of belonging. By sharing stories and ideas, and working side by side with neighbours, residents feel more connected to each other and to their neighbourhood. Breaking down isolation can result in more empathy and increased sense of ownership of community issues and concerns; as one interviewee put it, "When you care, you start taking care."

Bridging Difference and Increased Understanding

The arts can reframe thoughts, feelings and ideas by approaching them in a metaphorical or a non-linear way. "Sometimes things we cannot say to another person we can express easily with arts," says Rvinda Dubb, a visual artist

from Weston Mt. Dennis who recently moved to Canada from India. In the short term, this helps air different points of view and in the long term contributes to attitudinal changes that can shift xenophobic thinking.

Where diverse populations live side by side, the arts can offer another language in lieu of a common spoken language. Community play specialists Jumblies Theatre are a fine example of working with diverse populations to create plays that capture the elements and history of a neighbourhood. Their December 2011 production of *Like An Old Tale*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, was inspired by people, places and stories of Scarborough, including Malvern. It merged an original musical score by Juliet Palmer with traditional-style First Nations songs created by singer Rosary Spence and traditional Tamil songs sung by Sharada Eswar. The cast of over 100 brought together diverse community members of all ages and abilities, including those who were Aboriginal,

Writing has made me more aware of what is around me in the community...what I write about are things that I see in the community ... I write about it to prompt people to take action, to make a difference.

The arts allow you to create; to think and reflect on what happens in your community, what happens in your own life, and what happens around you.

Judy Tran,

► artist, Weston Mt. Dennis

Tamil, European and Latin American. Jumblies' Artistic Director Ruth Howard sees the community as the canvas where change happens not only for participants but within the artists as well. "Putting ourselves in situations where this change can happen and impact on our artistic practice is the counterpoint to the equally important but better documented transformative power of community arts for its participants, and locates the artist, as well as the participant and audience, within the aesthetic of 'emergence'" (Howard and Van Fossen, 6).³⁰

The arts offer a powerful form of communication. Community-engaged arts can bring disparate groups together revealing differences and tensions but also creating a place of possibility to examine these contradictions. They can help us see a different perspective, shatter expectations, question the status quo, deepen conversations and have a transformative effect on participants and audiences. They can inform and educate and, as one interviewee said, "they can open us up to other realities." In *VIVA! Community Arts and Popular Education in the Americas*, Deborah Barndt discusses the place where 'the dynamic relation of theory and practice' reveal 'contradictions' and thus also an opportunity for potential reflection and action. Drawing on the work of adult educator Paulo Freire and journalist and union organizer Antonio Gramsci, Barndt explores tensions she feels are reoccurring (and perhaps inevitable) when engaging in community arts practice (Barndt, 2011).

Dale Hamilton, founder and Artistic Director of Everybody's Theatre, created *A Whole New Picture: a Mount Dennis Community Play* about the history and challenges facing Mount Dennis. She shared the difficulty of creating community plays but also their potential to challenge assumptions. Her story emphasizes the provocative role art can play in raising questions, in making people uncomfortable, and dealing with differences and deeper social schisms. Denise Gillard of Frontlines, a social service agency in Weston Mt. Dennis sees the arts as a way "to see beyond our own selfishness and struggles."

We reached a philosophical roadblock that centered on this bar down the street called Nancy's. It was clearly a hangout and a centre for prostitution. Obviously people in very difficult circumstances. I was trying as a manager of the project to focus a fair amount of attention on those people and I was told that "those people" weren't ready for community development...It really felt like the antithesis of what I think community development is...I'm not saying that there is a simple answer to this, but in community development all you can really do is respond in the moment. So what we ended up doing was a community-engaged all inclusive theatrical walk/bus trip through the neighbourhood, and the bus stopped at Nancy's. Originally I had hoped to cast one of the prostitutes in the role as themselves, but their addictions and just being able to find them was very challenging. So a woman from the neighbourhood performed that role. So we were using the arts as a real mirror of the neighbourhood. Of course there were some people who didn't even want the bus to stop at Nancy's.

Dale Hamilton,

► Artistic Director, Everybody's Theatre

³⁰ Ruth Howard and Rachel van Fossen explore the role of professional artists in working with communities and the development of a community arts aesthetic in their paper, "Easy to Say: Reflection on the roles of art and artists in Canadian adaptation of Colway Community Play form." The paper was released as a response to a meeting of community arts practitioners held in Toronto in 2003. http://www.canadacouncil.ca/~media/Files/Inter-Arts/20_jumbliesen.pdf

Neighbourhood Beautification, Local Participation and Increased Pride

Art in public spaces was frequently cited as a way to improve the visual aesthetics in a neighbourhood. In Weston Mt. Dennis, murals have been used to beautify areas neglected by absentee landlords. In St. James Town groups such as Bell Box Murals, Community Corner, Community Matters, Recipe for Change Initiative, Luminato Festival and Art City have worked on public art projects in the neighbourhood, evidenced by the number of mosaics, murals and fence art that can be seen when walking the sidewalks of this largely car-free neighbourhood. At Urban Arts, a team of youth artists and a professional artist work each summer on the creation of murals in the neighbourhood. Interviewees noted the positive effects of mural projects in countering gang tagging and helping "beautify" the neighbourhood. Many projects invite local participation into the creation and input into the content.

At the same time, the public nature of this work means there are often differing points of view as to where the work should be located, its content and style. See the section under Public Art in Chapter 4 for a larger discussion of murals.

Legacy Building

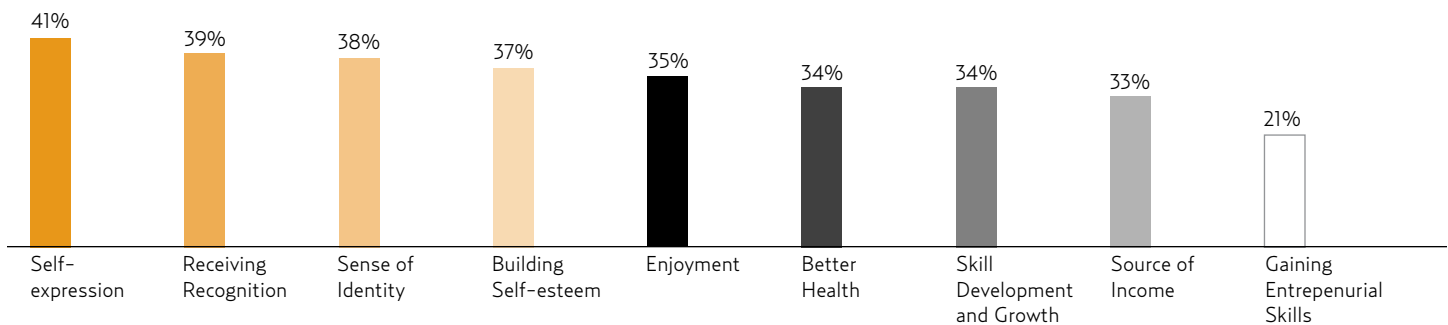
Marginalized communities have turned to art as a way of exploring their stories and sense of identity. Some of this work has grown organically out of community struggles and a need for self-determination but at times community arts is introduced in a more prescriptive way in order to assist a community facing a particular struggle or concern (the prescription might be written by community insiders or outsiders). Monica Kin Gagnon and Richard Fung,³¹ suggest that community arts can play a role for diasporic groups to recover histories and practices that have disappeared or been negated by the dominant culture. While embracing the benefit of identity driven work, they caution against pigeonholing artists into any expectation that their work should focus only on their own cultural histories or identities.

St. James Town-based photographer Alejandra Higuera says "I want to show a different image of immigrants. Toronto is such a diverse world." She likes her new home in St. James Town and wants to capture the feel of the diversity in the community from the point of view of an immigrant artist. Another newcomer artist, Yassir Nagim, is using his visual art pieces to raise awareness of what he sees as a problem in his home country. Describing one of his works, he points out that "the relief pieces are made of bamboo and deal with the issue of forced female circumcision in Africa." These examples illustrate newcomers who are expressing themselves not only about the communities they are now a part of, but also the communities and countries they are from and often remain connected to. These projects that are place-based and not place-bound deepen our understanding of global histories and migrations. The arts can help us understand residents' past and origins which is critical to building a community in the present and into the future.

³¹ Gagnon and Fung's work *13 Conversations About Arts and Cultural Race Politics* contains essays about cultural appropriation and authenticity of cultural forms.

PART TWO: Impact on Individuals

TABLE 6: TOP IMPACTS OF THE ARTS ON THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS



Interviewees expressed the impact of the arts on the lives of individuals as largely connected to areas of empowerment and personal agency including improved self esteem, recognition from others, and a greater sense of identity and enjoyment; and as an opportunity to earn money and gain skills. For some, involvement in the arts moved day to day life past the “ordinary” showing that there was more to do together than just “having a cigarette and coffee.”

Empowerment and Personal Agency

The arts have been and continue to be integral to major social movements, and can be part of pivotal social transformations (Reed). While this role of the arts was not explicitly explored in this study, it is an inevitable extension of the social engagement and community-building described above, and a number of interviewees spoke about the ability of the arts to empower individuals.

Mainstream popular culture – often seen as superficial consumption, heavily influenced by mass media – pervades contemporary society but when art is examined at a neighbourhood level there is no shortage of people creating their own forms of cultural activities and entertainment that are spiritually, intellectually and artistically relevant to themselves and other members of their community. In some ways these initiatives counter the dominant popular consumer culture: rap becomes resistance, weaving and gardening become subversive and the selling of hand-made art objects becomes a new platform for local commerce that challenges the mass production of goods. The arts are part of a democratic impulse to get involved and make a difference by working together or altering public space; they

are positive responses against isolation and alienation in urban environments.

