



ST. JAMES TOWN SPRING GATHERING

CELEBRATING OUR SUCCESSES: COMMUNITY PLANNING
FOR A FAIR AND EQUITABLE COVID-19 RECOVERY

2022 REPORT



The Spring Gathering is an annual community consultation that takes place in St. James Town (SJT). It is led by Health Access St. James Town (HASJT) in partnership with the residents of SJT. This report summarizes the feedback from the 2022 Spring Gathering consultation session, community consultation sessions, as well as community-informed program recommendations.

A WORLD WITHIN A BLOCK

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INTRODUCTION AND AUTHORSHIP

This report was prepared for Health Access St. James Town (HAJST) and the St. James Town Service Providers Network (SJTSPN) by the Health Promotion and Systems Specialist at Sherbourne Health (SH). For more details please visit: www.stjamestown.org

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Planning Committee: Spring Gathering would not be possible without the efforts of the planning committee, table facilitators, and organizers made up of service providers and residents. The following agencies participated in the planning and implementation of Spring Gathering this year: TNO, Fred Victor, Dixon Hall, Hospice Toronto, Sherbourne Health, Progress Place, SickKids, The Neighbourhood Group, St. Michael's Hospital.

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OVERVIEW OF SPRING GATHERING

This year, the Spring Gathering consisted of a series of community consultation sessions, followed by a main event hosted by the Service Providers' Network (SPN) in collaboration with community residents. The community consultation sessions varied from Chai and Chat events to larger celebrations, and all included a focused discussion on the needs, strengths, and future planning of St. James Town services.

The main Spring Gathering event was hosted on **Friday, June 10th from 5:30-8:00PM** at the Wellesley Community Centre. Spring Gathering 2022 was a celebration of community successes and a rejuvenating time where community members and service providers gathered to share their experiences and recommendations for future programs and planning as well as collaboratively plan for a fair and equitable COVID-19 recovery.



The event was opened by a land acknowledgement offered in both Arabic and English from Alaa Mohammed. After opening addresses, speakers presented their achievements in vaccine engagement and health equity throughout the year, as well as provided updates on equity, diversity, and inclusion in our community engagement work. We also highlighted many of the programs that connect the SJT community, including the 2SLGBTQ+ newcomers' group, intergenerational and cross-cultural programming for seniors of SJT, Black Wellness Clinic, and 240 Hub.

Next, attendants participated in small group discussions, where they were guided by four main themes: 1) **access to primary care**, 2) **mental health and social isolation**, 3) **safety as a factor of health**, and 4) **food security and access**. After each group discussion, participants were brought back to meet as a larger group and share some of the key points that were raised during their conversations.

Toward the end of the night, a repaired coffee machine from the Repair Shop at the 240 Hub was raffled off to a lucky winner and Samira Aman, a poet and resident of St. James Town, closed the event with a poem. Guests brought home food from **Flavours from our Neighbours**, a catering collective comprised of passionate St. James Town residents.

CELEBRATING OUR SUCCESSES

Equity-Based Pop-up Clinics in SJT (presented by Sehr Athar)

Throughout the past year, ambassadors and community partners focused their efforts on vaccine clinics that prioritized the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations. This equity-based approach to vaccine engagement was only made possible through the work of ambassadors and residents who sat on planning committees, and ensured that each clinic could tailor the care, languages, and resources offered at these pop-ups. From March 2021 to March 2022, approximately 100 vaccine pop-up clinics were successfully completed with many offered during weekends, evenings, and sometime late at night to ensure that even those who worked late shifts were able to be vaccinated. These clinics reached a wide range of population groups, including essential workers, kids, 2SLGBTQ+, home-bound residents, sex workers, and Latinx communities.

2SLGBTQ+ Communities (presented by Kaína Mendoza)

In previous years, we have heard the need for increased programming and responsiveness to our 2SLGBTQ+ community in St. James town. Throughout the past year, vaccine ambassadors have led trivia games, Chai & Chat discussion groups, and have established a weekly 2SLGBTQ+ newcomers and BIPOC drop-in group at The Corner.

Intergenerational Programming for Seniors (presented by Xiao Pang)

Previous Spring Gathering consultations have highlighted the need for senior's programs with an intergenerational component that brings seniors and youth together for cultural exchanges; Throughout the past year, The Corner has continued to work in collaboration with residents and community partners to start a Chinese and Filipino Seniors Program. Our youth ambassadors have been able to work on their language skills and develop culturally responsive programming that is truly in partnership and collaboration with the senior participants. Next up, we plan to bring the groups together for multicultural activities like field trips and train and engage youth volunteers and participants to build out a community support network.

CELEBRATING OUR SUCCESSES

Black Wellness (presented by Munira Yusuf)

In the pandemic, there has been a critical need to address the disparities in health outcomes experienced by Black communities in Toronto. Health Access organized a Black wellness clinic which included support from other organizations such as the Black Physicians Association of Ontario, Black Cap, Sherbourne Health, Women's Health in Women's Hands, La Passerelle, The 519, and the Regent Park Community Health Center. Vaccine clinics served as a space where Black community members could connect with Black health and social service providers and get to know the supports that are available to them. Our wellness clinics provided wrap-around services including health, employment, harm reduction, or information on community programs.

