

# St. James Town Community Corner

June 2013



## “The Corner”

“The Corner” at 200 Wellesley Street East is a storefront-style community space developed by and for residents of St. James Town. Its doors opened officially in July of 2011 after five years of hard work and collaboration between residents, service providers and Toronto Community Housing Corporation, who own the building.

The Corner, like the proverbial street corner, has become an informal gathering place – and much more. Inside its basic but welcoming entrance an important local success story is told.

The Corner is a place to meet, to teach and learn, to connect, celebrate and organize. It is “owned by everyone” and “owned by no-one.”

Everyone in the neighbourhood has access to the space, but no one individual or group has exclusive use of its resources – program and meeting rooms, a community kitchen, public access computers and reception services etc. Every day sees a variety of activities – people dropping in to ask for information, a local Tamil dance group, seniors programs, health promotion groups for women, and community meetings.

Every day The Corner is a hub for an exciting variety of activities.

- Drop-in programs
- Skills development
- Gardening programs
- After school programs
- Seniors day programs
- Community use of space
- Computer and printing
- Internet access
- Employment services
- Settlement services
- Health services
- Wellness programs



*“I love coming to Arts n' Crafts because I love having fun! And making crafts is fun. They should have more crafts here!”*

*-Dechen, 6 years old*

## Our Vision

To improve the health, well being, quality of life and personal development of residents of the St. James Town community

## Timeline

**2006** – The St. James Town Service Providers Network forms a subgroup to explore the concept of a community hub in partnership with TCHC.

**2006-2007** – The subgroup holds 16 exploratory meetings with a diverse cross-section of residents.

**2008** – An interim steering committee made up of residents and service providers is formed to build on the findings of the consultations.

**2008-2009** – A governance structure for 'The Corner' is developed.

**2008-2010** - Funding is received from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Manulife Financial, Home Depot, Stuff Canada and partner organizations. The first phase of renovations are completed.

**2011** – The Corner opens its doors.

**2012** – The Rotary Club of Toronto and other funders agree to fund renovations to expand "The Corner".

**2013** – Second phase of renovations are complete. The Corner is now a fully accessible space.

## History

The idea to create The Corner originated with the St. James Town Working Group - a network of local service providers. Initially the space at the base of the 200 Wellesley Street building was used as a medical clinic, run by Wellesley Central Hospital and subsequently as the St. Michael's Hospital St. James Town Family Health Clinic.

When St. Michael's Hospital vacated the space in 2006 to move to a larger location at 410 Sherbourne St., local residents and service providers identified it as an ideal location for a new type of shared community space. Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), who owns 200 Wellesley Street, supported this idea.

The St. James Town Working Group formed a subgroup to lead the process of engaging with residents, to develop a vision for the space. Following several community consultations, a Steering Committee made up of both service providers and residents was formed to develop the partnerships and secure resources to make the dream a reality.

## Governance Structure

A Steering Committee oversees the operations of The Corner and consists of 13 members:

- 8 community residents, including both TCHC tenants and residents from the broader St. James Town Community.
- 5 representatives from agencies that deliver services within St. James Town.
- TCHC is an ex officio member of the steering committee.

## Supporting Partners

Partner agencies provide in-kind resources.

Toronto Community Housing Corporation provides space, maintenance and utilities.

Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, as lead trustee, provides management and in-kind resources.

## Impact

### PROGRAMS

There are a number of community organizations who provide programs and services at The Corner, targeting various demographics. On any given day, one would find residents dropping in to seek information to help them settle in a new community, a local dance group holding a class, seniors participating in day programs, educational programs for children and youth, health promotion supports, women's leadership development group, community meetings and much more.

A monthly calendar showcasing the scheduled programs and services is produced and posted online and in local buildings. Most programs require registration due to room capacity and high demand. Other services such as use of computers and telephone are available on a drop-in basis.

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS

When The Corner opened, a variety of service providers were invited to provide programs in the newly opened space. Over 35 service partner organizations were engaged in providing various programs or services by January 2012, which was the 6-month mark of The Corner's opening. By the end of 2012, additional 8-10 organizations provided ongoing programs and services. Local residents also use the space to create their own community group meetings, clubs and networking opportunities.

### VOLUNTEERS

In 2012, a steady number of volunteers and placement students contributed to the success of The Corner.

Volunteers gave their time in numerous ways including working at the reception desk, interpretation and translations to clients and assisting with programs such as homework club and income tax clinics.

## THE NUMBERS TELL A STORY...

### Visits

- In the first 3 months of operation (Sep - Nov 2011), there were 1,784 visits to The Corner.
- By the last quarter of 2012 (Oct-Dec 2012), this had grown by 10 times to 17,208 visits!

### Types of Visits

- 65% of visits were for regular programs
- 20% were for ad-hoc time-limited programs
- 15% were for resident or volunteer led programs

### Volunteers

- In total, 578 volunteers helped The Corner in 2012.



*"I like coming to Homework Club because there's lots of room and people who walk around to help and its very fun!"*

- Chantelle, Grade 4

## Stories from The Corner

### Volunteerism – The Rewards

As a recent graduate of a social work program, I found The Corner to be different from other volunteer opportunities for a number of reasons. The Corner is mostly run by volunteers and staff who live in the community.

Many different services providers use the space to provide much needed services to the community.

As a young resident of St. James Town, I had been looking for an opportunity to volunteer for a couple of hours a week. At The Corner, I found much more than just a place to volunteer.

I started out working at the front desk and helping out with a support program. After a few months, I joined a series of leadership workshops designed for women.