For example, Lost Lyrics, a mobile youth organization, work with youth throughout the city and has worked extensively in Malvern with its high concentration of youth. Co-founders Amanda Parris and Natasha Daniel assist young people who feel stigmatized by race or class to share their stories without judgement and the organization provides tools for arts-based education as a means to develop self-empowerment and positive self-image, in particular among racialized youth.

Many interviewees spoke about the positive changes youth arts programs are making not only for the youth themselves but for the communities they live in. Youth arts has become a distinctive type of artistic practice that does more than provide arts programming for youth – it puts them in the driver’s seat by building leadership qualities and giving them the skills to run their own organizations and become a part of social change. Youth-led arts programs draw attention to participatory planning approaches, seeing youth as experts, moving away from top-down models, and becoming more in touch with on-the-ground needs. Femi James, Director of The S.P.O.T, a new youth-led arts hub in Malvern, explains that the centre is especially important to a neighbourhood where many young people have been “criminalized, racialized, and marginalized.” Initiated in January 2008 and funded by the Youth Challenge Fund and the City of Toronto, the centre is developing creative voices and skills for long-term individual and community success. Like Urban Arts in Weston Mt. Dennis and UforChange in St. James Town, the S.P.O.T is an up-to-date media centre that provides

There has never been a dedicated space like this in Malvern whether it was t-shirt making or screen printing – there was no place to do this in the neighbourhood. We've never had a dance studio – it was always tough finding space. It would be someone's basement or negotiating the schedule at the community centre. They [local youth] didn't want to join a program; they want to be the program.

Femi James,

► Executive Director, The S.P.O.T.

recording equipment, performance space, and design facilities. At The S.P.O.T. the young people are involved in governance, decisions about programming, and evaluation.

Culturally relevant, locally-based programs that use media, visual and performing arts have demonstrated promising results in positive youth engagement. Advocacy efforts promote the benefits of arts programming for children and youth by illustrating how the arts build skills, promote community engagement and provide

broader social and economic benefits.³²

ArtReach Toronto is a pioneer in youth arts. Their skill development and granting programs support youth artists and art organizations in neighbourhoods throughout the city. Shahina Sayani, ArtReach's Director, speaks passionately about the impact of the arts on young lives and the desire of youth to support "active change" by speaking out about the problems they are facing; this is having a "long term ripple effect" on communities. An extensive evaluation of their programs revealed that the youth-led focus significantly built skills in young people.³³ The impact of art on self esteem for youth has aptly been called "walking taller" (Weitz). Following the ArtReach example, additional groups are emerging to support marginalized artists. Cue is a youth-led initiative that supports LGBT newcomer artists and people with disabilities between the ages of 19 and 29 through small grants and skill development workshops in areas such as in project budgeting, producing and exhibiting work.

Enjoyment

Interviewees spoke extensively about finding joy through art-making as a motivator to be and to stay involved in the arts. Researchers observed that interviewees became more animated when discussing their experiences. Art-making was described as a kind of "passion" that is like "taking care of a part of yourself" because "the love and care you put in" is seen by those that buy, hear or see your art.

Economic Impact

In economically challenged neighbourhoods, arts programs are sometimes seen as a way out, a pathway to a career, or at least a chance to supplement an income. In St. James Town, vendors set up on the sidewalks while in Weston an informal bazaar called Fish Fridays is a chance to "sell some stuff and make some money." Adeena Greeves, aka Cookie, a Weston performer, admires the Fish Fridays' host because "she's hosting not just for her [to sell items] but for other people so they can profit off of it as well. ...She's actually giving to the people and that's a big thing in leadership." For some making crafts or jewellery is a "chance to get a little bit of extra money to help out."

Young entrepreneurs are launching careers in music mixing, graphic design, clothing design and multimedia. The opportunity to make a living is a huge motivator and youth who have "made it" act as beacons of hope. The Arts Services Branch of the City of Toronto focuses on supporting the development of youth artists, and The City of Toronto's 2011 Creative Capital Gains Report acknowledges that the arts are important to the whole city. Nadira Pattison, Manager of Arts Services, notes the number of programs that have emerged to assist young entrepreneurs because they "have to have somewhere to go after they build skills." She calls this "the ladder of opportunity." Pattison also sees access to prosperity for all as a key component in Toronto's ambitions to be a strong, global city.

Some emerging artists we interviewed clearly had their eye on becoming stars. Having role models and a dream are important but "celebrity" culture is very seductive and the reality is that very few achieve star status. Allen Kaeja, a

³² The Arts Network for Children and Youth raise awareness of the benefits of arts programming, lobby for increased funding for the sector, distribute resources, and engage in research studies. http://www.artsnetwork.ca/?q=research_reports

³³ <http://www.artreachtoronto.ca/evaluation.html>

dance artist who has worked with many youth projects in priority neighbourhoods, noted the tension between an instructor's encouragement of unique creative expression and a youth's desire to replicate the latest YouTube phenomenon. It is important not to forget the difference between commercially successful stars and the reality that most professional artists live well below the poverty line.³⁴

A more useful perspective is to see that arts programming benefits participants in many ways. By hiring young people from the area, for example, UrbanArts is trying to "engage people in the community in positive ways to build skills, talent and confidence. They can take that into other areas of their lives."³⁵

Conclusion

The intrinsic and expressive value of the arts benefits the individual by providing pleasure and a sense of agency through literal or metaphoric shaping of material, and a connection to something larger than oneself. Increased individual capacity does not necessarily stop with the person but can contribute to increased sense of belonging and a desire to make a difference, qualities that are needed in a pluralistic society. In this way, intrinsic values contribute to instrumental changes within the larger society such as improved health, economic social cohesion as well as movements for social change.

The information gathered in this research illustrates that the arts are having an impact on the lives of individuals and the communities in which they live. At the same time, it is necessary to address systemic causes of poverty and inequality in order to have lasting change.

³⁴ <http://www.hillstrategies.com/content/situation-artists-0>

³⁵ Weston Mount Dennis Blog, August 2010 <http://www.westonweb.ca/2010/08/28/urbanarts-completes-mural-project-in-weston/>

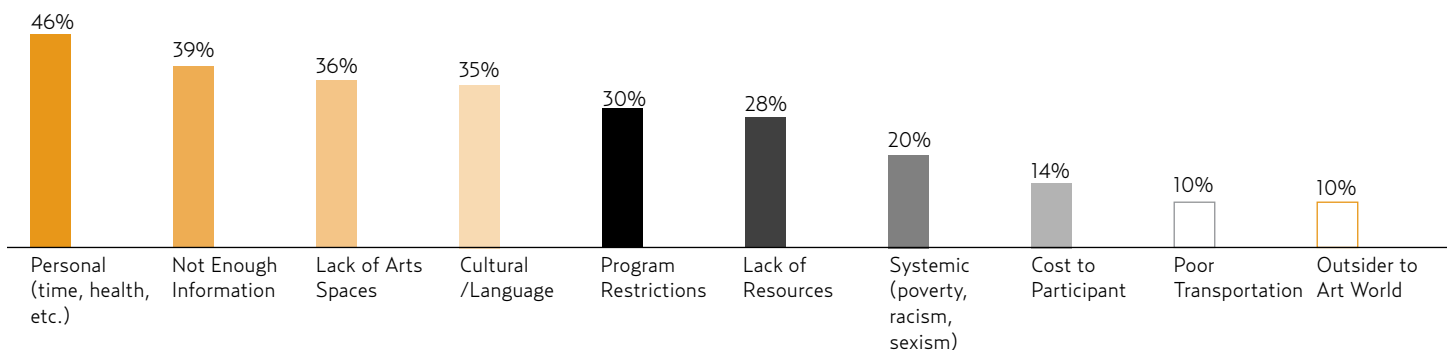
CHAPTER EIGHT

Access to the Arts: Barriers and Opportunities

Interviewees shared their own experience and the experiences of friends, families and neighbours. Disconnection, alienation and isolation were flagged as major barriers to accessing arts programs. These obstacles are connected to social inequities and larger structural problems that marginalize some people and communities more than others. 45% of respondents said that pressures in their personal life kept them from participating in the arts. These included lack of time, health issues, or simply feeling that they didn't have the energy to take on anything else. Some of these reasons reflect the high cost of living in Toronto, and the amount of time needed to travel for work or recreation. Some of these pressures are acutely felt by new immigrants dealing with settling in a new community (see Chapter Five for more information about challenges faced by newcomers). 35% of respondents identified cultural and language barriers to accessing information and 30% noted program restrictions by factors such as age, gender, art form, location or scheduling. Interviewees felt that residents of Toronto living in wealthier neighbourhoods do not experience the same number of barriers to arts involvement as they do.

The following table indicates the top access issues reported by interviewees.

TABLE 7: TOP BARRIERS TO ARTS ACCESS



Some interviewees provided specific incidences of when they faced a barrier while others spoke of an overall feeling of being on the outside of an insider "arts community." Whether that is downtown versus suburban, long time resident versus newcomer, or simply a group in the know versus those not on the list, the result is that a sizeable

number of people reported problems accessing the arts. Barriers connected to individual circumstances and challenges in program planning are discussed in Part One. In Part Two systemic challenges and ways that organizations are addressing barriers are addressed.

