

A World Within a Block.



Annual Report 2016 – 2017

St. James Town Community Corner



Message from the Steering Committee

The St. James Town Community Corner (also known as The Corner) enjoyed a particularly busy year in 2016–17. It was marked by growth in a number of community partnerships with residents and service providers, continued use of space by resident led programs and recognition by funders and government stakeholders of the value that the St. James Town Community Corner brings to the neighbourhood.

Program highlights at The Corner included new partnerships with mental health service providers such as Progress Place, Sherbourne Health Centre, Yonge Street Mission and Women’s Health in Women’s Hands. A successful Mental Health Day event was hosted at The Corner to bring awareness of the resources available to the St. James Town community.

This year the Steering Committee of the St. James Town Community Corner focused on refreshing our strategic plan. Through the support and guidance of Fahad Ahmad we identified four objectives that will direct our work over the next three years:

- Community Engagement/Community Development/Community Empowerment
- Facilitating services that are integrated over a continuum
- Partnerships and Collaboration
- Advocacy to address systemic issues

The Steering Committee also hosted a visit by Karen Pitre, Special Advisor to Kathleen Wynne for Hub Development. We were able to discuss ways that Hubs across the GTA could share ideas to foster community led space sharing initiatives. This visit was followed by another visit in June by Karen along with Minister of Infrastructure, Bob Chiarelli to announce the Ontario government’s plan for ways to support surplus use of space by communities for local needs.

Opposite: A Flash mob as part of Mental Health Day celebrations



Residents showing their support through messages during Pride month Celebrations at The Corner

We also played host to Finance Minister and local M. P., Bill Morneau, who visited The Corner in May where he affirmed his support for the positive impact that people coming together can have on their communities. He acknowledged the use of community space that could make this happen. This was exemplified by the opportunity provided by Ramadan for The Corner to provide space to the Muslim community for prayers.

The Steering Committee has also played a key role in successfully pursuing a Collective Impact grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The purpose of this grant is to bring a number of stakeholders from the St. James Town community together to develop a plan to “Make St. James Town a Neighbourhood of Choice to Call Home”. The goal is to improve social connections in a way that will impact safety, health and well being (mental health and isolation), and economic opportunity. We are delighted to have former mayor and local resident Barbara Hall on board as a public champion for this project.

The Steering Committee wishes to thank the residents, partners, staff and volunteers who contribute so much to making The Community Corner a success. We also wish to acknowledge the support of Toronto Community Housing and members who have provided oversight to the governance of the Community Corner over the past year:

Shirley Roberts
Coordinator
St. James Town Community Corner Steering Committee

- **2016-2017 STATS**
- Number new intake: **1516**
- Front Area Service: **25840**
- Workshop/Onetime program / Meetings / Events: **1788**
- Resident Lead program / Service partners lead program: **7741**
- One to one services: **2236**
- Avg number of programs: **20** /month
- Avg number of service partners: **13**
- number of placement students: **5**
- number of volunteers: **11**



Residents taking part in a community cleanup

Afterschool Programming and Youth Engagement

In neighbourhoods like St. James Town, where parents are often both working, young people (specifically tweens) greatly benefit from additional access to safe spaces, positive mentors and help with school work, so they don't fall between the cracks. Consequently, this year, The Corner's partnerships focused on opening The Corner's doors to youth through afterschool programming and youth engagement workshops.

The Toronto City Mission offered both its EPIC Tutoring after school program and its KIC Art Academy this year to young people weekly at the hub. Elephant Space, an independent group working to prevent youth

isolation and build community, offered a weekly drop-in space with board games and team-building activities. The Leacock Foundation ran a full year leadership program designed to encourage students in grades 7–9 to see themselves as social and civic advocates for change. Introducing students to different forms of advocacy, and helping them to identify and take action on issues in their community, this program supported 13 youth ages 8-12. For some tweens who needed further support, Youthdale hosted an afterschool art therapy program in partnership with The Corner, facilitated by an art therapist who worked with 9 youth from the community. Art therapy, a form of psychotherapy which uses art media as a form of communication, allowed participants to express themselves, identify emotions, and learn how to cope with stress from a young age. It was not only youth in their teens that were engaged through The Corner this year. For the University of Toronto’s (UofT) Alternative Reading Week (ARW), The Corner worked with 8 UofT undergraduate students in February 2017 to solicit their volunteer support in redesigning, beautifying and de-cluttering our space. The students were a great help in giving the outreach boards at The Corner and 19 buildings a new lease of life, and organising The Corner’s storage areas, re-decorating the front intake and reception area. The hope is that UofT students will continue to offer their time on an annual basis to The Corner during their Alternative Reading Week.