The program allowed me to meet amazing women who live in the community with diverse backgrounds and high levels of education. Through my involvement at The Corner and networking with people who work at other community agencies. I am now employed as a youth worker.

- Orit Adose



*In 2012, community residents had contributed a total of 2,873 hours to ensuring The Corner's services and programs operated smoothly and efficiently.*

### Resident-led Governance

I first came to know when it first opened at my building. I immediately felt as though their initiatives were beneficial for those who lived in St. James Town like me.

I was enthusiastic about getting involved with the programs since it was a great opportunity to give back to my community. It has also allowed me to immerse in the development of the wellbeing of my fellow residents and also gives me the satisfaction of getting involved in my own community.

One of my proudest accomplishments during my time at The Corner was taking part in the Women's Leadership Program early last year. Many women within St. James Town came together to discuss ways in which we could use our unique skill sets and find ways to pursue our passions successfully.

Another wonderful project, I worked on at The Corner was the Young Women's Leadership Program, Orit, another volunteer, and I started last year. While both of us found it challenging to recruit young women within St. James Town at first, it has been a wonderful learning experience to get involved with youth our age and younger. It was inspiring to learn that we as youth can create our own safe spaces in our community to have thought-provoking dialogues.

Once I complete my undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto, I am hoping to work with residents of St. James Town and other communities in Toronto.

I am now the youngest member of the steering committee for The Corner, since joining in May 2013.

- Abinaya Balasubramaniam



### Space Usage

In an average month, the available space that is booked by residents, service providers, and for in-house programs total an approximate 304 hours.

These are divided in three categories:

Services – 152 hours  
Programs – 128 hours  
Meetings – 24 hours

***An after-school program began in October 2012 at The Corner. Since its inception, it has served over 100 children and maintains a healthy enrolment of approximately 10 clients per program.***

### **Working with Children and Youth**

After graduating from Seneca's ECE program, I moved to the city in August 2012 to attend Ryerson University. As a new resident of St James Town I wanted to become involved in my community. Coming from the suburbs, I have never been a part of such a busy community. By volunteering at The Corner, I have met people who have enriched my personal and professional endeavors. The Corner has helped me to feel secure and connected in a new city.

Through volunteering at homework club, I have been able to support children with different needs. There is open communication between staff and parents, which is helpful in understanding a child's learning experiences.

The peer networking opportunities for children is a great aspect of the homework club. Not only do children have opportunity to learn from one another scholastically, they also have a place to acquire meaningful connections with other children and adults in their community. These components will foster the social skills that are so crucial when children transition into young adults and gain more responsibility.

- Michelle Peart



A wonderful day for the participants of the Women's Leadership program as they graduate from a six week intensive course offered through The Corner.

Our Community Clean-Up event for St. James Town attracted over 100 local participants, all working to beautify their neighbourhood. None of it would have been possible without the help of Everett Collrin (resident) and Thusy Mohan (Youth Council).



The Steering Committee meets monthly to provide direction and guidance to The Corner based on community needs and interests.

## More stories from The Corner



### Seniors' Day Program

At times, we seniors have a tendency to stay in for long periods without going out. Coming to the seniors group at The Corner gives us the opportunity to meet new people, enjoy a delicious lunch, have fun playing games and learn about issues that affect us. We really enjoy our time there.

- Clients

To witness the harmony of people coming together to help and nurture each other really speaks to the goals and purpose of this program. The program has provided a safe space to experience joy and a sense of community.

The seniors day program has been successful in its efforts to create a community where seniors develop social connections as they increase their sense of well being and quality of life.

- Service Partners



## Service Partners

Central Neighbourhood House  
City Hope  
Couching Institute on Public Affairs  
Family Inter-Generation Link  
Health Access St. James Town  
Hospice Toronto  
Low Income Families Together  
Parks, forestry & recreation, Toronto  
Peer Support Worker Krasmann Centre  
Progress Place  
Promed Hearing Centre  
Residents of St. James Town  
Sherbourne Health Centre  
South Riverdale Community Health Center  
St. James Town Chinese Seniors Group  
St. James Town Community Café  
St. James Town Women Council  
St. James Town Youth Council  
Sustainable Thinking and Expression on Public Space (STEPS)  
The Yonge Street Mission  
Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office  
Toronto Community Housing  
Toronto Employment and Social Service - Wellesley Place  
Toronto Public Health - Peer Nutrition Program  
UforChange

200 Wellesley St. E

Toronto ON M4X 1G3

Phone: (416) 964-6657

Fax: (416) 964-6658

E-Mail: [info@stjamestown.org](mailto:info@stjamestown.org)

Web Site: [www.stjamestown.org](http://www.stjamestown.org)



## Steering Committee

### Resident Representatives

Humera Siddiqui (Co-Chair)  
Wilma R.Sinnathurai – (Secretary)  
Abi Balasubramaniam  
Zahra Farah  
Ravinder Jakher  
Hai Yan Huang  
Vickie Rennie  
Amna Shah

### Partner Agency Representatives

Suhail Abualsameed (Co-Chair)  
*(Sherbourne Health Centre)*  
Farhia Abdi  
*(Central Neighbourhood House)*  
Jack de Klerk  
*(Neighbourhood Legal Services)*  
Ravi Subramaniam  
*(Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office)*  
Yogarajah Chelladurai  
*(Toronto Tamil Senior's Association)*

## Funders

Home Depot  
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada  
Manulife Financial  
Ontario Trillium Foundation  
Rotary Club of Toronto  
Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network  
Toronto Employment and Social Services  
Tower Renewal Office, City of Toronto  
United Way Toronto