PART ONE: Individual and Programming Barriers

INDIVIDUAL

- ▲ Affordability
- ▲ Accessibility
- ▲ Lack of personal support
- ▲ Life transitions

PROGRAMMING

- ▲ Facilities and cultural spaces
- ▲ Outreach and communications
- ▲ Transportation
- ▲ Accessibility and Targeting

Affordability

Researchers were asked by parents for more information about free or affordable arts programs for their children. There are not many options; free community arts programs fill up fast and for some even the minimal fees charged at community centres are too high.³⁶ Some parents, especially newcomers, have trouble figuring out how to navigate the sign-up system. A mother in St. James Town complained that children in the neighbourhood can't get into the programs because mothers from nearby affluent areas are more familiar with the on-line registration system.

No-cost arts programming maximizes accessibility but some concern was expressed that free programs are not valued by participants. Affordable programs – sliding scale, pay what-you-can options or nominal costs – offer a compromise. For example, the Roots and Branches Dance School in Malvern charges \$5 per class because school founder Tamla Matthews-Morgan feels free classes are sometimes treated as drop-in and without commitment it's difficult to build skills. She adds that no one would be turned away if the fee was an obstacle to participation. Interviewees recognized poverty as an issue in their neighbourhood but some rejected the idea of being labelled a "low income neighbourhood." Tamla is tired of dated terms like "have and have-nots" because she doesn't feel the community labels themselves with such reductionist terminology.

³⁶ St. James Town and Malvern have Community and Recreation Centres that offer a variety of arts and recreation activities, such as, ballet, crafting, early childhood music, hip-hop, and general classes in visual arts, and performing arts.

³⁷ The New Canadian Children and Youth Study is committed to developing a National Children's Agenda that pays attention to immigrant and refugee children, to their particular challenges, and to the capacities they need to develop in order to convert challenge into opportunity. http://nccys.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=1,

The research team identified a limited number of opportunities in the research neighbourhoods for private classes but found no examples of privately owned arts centres offering family arts activities.

Lack of Support and Systemic Barriers

Encouragement is an important support factor for a person to start or continue to pursue their interest in the arts. Some youth discover their parents are not supportive when their "hobby" turns into a serious pursuit. "I think newcomer immigrants have a lot of hope for their children. They want their kids to be a doctor instead of a DJ or graffiti artist," says Sean Roman who facilitated arts workshops at UforChange in St. James Town. Parental concerns have to be understood in the context of the sacrifices parents make to come to Canada, including perhaps losing status and having to take on menial jobs. This situation reflects a larger social issue, which is the lack of general support for the arts as a livelihood in Canada (which is not the case in all countries).

A member of the St. James Town Youth Council and participant in UforChange's programs shared that the arts offer her a chance to express herself but she had to win her parents over: "Ever since we were young we were taught that if you do anything like art you will be broke. My parents were like that too; they said the fashion industry is cutthroat and it will be difficult." Malvern-based artist Connie Tong didn't receive the support she wanted from her parents but when they saw her working hard to become an artist she gained their understanding and respect.

There are many external factors that make accessibility to the arts difficult but some of the barriers have been internalized. Studies have illustrated that "Neighbourhoods affect children's health and well-being. Children in poor neighbourhoods tend to attend schools with limited funding, have access to few cultural resources, and are at high risk of dropping out of school."³⁷ A 2013 study completed by People for Education reports inequitable access to arts in

Ontario schools and that many elementary and secondary schools rely on parents to fundraise for art enrichment.³⁸ This situation makes it more difficult for young people in low income neighbourhoods.

Being creative also means taking risks and many feel that if you don't have "talent" you might, as one youth told us, "make a fool of yourself." Recognizing that support is a key factor in building self esteem, a major objective of community-based arts programs is to encourage participants and build confidence.

Facilities

There was unanimous agreement on the need for more and stable funding in order to support and sustain arts programs, and an equally strong call for more spaces. Interviewees shared many examples of how their neighbourhood could "blossom" if there were more spaces for arts activities; comparisons to "downtown" and more "affluent" areas were frequently made. Despite expressing optimism and belief in their neighbourhood, many interviewees were frustrated with the gap they saw between what could be and what is. The research team heard of several initiatives to build cultural spaces that were proposed but have not materialized, leaving local artists and residents discouraged.

This is particularly true in Weston Mt. Dennis where, despite being targeted as a Priority Neighbourhood, the area still lacks a community or recreation centre. There have been many community meetings, research studies and promises but as one resident wryly put it, "We're in year 3 of a 30 year upswing."

According to the *Toronto Vital Signs* report (2012),³⁹ Toronto has an enviable neighbourhood-based library system that is the largest in the world, with 99 neighbourhood branches. Libraries are important community hubs and act as formal and informal meeting spaces. In addition, some branches have spaces where they program arts activities or schedule art exhibits. However, not all libraries have enough space and from time to time branches are closed for lengthy

renovations which affects scheduled programming.

Where there is insufficient room in libraries and community centres or no dedicated arts space, program planners have started to look elsewhere. Arts for Children and Youth conducts programs in Toronto Community Housing spaces in Malvern, St. James Town and Weston Mt. Dennis. Some interviewees suggested that more use should be made of schools outside of school hours but others noted that schools are generally difficult to access in the evenings and weekends for a number of reasons, including supervision and operating costs. In contrast, thanks to a supportive administration, Rose Avenue Public School in St. James Town acts as a community hub for meetings, local gatherings and classes. Case in point: a design charette on the use and development of public spaces attended by the research team was held in the school on a Saturday. Similarly in Malvern, our research team conducted two after-school events at Blessed Mother Teresa Secondary School. The school has a tradition of arts activities and in September 2012 began offering a Regional Arts Program. With a brand new dance studio to complement their existing drama studio and multiple music and art rooms, they are well-equipped to accommodate a new wave of artistically driven students.

Attempts to use repurposed facilities or build new spaces raise hope but the reality is a many-stepped process involving permits, insurance, and safety regulations. "There is a group of people trying to see if we can't do something with the former post office building which would make a great community space," explains Mike Sullivan, MP for York South-Weston. "But it's full of asbestos; about a \$1M of remediation is needed." In addition, some art forms need particular amenities such as wooden floors for dancing or sinks to wash brushes and do clean up after messy visual arts activities.

Operating out of a storefront space, Art City in St. James Town is providing arts experiences for children in a densely populated area but they have insufficient space and resources to meet local demand. Their free after-school art program has a continuous waiting list. The problem of accessibility to arts opportunities for children and youth is further compounded by cutbacks to arts education in

³⁸ <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/annual-report-2013-WEB.pdf>

³⁹ https://www.tcf.ca/sites/default/files/TVS_2012_FullReport.doc

⁴⁰ Making the Case for Arts Education <http://www.arts.on.ca/asset6345.aspx>

Toronto's schools.⁴⁰

The Weston Silver Band might have their roots in the community but they want to connect with brass musicians and audiences from outside their neighbourhood. Toronto Arts Council's Music Officer Christy DiFelice notes that this group, and others like them, seek support to cover the costs of concerts but they want well equipped spaces and there are few ideal performance spaces in neighbourhood settings. Community arts groups also have difficulty finding space for their activities. Impact: Indian Martial and Performance Arts Collective reported having to use spaces outside of Malvern because of lack of space in the community for presentations.

At a Toronto Arts Foundation sponsored city-wide symposium on community-engaged arts held in 2006, community arts practitioners from Toronto shared concerns about spaces with poor heating, cooling and ventilation; cramped spaces lacking sufficient storage; and spaces in areas with poor lighting and irregular transit connections resulting in arts facilitators feeling unsafe (Charlton and Lawrence). These conditions not only illustrate the challenges of delivering arts programming, but reflect the broader disparities between neighbourhoods in the city.

Outreach and Communication

Even with the best outreach and communication efforts, there will be some who feel left out. Poor communications mean individuals don't link to opportunities and groups don't get the support they need. Interviewees in Weston Mt. Dennis pointed out that arts programming is "pretty much underground." Artists don't know where other artists are or when events are happening and some working in programs describe feelings of isolation and being cut off from the local and the larger city scene. There was a suggestion for something as simple as a neighbourhood bulletin board for arts activities. Knowing what else is going on is important because artists

have "these little gems" and sharing what is succeeding helps them "keep going."

It's often assumed that information can be found on the internet but many informal groups don't have a web presence. Word of mouth can be effective but it also means that some people are outside of the loop. Different modes of communication are needed for different groups – posters will work for some, for others it is social media and still others by word of mouth. Sometimes all modes are needed plus translation into different languages and an awareness of cultural barriers.

Urban Arts is one of the best-known groups in Weston Mt. Dennis but they also face challenges with community outreach. Executive Director Marlene

McKintosh notes that "there are things that happen in the community that we don't always know about because the word doesn't get out and vice-versa. We do as much outreach as we can but people don't always know what's going on. Most neighbourhood-based arts groups don't have a dedicated outreach position and many do not receive annual funding so it's difficult to focus on communications."

Interviewees from Malvern pointed out the challenges of suburban communities where the population is spread out, there is less of a street life, and the major shopping area is a mall. Although malls frequently serve as *de facto* community centres where information is shared informally, there

are limited public spaces in malls for promoting community events. One interviewee, describing the neighbourhood as "isolated" also noted disconnection between groups working in the neighbourhood even though some of those groups are within walking distance of each other. Word of mouth doesn't spread in Malvern, it gets trapped in smaller subgroups."