Social Enterprise and Income Generation

Of note in 2016 is the exciting partnership The Corner built with the Universal Social Enterprise for a unique income-generating initiative. The Universal Social Enterprise aims to facilitate economic opportunities for vulnerable groups in Ontario. In St. James Town, it introduced the Saving Box program; a community-led business loan program geared toward individuals and community groups with a unique income-generation or business idea. Through the program, participants receive wrap-around support, including mentorship and coaching for their individual needs by staff from the organization that are at The Corner 2-3 times a week.

- **SJT FESTIVAL AWARD WINNERS 2016**
- In appreciation for your time, dedication and continuous support to the St. James Town Community
- 1. Muneer Ahmed Hassan
- 2. Bhoomi Patel
- 3. Justin Romanov
- 4. Tracy Turner
- 5. Charles Stoodley
- 6. Wayne Lapointe
- 7. Carole Montemurro
- 8. Serendipity Visual Arts
- 9. Absolute Bakery & Cafe

- **SJT SCHOLARSHIPS 2016**
- 1. For Community Engagement/Leadership – Abhaya Khadka
- 2. For Creative/Artistic Contribution – Mariam Anwar
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A St. James Town Story of Resilience

I was forced to flee in December 2016. I came to Canada and I was granted refugee status at the beginning of March. I did not speak English and it stopped me going out, speaking to people and asking for help. I met a friend in Toronto and I started to live with him in a sharing room.

One day I went to St. James Town Community Corner with my friend. After we registered, we met the Health Access intake worker. My friend helped to interpret our conversation. I was helped to navigate different services. I was able to apply for social welfare and I received financial support through the government. I was connected to Primary Health Care at Sherbourne Health Centre. I felt very comfortable meeting a doctor who spoke my language and it was a lot easier for me to explain myself.

I was granted permanent resident status in June. I was connected to the settlement worker to help me apply for permanent residency. St. James Town Community Corner was very helpful for me during my difficult time. Presently, I am attending English classes at St. James Town Community Corner. I want to learn English and start working in Canada



TOP:

Residents at a round table consultation during the Annual SJT Spring Gathering

Celebrating the Community

SPRING GATHERING

This year’s Spring Gathering took place on Friday, April 21st, at Rose Avenue Public School in the heart of St. James Town. The Spring Gathering is an annual community consultation led by Health Access St. James Town, in partnership with residents and the St. James Town Service Providers’ Network. Providing an opportunity to bring the community together and share their opinions on current issues, it is an event that the community looks forward to every year.

A total of 224 people attended this year’s Spring Gathering, including residents, service providers, volunteers and children. A Friday evening was chosen to ensure that most residents were able to attend and stay until the end, without the constraints of school or work the following day. This year had more youth participation than previous years – two St. James Town youth leadership groups came and actively contributed to the discussions, offering a much needed youth perspective. There was strong representation from seniors as well; representing diverse language groups (e.g. Tamil and Mandarin). The other population group that was highly represented was that of newcomer families. St. James Town, often seen as a leaping-pad for newcomers, needs their voices in particular to address issues of settlement and acceptance. Ensuring these families feel included in these discussions is vital in allowing their voices to be heard and helping the unfamiliar feel familiar.