St. James Town is largely a tower community with limited

The people who are missing in arts programming are the young people who live in the neighbourhood but don't go to school in the area or who are out of high school (18 to 29), adult men, and non-English speakers.

Alex Dow,

► Action for Neighbourhood Change, Malvern

A lot of the focus is on youth, so that's good. And then we have seniors, but it seems like there is nothing in the middle.

Cheri Hurst,

► Weston Historical Society

public space; this increases isolation and provides less space for information sharing but interviewees said word of mouth works well especially within ethnocultural or interest driven subgroups. In Weston Mt. Dennis, we were told that subgroups access news differently – word of mouth, flyers, on-line – and mastering all the different ways of communicating is like being ‘multi-lingual.’

Outreach efforts can be improved but sometimes it’s all a matter of timing. Performer Cookie (Adeena Greaves) “never took in” information about local activities and development workshops until she started singing, but then she realized, “Oh! These resources are here ... and once you know about it, it can help you down the line.” The difficulty of information getting lost in an overload of messages and the broader social phenomena of social isolation and atomization, all contribute to lack of community connections.

In addition to problems with outreach, there is a need for better networking between arts organizations with similar goals. Concerns about “duplication of programming” and the number of youth arts programs that are not in communication with each other were earmarked by an interviewee working on mural arts projects. Overworked arts groups find it difficult to take on coordinating roles, which underscores the need for neighbourhood coordination. Important work is being done by City of Toronto-funded Local Arts Service Organizations;⁴¹ however, these groups serve large regional areas with limited resources and do not operate in downtown communities.

In response to the perceived need for better networking, the Neighbourhood Arts Network⁴² was founded in 2009. It operates as a virtual hub for approximately 1000 members throughout the city who are working in diverse arts disciplines and interested in the role of arts in building communities. The Network provides information about what’s going on, highlights case studies, maintains an updated “reading room” with links, and organizes training and networking events in locations throughout the city.

Transportation

Transportation is a challenge for residents in suburban areas. Malvern, located in the region of Scarborough, is the most north-easterly section of Toronto. It is not only a long way from downtown but also from the southern edge of Scarborough. Transportation is a major issue in the suburbs for residents who do not own cars. There are long wait times for infrequent buses and long commutes across town. For those reliant on public transportation, travelling to access arts activities, classes or training opportunities not available in the neighbourhood can take hours.

In Weston Mt. Dennis, residents spoke about the difficulty of planning activities for the community because it is so stretched out. Some activities happen at the southern end (Mount Dennis) and others in the north end (Weston). Parents are concerned about their children’s safety and the problem of waiting for infrequent buses on cold winter evenings.

Targeted Programs

In Chapter Five we discussed the lack of intergenerational and intercultural programs and the problem of targeted programs not being accessible to certain demographics. Some interviewees had mixed responses to the idea of targeting. For some targeting looks like barriers while for other it means doors opening. A youth arts facilitator in Weston Mt. Dennis points out that, while the program doesn’t officially name it, the content is an unwritten statement about who they want to attract: “I’m not saying Caucasians don’t dance or make music ... but we gear in a hip-hop, R&B, urban music way. ...Our events are very consistent ... I think subconsciously people already know it’s [for black youth].”

On the other hand, a dance instructor questions why art is “categorized into cultural backgrounds.” For her it doesn’t matter “where you come from or what you look like, it’s about what you are interested in.” She sees no reason why the young black girls she is working with should only be hip-hop dancers. She doesn’t want them to become trapped, and counters “Why not ballet or male-dominated krumping?”

⁴¹ In 2013, four Local Arts Organizations were expanded to six serving the following communities: Lakeshore, Etobicoke, York, Scarborough, North York and East York. <http://www.toronto.ca/culture/arts-services/laso.htm>

⁴² www.neighbourhoodartsnetwork.org

Groups that have not had opportunities to participate in the arts might feel more comfortable in a program with those who share their needs and concerns. "Kids in the neighbourhood who are living really at-risk lives need to be supported and their energy can be channelled into arts programs," said one local activist in Weston Mt. Dennis. Young men are frequently referred to as an at-risk group and arts programming is promoted as one of the ways that they can be steered away from criminal activity. St. James Town community activist Josephine Grey reminds us that there is a need to target alienated young men because "getting

positive feedback and support can help them recognize that the world is not against them." At the same time, in looking critically at gender issues, a community organizer points out that programming for young women can take a back seat to sports activities and the perceived needs of young men.

"Youth are not a homogenous group," says Shahina Sayani of ArtReach, a youth arts funding organization. Although a pioneer in youth-led arts ventures, the group is cautious about embracing the term "youth arts" as it implies a

PART TWO: Addressing Barriers to Participation

homogenous aesthetic grounded in urban art forms. Sayani suggests more expansive thinking is needed because "not everyone is interested in graffiti arts."

- ▲ Improving Local Involvement
- ▲ Training
- ▲ Building Partnerships
- ▲ Advocacy and Reporting

Improving Local Involvement

Interviewees spoke about the need for programs to be in touch with local concerns, and informed and facilitated with knowledge and respect for the culture of participants. Some programming by "outsider" organizations was viewed as top-down, opportunistic and disconnected from the community. It is important to work with local assets before bringing in "experts" because it is better "to find out what's there," says Charmaine Lurch a community arts practitioner who works on art projects at Rose Ave. Public School in St. James Town. Organizations such as Artists for Children and Youth and Art Starts operate in neighbourhoods throughout the city and by making a long term commitment to the community and mentoring local artists as facilitators they

are contributing to local community development.

Some social service organizations fulfill their health and wellbeing mandates by offering arts programs. The stability of the programs is dependent on a variety of factors including the support of agency leadership at staff and board levels and sufficient funding to maintain programs. Often agencies partner with artists or arts organizations to apply for arts council project funding. These projects are assessed according to the strength of the relationship between the artist and the community; one might say that the art would not be the same or even possible without the community perspective and the art making would be different without the aesthetic lens provided by the artist(s). There are many examples of successful partnering between artists and community organizations but non-arts groups need an easily accessible source of information on local arts resources. The Neighbourhood Arts Network is helping connect artists to community arts opportunities but it will take more time to populate the Network with information that covers all the city's neighbourhoods so local agencies can identify more local artists for their programs.

Priority Neighbourhood status has helped direct resources into Toronto's suburban neighbourhoods. Established in 2009, the Malvern Revitalization Committee has focused

⁴³ http://www.apcol.ca/Newsletter/Community_Connection/Malvern_ANC.html

on a number of projects including community gardens and arts projects for youth.⁴³ However, a Malvern-based arts leader wondered if arts organizations from outside the neighbourhood have benefited more than local artists because local artists are not aware of funding opportunities. In addition, she pointed out that some artists have a fierce sense of independence coupled with distrust of funders and a desire not to take "government money." The research teams met artists who are currently or have in the past worked on projects in community locations that are supported by government funds, arts councils and the private sector, but artists who feel they are not included in local development opportunities need more information and mentoring, and information that dispels myths about grants. An increased focus on outreach by arts funders and foundations to marginalized communities will help address this situation.

The importance and value of using local assets in community development projects has been well documented (Borup). However, the extent of participation, consultation and relationship building varies, often leaving some residents feeling like they are excluded from the process.

Community consultations can be difficult and time consuming to organize but are essential for community buy-in. This will help address situations such as a public art project in Weston Mt. Dennis that left residents feeling that the process was "pretty condescending," and another instance when community development plans felt like "cookie cutter solutions" that ignored neighbourhood specifics.

Training

There are many demands on a small number of cultural leaders; interviewees noted that it is necessary for arts organizations to make sure that staff and volunteers don't burn out. When a leader leaves, they take with them valuable knowledge and experience. Training programs in community-engaged arts, such as the Community Arts Practice Certificate Program at York University and training intensives by Jumblies Theatre are working to create a new generation and a larger pool of facilitators, many of whom reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds being served by community arts programs. "If young people don't see themselves reflected in their leaders, they might not feel inclined to participate. They need mentors who represent

their community or art form or culture," explains ArtReach Executive Director Shahina Sayani.

Building Partnerships

Local events are rarely covered by city-wide "What's On" listings and remain hidden to the general population but that doesn't mean they lack an audience. For example the researchers heard about events such as dance recitals or theatre performances performed in languages spoken in the neighbourhood that attracted large audiences. Downtown doesn't know about the suburbs and the suburbs feel disconnected from downtown.

Lennox Cadore, Program Manager at Urban Arts, a youth arts facility in Weston Mt. Dennis, thinks there are opportunities for partnerships between local arts groups and high profile cultural organizations. He wants to move beyond a charity model – the usual offer of free tickets to "priority" populations – and find ways for community arts organizations to dialogue with arts institutions in a way that can benefit both parties.

Arts groups working in perceived "elitist" art forms such as modern dance, ballet and opera face challenges when trying to do outreach. Deborah Lundmark of Canadian Children's Dance Theatre, a nationally recognized training institution across the street from St. James Town, notes that they are "sometimes perceived as an organization for rich children, which is not the case." But getting this message out in the face of perceptions about the art form is a challenge.

The Canadian Children's Dance Theatre and other arts organizations such as Tapestry New Opera Works are re-examining what outreach means. Since 2006, Tapestry New Opera has been offering their INside Opera Program in Regent Park and St. James Town. Partnering with City Hope, a local youth organization, they link youth with writers, composers and educators. Special Events and Marketing Associate Lauren Schoolman explains: "We used the kids' experiences, ideas, and friendships to make a libretto. From these ideas they would create a story and then the composer would create music. ...The pieces were performed in the community." The program also provides leadership development opportunities for participants who are encouraged to return and work with younger participants, resulting in what Schoolman describes as "a change in the youth mentors when they were given the opportunity to be

in a leadership position." Participants benefit and Tapestry connects to communities and contributes to a discourse about who creates opera, for whom and about what.

Advocacy and Reporting

"What can spray paint do? What can a kid holding an SLR camera do to cause change?" asks Sara Elraheb, Programming Director at UforChange. According to her, the answer is "A lot," which is why she feels it's important to advocate for the value of the arts and why money invested in local arts programs is an investment in the future. The importance of advocacy was echoed by a focus group discussion with artists in Weston Mt. Dennis who were concerned that art is not seen as a serious endeavour but a kind of "a pastime."

There is much debate about how to best to capture the value and impact of the arts (Guetzkow, Reeves). What has emerged is a growing consensus that mixed methods (quantitative, qualitative, anecdotal and statistical) are necessary to capture the breadth of creative experiences in complex and changing urban environments. In addition, art-based research is natural fit for evaluating art programs (Knowles and Cole, Burns and Frost). Unfortunately few community arts groups and local agencies running arts programs have the time, resources or training to conduct thorough evaluation. Reporting frequently turns into a public relations activity – prioritizing a positive spin over serious reflection on what is working and what isn't. Support for arts programs to better document, evaluate and report on their work will not only assist those studying the field but will help arts groups with fundraising and planning.

Some interviewees think "the arts" are perceived as an elitist pursuit but broader thinking would capture a larger range of activities for reporting or advocacy. During the input stage, researchers asked questions about the right terms and expressions to use in the interview process. Tim Whalley, Executive Director of Scarborough Arts suggests "culture" as a more inclusive term that better represents what is happening at a neighbourhood level. Others suggested that "being creative" is more open-ended and doesn't restrict thinking to traditional arts disciplines but

opens up to art in everyday life; crafts, cooking, gardening, hair styling were all given as examples of creative activities that would not be offered as examples if we only asked questions about "the arts."

Conclusion

From artists to politicians, from business owners to librarians, from youth to seniors – there is widespread interest and enthusiasm for the arts but there are barriers that make it difficult for residents to engage. These include: lack of space and resources to support and sustain arts programs; a need for better local networking and communication; and personal and family factors that make it difficult for individuals to participate. Arts groups and community agencies are working to better understand and address access issues but some of these barriers need long term coordinated responses including improved neighbourhood coordination and better municipal planning.

CHAPTER NINE

Visions for Arts in Neighbourhoods

To round out our research we ended interviews with a question about the future: "What are your hopes for the arts in your neighbourhood?" What emerged was a vision of what might be possible with attention and resources.

Developing More Arts Spaces

Weston Mt. Dennis dreams of a community centre for arts programs and maybe even a performing arts centre. Theatre artist and resident Robin Breon thinks the arts could "revitalize the whole community." Jacquie Thomas from Artists to Artists Foundation echoes Breon's suggestion when she says "My hope is that every corner would be a very dynamic corner ... flowers, arts galleries, murals or even sidewalk cafes ... Saturday performances, kid's arts initiatives, community gardens...Weston has potential to become a very vibrant community." United Church Minister Michael Kooiman adds to the picture by dreaming of using empty storefronts to create pop up galleries and fostering "a real entertainment corridor" on Weston Road. Denise Gillard from Frontlines imagines a joint arts and sports complex with performing spaces, gym, program spaces and kitchen.

In St. James Town Mike Benford, who teaches music classes at the Community Corner, would like to see a brand new building that would be a gallery and presentation space to showcase the work of local artists. There were also many ideas about how to transform the neighbourhood's public space – unused tennis courts become spaces for youth programs; muddy patches of earth transform into community gardens; dark Bell boxes full of telephone wires are turned into colourful canvases; and where vendors haphazardly set

up on the ground there will be a vendors' area with artists and entertainers. Some of these visions are being brought to life by residents and by groups such as Community Matters, who have crafted an arts plan for the neighbourhood.

St. James Town community activist Josephine Grey expressed her love of musical jams and noted that, in the past, places of worship brought people together with

songs and music. She suggests that what is needed now is a space where multiple cultures and faiths can share a common space.

In Malvern, the newly opened youth arts hub, The S.P.O.T., stands as an example of what can happen when public and private sector partners work together. In the future, artists would like to see galleries display and sell the work of local artists and more art in public spaces. A group of young mural artists, currently working on a commission to create a piece for the Malvern Town Centre, wants to see more public art in their community.

A multipurpose art centre could provide arts education programming for everybody, showcase community projects, host contemporary art exhibitions that reflect the neighbourhood ... and a roof top garden so we could make our own preserves and sell them.

Elizabeth Underhill,

► artist and curator,
Weston Mt. Dennis

Strengthening the Arts as a Local Asset

Interviewees provided multiple examples of how the arts are making a contribution to the community by breaking down barriers, increasing the sense of local pride and encouraging skill development for some of the more vulnerable members of the community. As one local resident emphatically put it, "This is your home and this is where your heart belongs so you make it your own...it's community building and engagement and absolutely that can be done through the arts."

A Weston Mt. Dennis teacher noted that some parents take their children out of the neighbourhood for art classes, but

if neighbourhood artists can flourish on their home turf they can offer classes and workshops that can benefit residents and artists alike. A resident would like to see more dance classes in a variety of dance forms. In a neighbourhood that has a high drop-out rate, she thinks more arts programs will help keep children in school because they would have an outlet for their creativity and energy. This, of course, needs to be accompanied by advocacy for increasing – not diminishing – arts education within the schools.

Interviewees envisioned more opportunities for local artists to be involved in community development. Toronto is a destination for professionally trained artists, many coming from global urban centres, but newcomer artists are an under-used asset. With mentoring support and information about how the art world functions in Canada they will have a better chance of maintaining their professional arts practice and contributing to local community arts projects.

Creating Sustainable and Accessible Arts Programming

A number of community-engaged arts projects have emerged in the research communities but there is a need for sustained funding, not just one-time project grants. Without on-going operating support it is difficult to maintain programming in the community. Allyson Adley from the Art Gallery of York University is familiar with community-engaged work in the northwest section of the city. She sees a lot of dedication, energy and commitment in the area and would like to see groups receive “the funding they deserve.” Many interviewees also had a vision of improved financial access to arts participation for young people, including access to the equipment and resources necessary for programs such as recording and media arts.

Youth participants from The S.P.O.T in Malvern underscored the importance of mentors to their development and, looking into the future, they hoped that the same mentoring support would be there for their little sisters so they would be able to, literally and metaphorically, “sing their own songs.”

There was also a hope expressed that arts programs can be offered to more residents, such as seniors, working-age people and men. In addition, there was a call for intergenerational and intercultural programs to assist in breaking down barriers between residents and to offer

opportunities for older, new and current immigrants “to show the rest of the community what their cultures are all about.”

Supporting neighbourhood-based activities is an investment that not only supports specific local programs but helps residents see the arts sector as a contributor to the quality of life in their neighbourhood and the city as a whole. A volunteer at the Learning Enrichment Foundation wants to see more people encouraged to be creative because art-making will take them out of their “comfort zone” and this helps individuals develop transferable skills and confidence that assists them in all aspects of their life.

Building a Local Arts Identity

Toronto is a city of neighbourhoods and each has particular features, history and vibe. The arts can help raise unique neighbourhood profiles. In Weston Mt. Dennis, many young musicians and rappers have emerged and many hope that support for music programming would raise the profile of local talent and support the emergence of a local sound “created straight from here.”

In Scarborough, the arts are seen as a way to nurture neighbourhood pride. For Tim Whalley, Executive Director of Scarborough Arts, the potential of the community reaches back into its history. “From Doris McCarthy in the past to the huge hip-hop scene that’s exploded here” he feels Scarborough is an arts destination and, as the Scarborough Arts Program & Outreach Coordinator Kat Rizza adds, there is no need to make “downtown the place to go.”

An overarching artistic vision for a neighbourhood would pair artists with spaces within the community so that aesthetic and conceptual standards could be developed for the projects that take place. Pop-up galleries are being explored as alternative exhibition spaces but they require different consideration than a formal gallery. Support for a local artist/curator position would help artists to organize solo and group shows that connect to the space and site history in a more meaningful way than simply making use of free wall space.

CHAPTER TEN

Commitment to the Future

The Toronto Arts Foundation, a charitable organization, provides the opportunity for individuals, private and public foundations, corporations and government agencies to invest in and strengthen the arts in Toronto. We are powered by a vision: *Creative City: Block by Block*, a commitment to connect every Toronto neighbourhood to the transformative social and economic benefits of the arts. This goal is being realized through initiatives such as the fostering of Local Arts Service Organizations, the founding of the Neighbourhood Arts Network, and research initiatives.⁴⁴

Toronto is one of the most liveable cities in the world but for many the arts are not accessible and many neighbourhoods lack arts and cultural facilities. The Creative Capital Gains Report,⁴⁵ created by an advisory council and released in 2001, articulates a vision for the arts in the City of Toronto from the more modest neighbourhood-based projects to the largest downtown institutions. Increasing arts funding to \$25 per capita, a recommendation of the report that has been implemented by City Council, is a good step towards supporting the diversity of arts practices in Toronto but there is still much to be done.

City wide visions for strengthening the arts combined with the insights, commitment and dreams of those working and living in Toronto's neighbourhoods will help foster the arts at a community level. The people we met and the projects we visited during this research project are making a difference. The work they are doing combined with their hopes for the future are a fine picture of what could be possible with sufficient resources and support.