After receiving specific training, six Community Ambassadors took a leadership role in the planning, outreach and table facilitation. There was a general buzz of excitement throughout the entire event, as residents were invited to brainstorm priority strategies and actions for the following themes:

- Newcomer/Settlement Issues,
- Seniors’ Issues,
- Income Generation/Skill Building
- Community & Civic Engagements
- Mental Health-Access to Services,
- Youth Issues/Concerns,
- Safety/Neighbourhood Improvement,

The night ended with a light dinner and raffle prizes. The Spring Gathering findings were then analysed and written up into a report, which was shared with Health Access and St. James Town Service Providers’ Network partners. The findings are incorporated into the annual work plans of these respective agencies, and sub-committees so that we are able to respond to the emerging needs and support putting residents’ ideas into action. It is crucial in community action that the resident’s voices are heard and their needs are put first. The Spring Gathering is a key event which enables this bottom-up change, allowing for effective and meaningful action.

FESTIVAL

The 2016 Festival held on August 27th was themed Know Your Neighbour(hood) in light of the safety project. It was well attended, boasting 14 performances, children’s games, a bouncy castle, food and craft vendors and much more. St. James Town Youth Council Members, Suo Nanji and Jamast Sheikh were the Festival MC’s this year and did a wonderful job.

Residents were able to eat from an expansive menu of South Asian cultural foods representing Sri Lanka to Pakistan! Local vendors sold tasty snacks like Idli Sambar, Pakoras, Chaat, Pani Poori, Pav Baji, Kuli Panigaram with Coconut Chutney, Mirchi Bajji, Dhai Vada, Aloo Tiki, Sweet Corn Masala, Halal Chicken Biryani, and Jalebis and Ladoos (sweet desserts).

Cultural performers also represented the “World Within A Block” including an Ethiopian Dancer, a First Nations Dance Group from Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, Indian Classical dancing by Paromita Kar who is the first Canadian to hold a PhD in Dance Studies, and Hula Dancer Trini Fallon, to name a few.

The festival has now become a staple of St. James Town’s summer and is anticipated with much excitement by the residents. It has turned into a venue for residents to show their skills and talents, create connections, connect with opportunities and above all just celebrate being part of this wonderful neighbourhood.

To celebrate the St. James Town Festival volunteers, the SJTSPN held an appreciation event in September at the Wellesley Community Centre to recognize the hard work of the volunteers who are integral in the planning of the annual festival. Of the 50 volunteers, the celebration brought out 30 volunteers, who ate a catered meal together, danced and listened to music. The volunteers were also presented with a certificate of appreciation for their time volunteering during the day.

“OPENSTREETS TO”

We were proud to announce that The Corner was the lead agency for the Sherbourne/ Bloor Hub at the annual Open Streets Festival which engaged over 250 people. This City of Toronto festival shuts down car access on Bloor and Sherbourne on both Sunday August 21st and Sunday September 18th to promote pedestrian access, local businesses and community activities. The Corner provided games and activities along with resident-run groups and the St. James Town Service Providers’ Network organizations. Fifteen volunteers and six partners participated in the event, and local St. James Town performers were featured, including a South Asian dance group and a singing band.

ST. JAMES TOWN PRIDE

The second annual St. James Town Pride was celebrated on June 23rd at The Corner. It was held around the same time as the annual City-wide Pride event that celebrates the advances in human rights that the LGBTQ+ community has made through years of protest and advocacy. The St. James Town event was hosted by The Corner in collaboration with Sherbourne Health Center and Sunshine Centre

TOP:

A volunteer with her certificate during the Volunteer Appreciation event

BOTTOM:

Residents from across The City dance together at Openstreets





TOP:

Resource materials for the community at The Pride Event

BOTTOM:

A volunteer alongside food baskets for distribution as part of Ramadan celebrations



for Seniors. The event attracted over 30 people from the community and surrounding areas, ensuring a safe space to connect with service providers and build community. The event helps to further promote The Corner as a space which welcomes and actively supports the LGBTQ+ community.

RAMADAN FOOD DRIVE & ANNUAL EID BBQ

Two food drives were developed in partnership with Toronto Muslim Welfare Centre with the goal of providing food relief for Muslim families during Ramadan; the annual month of fasting and spiritual growth that ends with the celebration of Eid al-fitr. The fasting and prayers during Ramadan is a time where Muslims' reflect on how they can give back to the community. On June 7th and 23rd a total of 23 families were provided with food baskets. Then, on July 8th, the St. James Town Interfaith Initiative, in partnership with the Office of MPP Glen Murray, held a barbeque celebrating Eid, with food and music. Symbolically, sharing food is an integral way to build meaningful relationships among individuals and community members. Over 150 community members attended this well appreciated event.

COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS DINNER CELEBRATION

In partnership with Trinity Life Church, Progress Place, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, Sherbourne Health Centre and the Yonge Street Mission, The Corner held a Christmas dinner for 130 community members. In addition to the meal, the majority of which was provided by Trinity Life Church, there were gifts for adults and children as well as music, games and Christmas Carolling. For both families as well as isolated residents, this Christmas dinner goes a long way to celebrate the holidays and build a sense of community

Community Help

TAX CLINICS

Each year, The Corner provides tax clinics between February and April to the community, in partnership with volunteers from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and the Sri Lankan Accountant's Association. Given that income is a major determinant of health and wellbeing, filing tax returns for low income residents who may not be able to do it themselves, is an effective and important intervention to help provide income support. The two tax clinics offered by the CRA volunteers ensured 100 people were supported in filing their tax returns.

SRI LANKAN ACCOUNTANT'S ASSOCIATION

The Corner would like to celebrate its long-standing partnership with the Sri Lankan Accountant's Association of Canada (SAAC). SAAC is a dynamic and growing association comprising Sri Lankan accounting professionals including Chartered Accountants, Certified General Accountants, Certified Management Accountants as well as students working towards their accounting designation. This year the pro-bono tax clinics offered by SAAC led to 189 clients being able to complete their tax returns.

FLU CLINICS

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WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

In October, Health Access St. James Town partners hosted a “Tea and Talk” one afternoon at The Corner, with treats, coffee and tea, in celebration of World Mental Health Day; an annual global event that raises awareness about and reduces stigma of, mental health issues in the general public. Mental health myth busters and statistics on mental illness in Canada were shared to raise awareness. An art therapy colouring activity and live music was provided in a breakout room for residents. Table discussions with residents and service providers took place on stress, youth wellbeing, and coping strategies. With these table discussions community members were able to make direct connections to service providers. The partners that supported the event included: Sherbourne Health Centre, Youthdale, Progress Place and Women’s Health in Women’s Hands.

SAFETY PROJECT – CAPACITY BUILDING, EDUCATION AND AWARENESS-RAISING

The SJT safety team and residents received training on assessing neighbourhood safety, from experts such as METRAC. Two safety walks were conducted in August 2016 with City representatives and the safety project team. The Safety Ambassadors attended the St. James Town Service Provider Network meetings, as well as The Corner Steering Committee meetings to share community safety stories from the perspective of residents. The Safety Ambassadors also met with 5 different grassroots groups to gather information on “safe child, safe parents and safe neighbourhood”, the theme for October. They also hosted a youth mental health workshop with 23 people in attendance.

TOP:

The Safety Team during the SJT Spring Gathering

BOTTOM:

Residents with volunteers and the Safety team during a safety walk in the neighbourhood



FUNDERS

Toronto Central Local Health Integration
Network – TCLHIN
Ontario Trillium Foundation

Toronto Employment and Social Services
City of Toronto – Tower Renewal

SERVICE PARTNERS

Bleecker Wellesley Activity Network
Central Neighborhood House
Fred Victor
Hospice Toronto
Leacock Foundation
Muslim Welfare Centre
Nepali Literature Society
Progress Place
Sherbourne Health
Sickkids
Sunshine Centre for Seniors
Toronto Humane Society
The Neighborhood Organization – TNO
Toronto Public Health
Unispere Canada

University of Toronto
Yonge Street Mission
Youthdale
Red Dress production
Toronto City Mission – TCM
City Hope
Nepali's Women's Group
Wellesley Place
Culture Link
Elephant Space
Sai Organization
18blocks.com

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Amna Shah
Maryana Tanyashyna
Vickie Rennie
Chelladurai Yogarajah
Criss Habal-Brosek
Nalini Pandalangat
Ravi Subramaniam

Shirley Roberts
Veronica MacDonald
Jelani Matthews
Wilma
Suchana
Orit
Susan