Transforming Communities Through the Arts focuses on three neighbourhoods. Although each community has its own specific challenges and needs, the findings are generally applicable to all underserved areas of Toronto.

We have identified three major directions that require further development and investment: connecting, mentoring and sustaining arts in neighbourhoods.

Recommended Directions

DEVELOP CONNECTIONS

- ▲ improved communications within communities
- ▲ strengthened connections between artists

IMPROVED MENTORING

- ▲ support, mentoring and connection for newcomer professional artists
- ▲ skill-building and mentoring for emerging artists

INCREASED SUSTAINABILITY

- ▲ more spaces for cultural activities in neighbourhood settings
- ▲ increased funding for projects and operating support for established organizations that have made a commitment to working in priority neighbourhoods

Opportunities for Action

As the lead organization in the research, the Toronto Arts Foundation, along with our sister organization the Toronto Arts Council, are committed to moving forward with policy and funding to explore these directions. Working with other stakeholders we will continue the discussion and seek opportunities and potential partnerships to support the transformation of neighbourhoods through the arts.

⁴⁴ www.torontoartsfoundation.org

⁴⁵ <http://www.toronto.ca/culture/pdf/creative-capital-gains-report-august9.pdf>

Opportunities include:

- ▲ Support local connections currently being developed by Local Arts Service Organizations (East End Arts, Etobicoke Arts, Lakeshore Arts, North York Arts, Scarborough Arts and Urban Arts)
- ▲ Build on-line and in-person networking and promotion through the Neighbourhood Arts Network
- ▲ Support for professional arts organizations working outside the downtown core through the Toronto Arts Council's Community Connections funding
- ▲ Explore partnering opportunities between Toronto Arts Foundation and Toronto Arts Council with social service agencies and settlement organizations to connect newcomer artists to opportunities in Toronto's arts and cultural industries
- ▲ Develop and expand the Neighbourhood Arts Network's support for newcomer and emerging artists
- ▲ Develop and expand Toronto Arts Council's Mentoring and Micro-Granting Programs including increased funding for youth artists
- ▲ Continue to promote Toronto Arts Foundation's vision, *Creative City: Block by Block*, to promote arts accessibility in all Toronto neighbourhoods

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Useful Websites

Research Partners

Art Starts ►

<http://www.artstarts.net/>

York University Community Arts Practice Program ►

<http://cap.apps01.yorku.ca/>

OCAD University Curatorial Practice Program ►

<http://www.ocadu.ca/programs/art/criticism-and-curatorial-practice.htm>

Toronto Arts Foundation ►

<http://www.torontoartsfoundation.org/>

Local Arts Organizations

East End Arts ►

<http://eastendarts.ca/>

Arts Etobicoke ►

<http://www.artsetobicoke.com/>

Lakeshore Arts ►

<http://www.lakeshorearts.ca/>

North York Arts ►

<http://www.northyorkarts.org/>

Scarborough Arts ►

<http://scarborougharts.com/>

Urban Arts ►

<http://www.urbanartstoronto.org/>

Arts Councils

Canada Council for the Arts ►

<http://www.canadacouncil.ca/>

Ontario Arts Council ►

<http://www.arts.on.ca/>

Toronto Arts Council ►

<http://www.torontoartscouncil.org/>

Networks

Neighbourhood Arts Network ►

<http://www.neighbourhoodartsnetwork.org/>

Community Arts Network Archives ►

<http://wayback.archive-it.org/2077/20100906194747/>

<http://www.communityarts.net/>

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE

Community-Based Research

Description of Community-Based Research

Community based research is research that strives to be:

Community situated: begins with a research topic of practical relevance to the community (as opposed to individual scholars) and is carried out in community settings.

Collaborative: community members and researchers equitably share control of the research agenda through active and reciprocal involvement in the research design, implementation and dissemination.

Action-oriented: the process and results are useful to community members in making positive social change and to promote social equity.

Hallmarks of Community-Based Research

- ▲ The relevance of the research topic is identified or verified by community members.
- ▲ The resources of research (financial, expertise, etc.) are shared with community members, particularly those most affected by the research topic.
- ▲ The research process recognizes and utilizes the expertise that community members have.
- ▲ The research process recognizes and addresses power imbalances between researchers and community members.
- ▲ The research process is driven by values, including: empowerment, supportive relationships, social change, learning as an ongoing process and respect for diversity.
- ▲ The research process and results are accessible and understandable to community members.
- ▲ The research process and results consider and adapt to the context in which the research is conducted.
- ▲ The research leaves a legacy, both in terms of the utilization of research results, as well as in the future collaboration among partners.

APPENDIX TWO

Interview Questions

The questions varied slightly depending on if the interviewee was:

- ▲ a community resident but not involved directly in the arts,
- ▲ an artist living or working in the community
- ▲ a locally-based arts organization offering arts programs in the community
- ▲ an arts organization not based in the community but offering programs in the community
- ▲ a locally-based community or social service organization supporting the arts and/or offering arts programs

At the beginning of the interview the researcher informed the interviewee that the purpose was to ask a set of questions about art, community engagement, and accessibility to the arts. Not all questions were answered by all respondents.

ARTISTS

Objective for interview:

- ▲ How the artist's arts practice is influenced by the neighbourhood and vice versa
- ▲ What arts activities are happening in the neighbourhood
- ▲ What they think could improve access to the arts in their neighbourhood
- ▲ What role arts play in improving the quality of life in their neighbourhood

ART PRACTICE

- a) Tell me about your art practice? What motivates you to make art?
- b) How has art-making made a difference in your life? Can you share a story of how involvement in the arts has had an impact on you?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- a) What comes to mind when you think about arts in this neighbourhood?
- b) Why do you work and/or live in this neighbourhood? What challenges do you face as an artist living or working in this area?
- c) What impact does the neighbourhood have on the art you make? How does the community influence your art? Would your art be different if you lived elsewhere?
- d) Have the arts made a difference to this neighbourhood? Have the arts contributed to the development of the neighbourhood or the quality of life of the people who live here?
- e) Who are the creative leaders, individuals or organizations in the community?

ACCESSIBILITY

- a) Do arts projects get imposed on the neighbourhood? By whom? Do community members have a say? Do you know of times when community members were not happy with how arts project were run or how they turned out? Explain.
- b) Is the neighbourhood's cultural diversity reflected in arts projects or programs offered in the community?
- c) Do you know of any examples of residents creating their own arts activities, such as, drumming circles or knitting groups?
- d) What is your dream or hope for arts in your neighbourhood?

ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

Objective for interview:

- ▲ How the organization is creating, promoting or encouraging arts in the neighbourhood
- ▲ Who attends their arts events or programs
- ▲ Why people get involved in the arts
- ▲ What arts projects, events or services are in the neighbourhood
- ▲ How the arts have an impact on community well being and the quality of life of individuals

INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

- a) What comes to mind when you think about arts in this neighbourhood?
- b) Tell me about your organization's mandate or mission? How many years have you been working in the community?
- c) How has your organization created, sponsored, or assisted with arts activities in the neighbourhood (past, present and future plans)? Who attends your programs or events?
- d) Why does your organization work in this neighbourhood?
- e) What challenges do you face as an arts organization working in this area?
- f) How does the community influence the art? Would the art be different elsewhere?

ARTS IMPACT

- a) How has art-making made a difference to this community? Can you share a story of how involvement in the arts has had an impact on a person, a group or the neighbourhood as a whole?
- b) Who are the creative leaders, individuals or organizations in the community?
- c) What is your dream or hope for arts in your neighbourhood?

ACCESSIBILITY

- a) What makes it difficult for community members to participate in the arts?
- b) Do arts projects get imposed on the community? By

whom? Do community members have a say? Do you know of times when community members were not happy with how arts project were run or how they turned out? Explain.

- c) Who benefits from current arts programs? Who do you think is missing?
- d) Is the neighbourhood's cultural diversity reflected in arts projects or programs offered in the community? Are there opportunities for new immigrants to get involved in the arts?
- e) Do you know of some examples of people creating their own arts opportunities rather than participating in existing programs or because what they wanted to do did not exist?

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Objective for interview:

- ▲ How their organization supports the arts – now and in the past
- ▲ How and why people get involved in the arts
- ▲ Who attends arts events or programs (free or for a cost)
- ▲ What arts projects, events or services are in the neighbourhood
- ▲ How the arts have an impact on community well being and the quality of life of individuals

INVOLVEMENT IN THE ARTS

- a) What comes to mind when you hear the word "arts"?
- b) How many years has your organization been working in the community?
- c) Tell me about your organization's mandate or mission.
- d) What kinds of arts activities or programs are happening in the community now? What has happened in the past?
- e) Has your organization sponsored or supported any arts programs or events? Explain

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- a) Have you heard of or supported any community-engaged arts projects that have brought residents together with artists to create arts projects, such as, a mural, a mosaic, or a community play?

- b) Who are the creative leaders, individuals or organizations in the community?
- c) Do arts projects get imposed on your community? By whom? Do community members have a say? Do you know of times when community members were not happy with how arts project were run or how they turned out?
- d) Have the arts made a difference to the community? Can you share an example of how the arts assisted someone or made a difference in the neighbourhood?

ACCESSIBILITY

- a) Who benefits from current arts programs? Who do you think is missing?
- a) What makes it difficult for community members to participate in the arts?
- b) Do you know of some examples of people creating their own arts opportunities rather than participating in existing programs?
- c) Is the neighbourhood's diversity reflected in the arts projects or services offered in the area? Are there opportunities for new immigrants to get involved in the arts?
- d) What is your dream or hope for arts in your neighbourhood?

RESIDENTS

Objective for interview:

- ▲ What residents know about art in their neighbourhood
- ▲ How they participate in the arts or their reasons for not participating
- ▲ What they think could improve access to the arts in their neighbourhood
- ▲ What role arts could play in helping build their neighbourhood

PART ONE ► INVOLVEMENT IN THE ARTS

- a) What comes to mind when you hear the word "arts"?
- b) Name as many different art forms you can think of?
- c) What kinds of arts activities or programs are offered in the area? (art classes, festival, galleries, informal drumming circles, parades, etc.)
- d) Do you or your family members attend any arts events or practice any art forms?
- e) Has art made a difference in your life? Can you share a story of how involvement in the arts has had an impact on you?
- f) Have the arts made a difference in the lives of people you know? Can you share a story of how the arts assisted someone or made a difference in your neighbourhood?
- g) Have you experienced, seen or heard of any negative experiences with the arts in your neighbourhood? Explain.

PART TWO ► COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- a) Have you heard of any community-engaged arts projects happening in the neighbourhood now? Or in the past?
- b) Can art contribute to the development and health of the neighbourhood? How? Why?
- c) Who are the creative leaders, individuals or organizations in the community?
- d) Do arts projects get imposed on your community? By whom? Do community members have a say? Do you know of times when community members were not happy with how arts project were run or how they turned out? Explain.
- e) Is the neighbourhood's cultural diversity reflected in the kind of arts programs offered?

APPENDIX THREE

Respondents by Neighbourhood

	Malvern	St. James Town	Weston Mt.Dennis	Other	Total
Input Interviews	5	6	5	2	18
Surveys	23	20	11	0	54
Interviews and Focus Groups	19	45	39	16	119
	47	71	55	18	191

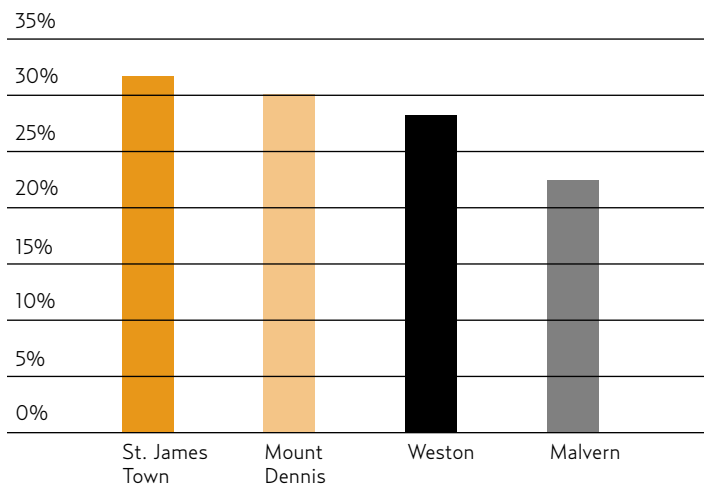
Note:

1. Other indicates interviews with representatives of organizations and funders that work on city-wide level who have an overview of community-engaged arts.
2. Some respondents participated in surveys, focus groups and interviews.

APPENDIX FOUR

Neighbourhood Comparisons

TABLE 1: LOW INCOME FAMILIES



Immigrants and visible minority persons account for a disproportionate number of low income persons in the city. Comparison of the top and bottom 25 neighbourhoods by prevalence of low income show variation in socio demographic characteristics consistent with previously discussed population disparities. In this regard, neighbourhoods with high family low income rates had significantly higher concentration of visible minority persons, immigrants, and lone parent families, as well as lower labour force participation and higher rates of unemployment.

Low income is not evenly distributed by population group or by neighbourhood in Toronto. Its prevalence is disproportionate for children, youth, senior women, recent immigrants, visible minority groups and lone parent families. At the same time, low income households are becoming more concentrated across Toronto's inner suburbs as well as in high-rise apartments in relatively more affluent neighbourhoods.⁴⁶

Based on 2006 Census stats, St. James Town, Mount Dennis and Weston are ranked 13th, 14th, and 15th for Family Low Income Rates out of 140 neighbourhoods.

TABLE 2: VISIBLE MINORITIES AS PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION

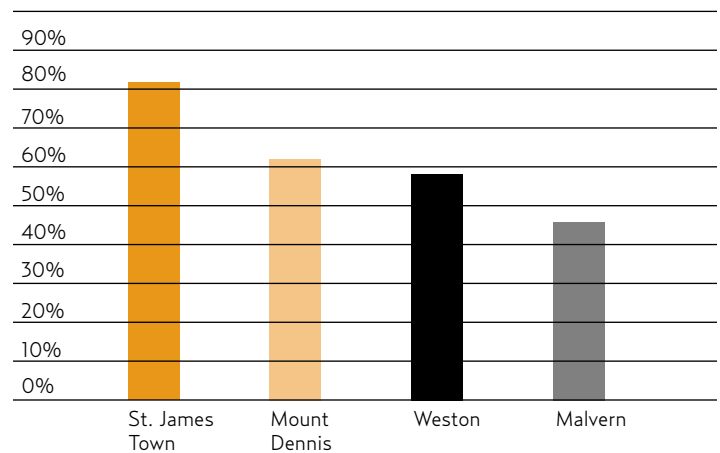
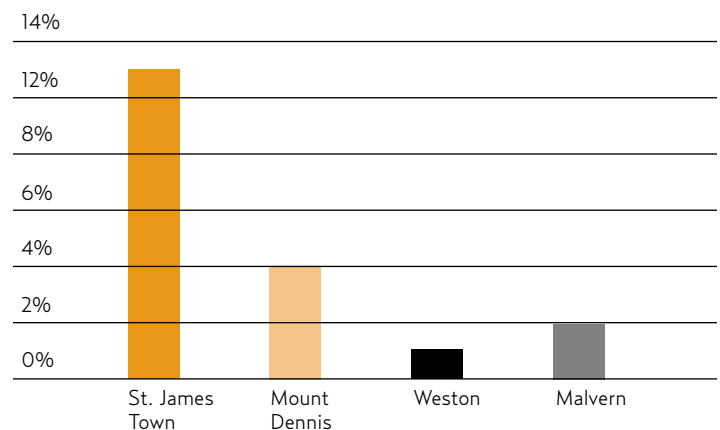
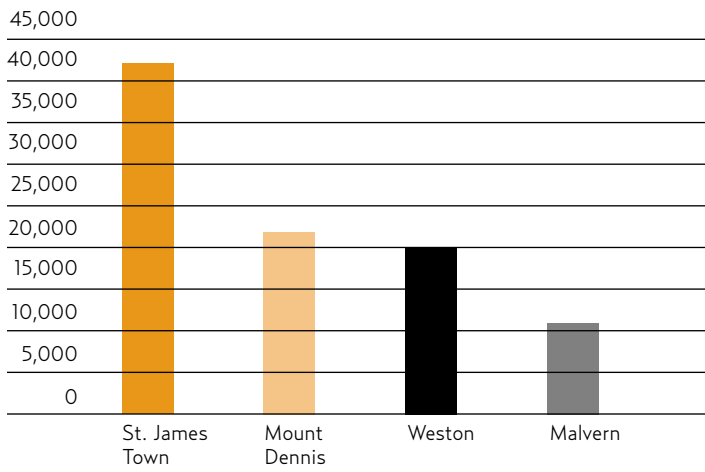


TABLE 3: RATES OF HIGHER EDUCATION



⁴⁶ Profile of Low Income in the City of Toronto, City of Toronto, 2001. (pp. 7-12) http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/pdf/poverty_profile_2010.pdf

TABLE 4: POPULATION SIZE



Top Five Languages Spoken (*Other than English*)

Malvern	Mount Dennis	St. James Town	Weston
Tamil	Spanish	Tagalog	Spanish
Urdu	Portuguese	Tamil	Portuguese
Tagalog	Vietnamese	Spanish	Italian
Gujarati	Tagalog	Mandarin	Somali
Cantonese	Somali	Nepali	Vietnamese

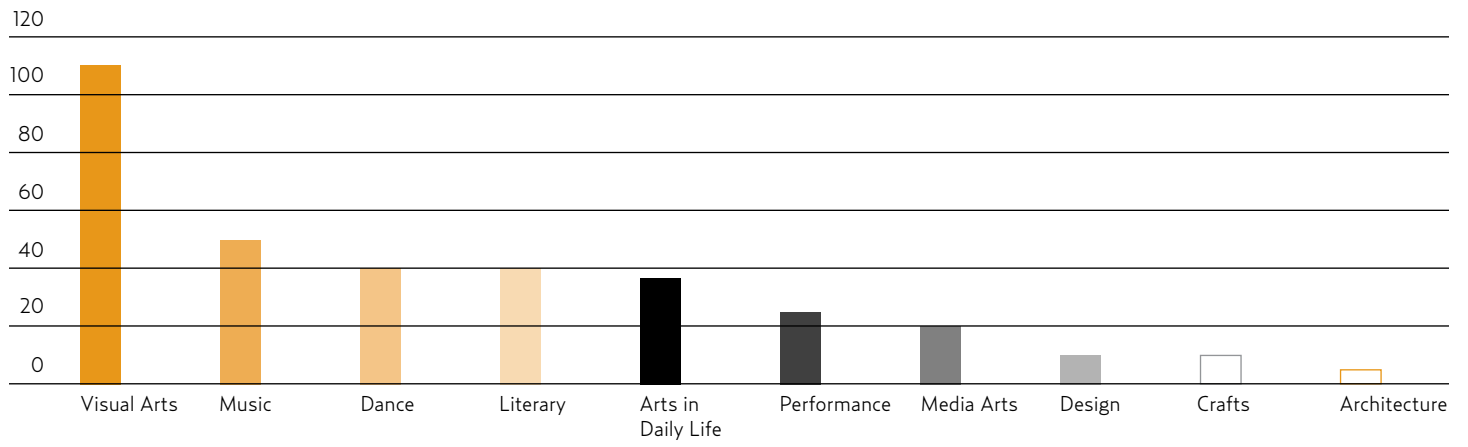
APPENDIX FIVE

Art Practices Identified by Respondents

96 distinct practices were named. 11 were common to all three neighbourhoods. 10 were common in two neighbourhoods.

	All three Neighbourhoods	Malvern	St. James Town	Weston Mount Dennis
Architecture			Interior landscapes	
Craft	Sewing	Ceramics	Basket weaving	Jewellery making
		Jewellery making	Knitting	
		Weaving	Quilting	
			Woodworking	
Dance		African	Contemporary	Ballet
		Ballet	Flamenco	Contemporary
		Caribbean	Jazz	Interpretive
		Hip-hop	Nepalese	Jazz
		South East Asian	Salsa	Hip-hop
		Praise	Tap	Krump
			Tibetan	Stomp
Design			Graphic	Fashion
Media	Film (filmmaking, movie nights and film festivals)	Anime	Animation	Documentary
			Computer graphics	
			Video Games	
			Video	
Performance	Theatre		Puppets	Community theatre
			Acting	Musical theatre
				Juggling
Art in Daily Life	Gardening	Nail art	Cooking	Hair dressing
			Market place	Henna painting
			Henna painting	Nail Art
			Yoga	Tattoo art
				Yoga
Literary	Poetry	Creative writing	Letter writing	Magazine Writing
	Storytelling	Fiction	Graphic novel	Newspaper Writing
		Spoken word	Self-publishing books	Spoken word
		Magazine (youth publications)		
Music	DJing	Calypso singing	Classical Nepalese music	Beat boxing
		Drumming circle	Guitar lessons/playing	Brass Bands
			Lullabies	Church choirs
			Music production	Classical
			Music engineering	Drumming circle
			Opera	Hip-hop music
			Piano lessons/playing	Jazz
			Song Writing	Music production
				Piano lessons/playing
				Punk
				R&B
				Rap
				Reggae
				World music
Visual Arts	Drawing		Bamboo relief	Calligraphy
	Painting		Bronze sculpture	Curating
	Photography		Chinese ink brush drawings	Installation
	Wall Art (graffiti arts, murals)		Fabric painting	Mosaics
			Photo collage	Print making
		Print making		

TABLE 5: ART FORMS BY NUMBER OF REFERENCES



Research Credits

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR ► Margo Charlton

CO-INVESTIGATORS ► Deborah Barndt, Rosemary Donegan, Liz Forsberg Alberto Guevara, Tamara Haberman

RESEARCH ASSISTANT ► Katherine Dennis

RESEARCH TEAM (OCAD UNIVERSITY AND YORK UNIVERSITY) ► Katherine Dennis, Benjamin Edelberg, Amy Gaizauskas, Kim Jackson, Naila Lalji, Mary MacDonald, Benton McKnight, Sara Mohammed, Zita Nyarady

COMMUNITY LIAISONS ► Aden Abebe and Ayesha Stewart (Malvern), Ida Sharma Dhungana (St. James Town), Colanthy Humphrey (Weston Mt. Dennis)

INTERN ► Laura Jabalee

EDITING ► Crisp Editorial (Christina Starr), Michelle Parson

PHOTOGRAPHY ► Nathaniel Anderson, Alejandra Higuera, Gillian Zidner, Joseph Michael Photography

Research Participants and Supporters

Aden Abebe, Neudis Abreu, Allyson Adley, Agazi A. Afewerki, Iftikhar Uddin Ahmed, Osayanmo Aiqboqun, Laura Alderson, Akilah Allen, Genell Almeida, Sylvia Angaitis, Nilofar Attayee, Malukah Aweri, Ervie Ayagan, Artina Balgobin, Chalo Barrueta, Robert Becevello, Mike Benford, Bryan Bermudez, Jim Betts, Laura Bolender, Jean-Marie Boutot, Robin Breon, Frederick Brobbey, Devon Brown, Patrick Burke, Paul Byron, Lennox Cadore, Amanda Cain, Melissa Calder, Michael Cavanaugh, Lenora Cayenne, Jonathan Chan-Choong, Luidmila Cibic, Rick Ciccarelli, Beatrice Lori Clermont, Ella Cooper, John Corson, Margaret Coshan, Helene Costa, Britney DaCosta, Natasha Daniels, Pastor Allan Davies, Benjamin De Graff, Dwayne de Mendoca, Tony Del Rio, Jenilson De la Cruz, Debbie Deveau, Binod Dhungana, Ida Shrama Dhungana, Catherine DiAngelis, Christy DiFelice, Kathleen Dinwoodie, Tanecia Dixon, Alex Dow, Ravinder Kawz Dubb, Stephanie Duermeyer, Karin Eaton, Kassandra Eccleston, Sarah Elraheb, Ryan Elliott, Shereis Elliott, Leah Engle, Getachew Fantu, Dega Farah, Cherry Farrol, Juancho Felici, Aurora Felix, Grace Fernandez, Mari Ferzli, Gillian Foster, Larry Freedlander, Whitney French, Julie Frost, Veniese George, Denise Gillard, Andrew Glinski, Erin Glover, Kemeesha Graham, Domanique Grant, Adeena Greaves, Joanne Green, Josephine Grey, Anthony Guerra, Sandra Guerra, Nadine Gutman, Chris Habal, Dale Hamilton, Patty Hayes, Alejandra Higuera, Colanthy Humphrey, Neshea Hunt Joseph, Cherri Hurst, Carnel Hutchinson, Mark Iogna, Hodan Ismail, Dalyn Jackson, Amran Jama, Femi James, William James, Allen Kaeja, Lila Karim, Phil Keirstead, Surabhi Khare, Karuna Kharel, Mohan Prasad Kharel, Zehra Kizilbash, Rowena Kizito, Jacoba Knappen, Michael Kooiman, William Kowalczyk, Kristina Kuang, Muse Kulow, Eugenia Lara, Jean Lara, Loree Lawrence, Jade Lee Hoy, Ink Young Lee, Jean Lee, Zoila Lewis, Ryan Llago, Skye Louis, Deborah Lundmark, Zoila Lewis, Ryan Llagos, Skye Louis, Deborah Lundmark, Charmaine Lurch, Wilma Maban, Laya Mainali, Belinda Marchese, Nigel Martin, Shinta Martina, David Martinez, Peter Martino, Gail Matthews, Tamla Matthews-Morgan, Jofre Maya, Isabel Mazotta, Marlene McKintosh, Hanane Mjama, Mariam Mohammed, Kasha Morgan, Elaine Munro, Patrick Nadjiwon, Yassir Nagin, Ella Neverson, Tam Ngo, Hawa Noor, Pamela Novack, Durga Pandey, Emmy Pantin, Bonnie Parsons Nadira Pattison, Laura Paxton, Amy Peebles, Barbara Philbert-Allen, Lystra Pierre, Archana Piya, Aruna Poudyal, Sherry Prenevost, Martin Proctor, Nazi Qaiser, Mike Rajaram, Cathy Reid, Ander Reszczyski, Liz Rice, Kat Rizza, Quacy Roberts, Pru Robey, Sandra Robinson, Valerie Rodrigues, Aaron Rogers, Sean Roman, Raj Sandesh, Dominique Santos, Shahina Sayani, Sarah Sharkey-Pearce, Deverae Shaw, Laura Shoolman, Chandani Shrestha,

Lisa Simpson, Gabilan Sirapatham, Michael Skaljin, Nancy Slamet, Naomi Soeandy, Blakely Soloman, Olanike Solomon, Jeannie Son, Ayesha Stewart-Mendez, Jason Strachan, Sarita Subedi, Ravi Subramaniam, Rt. Hon. Mike Sullivan, Andrew Suri, Keith Sweeney, Supreme Swiss, Cathy Tersigni, Jacklyn Thomas, Patrick Thompson, Connie Tong, Ayanna Townsend, Judy Tran, Leena Tuladhar, Robin Uchida, Elizabeth Underhill, Simone Vernal, Richard Warner, Suri Weinberg Linsky, Susie Whaley, Tim Whalley, Catherine White, Claudia White, Julie Witt, Alison Wong, Chelladurai Yogarajah, Rehaset Yohanes, Joyce Zhou, Gillian Zidner. Our apologies to anyone we missed or whose name we misspelled.

Research Project Advisors

Angie Aranda, Alison Bain, Elena Bird, Jane Burns, Denise Campbell, Ella Cooper, Susan Crocker, Sara Diamond, Jennifer Green, Claire Hopkinson, Michael Jones, Micheline Lafleche, Skye Louis, Susan McIsaac, Nadira Pattison, Barbara Rahder, Shahina Sayani, Barbara Sellers-Young, Andrew Suri, Susan Wright, Joyce Zemans, Rochelle Zorzi