Reducing, Reusing and Repurposing (presented by Alaa Mohamed)

The Corner 240 Hub has continued to offer a number of programs and services to help transform trash to treasures, build skills for repairing, fixing, creating, and more! These services offer repairs for all types of small appliances, electronics, clothes, laptops, phones, printers, bikes, small furniture, watches, and jewelry.

Some workshops offered at The Corner 240 Hub include clothing transformation/sewing classes where residents learn to stitch, fix, and repurpose clothes with a sewing machine, as well as Stitch night, including lessons on knitting and crocheting.



COMMUNITY ENGAGED PLANNING: METHODS AND THEMES

A variety of data collection methods were employed to better capture the range of participant's experiences, as well as to improve accessibility in the consultation process. Information was derived from surveys, interactive questions, art activities, and smaller discussion groups each guided by the four main themes. Following the event, Eduardo Dos Santos led the process of data validation/editing (ensuring procedural adherence and completeness of results), coding, and analysis in Google Sheets and Excel for the main Spring Gathering event, and several consultation sessions. Data analysis was completed by extracting key themes and highlighting their associated program and service recommendations offered by community members during the Spring Gathering event.

This year, several consultation sessions were planned before the main Spring Gathering event. These sessions brought together different communities within St. James Town and allowed for participants to share their specific experiences in a smaller and supportive environment. These focused sessions allowed us to better accommodate the range of languages and abilities, ensuring that everyone had an opportunity to contribute. Focused community consultation groups also allowed residents with shared experiences to exchange resources and information in an environment free of judgement. More information about the methodology of each focused session is highlighted in Table 1 attached in Appendix-A.

After the data analysis phase, several facilitators (from both the community consultation sessions, and main Spring Gathering event) met with the Health Promotion and Systems Specialist to validate the information that was collected during these conversations.

The main Spring Gathering event included an evaluation completed by attendants that will be used to guide the planning and methodology of future events. This evaluation measured the success of various methods of promoting the event, whether participants learned about new resources and services during the event and provided space for feedback on improvements to future community gatherings. Results for the evaluation are available in Appendix-D.



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

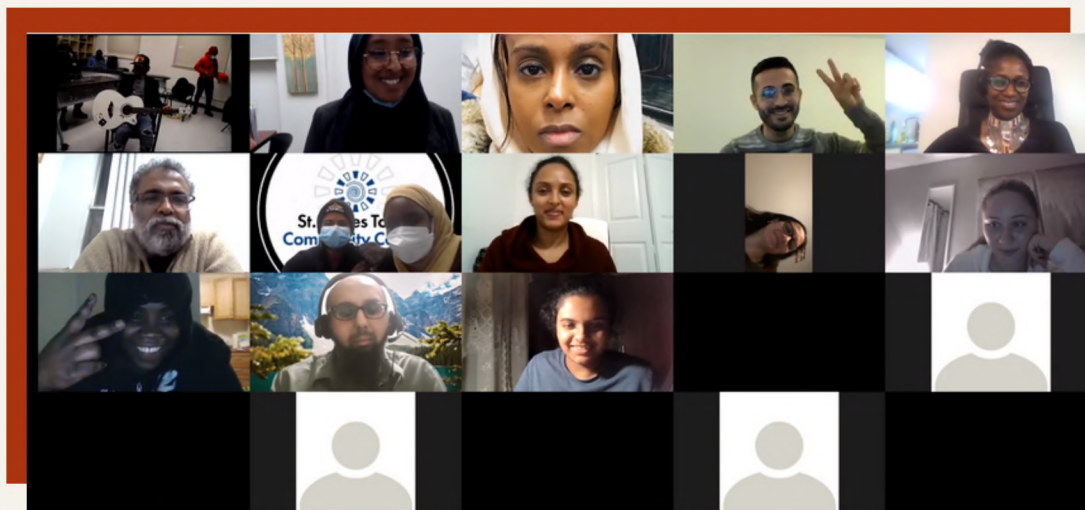
I. BLACK COMMUNITY IN SJT

The discussion groups for Black communities in SJT were held during the Black History Month event and the Juneteenth event. Facilitators guided the discussion towards themes of food access, housing supports, and community-building initiatives.

Many of the participants were aware of food programming in their neighbourhood, and highlighted initiatives such as food banks, the Moss Park Market, and Food Boxes on Sundays. In contrast, housing resources were not easily identified by participants, despite housing being a primary area of concern.

Rental increases were a cause of anxiety and stress for residents, and they were often not informed of rent increases in advance. The group discussed the factors that act as barriers to accessing housing for Black communities in SJT, including discrimination, rent increases, and feeling safe where they live. There was a general interest in tenant support groups, or tenant advocacy in the neighbourhood. For some newcomer populations, language was a primary barrier to accessing affordable housing and there was an indicated need for translation services that could support residents through the housing and rental process.

When the group was asked about services that could be made available to Black youth in SJT, participants called on a diversification of activities beyond those that offer sports. Particular attention was paid to the importance of developing programs that teach youth about Black history, including the impact of Black activists such as Viola Desmond and Rosa Parks. Much of the discussion focused on how Black scholars, activists, and visionaries have been excluded from the public-school curriculum and how communicating their impact to Black youth in SJT needs to be prioritized in future programming.

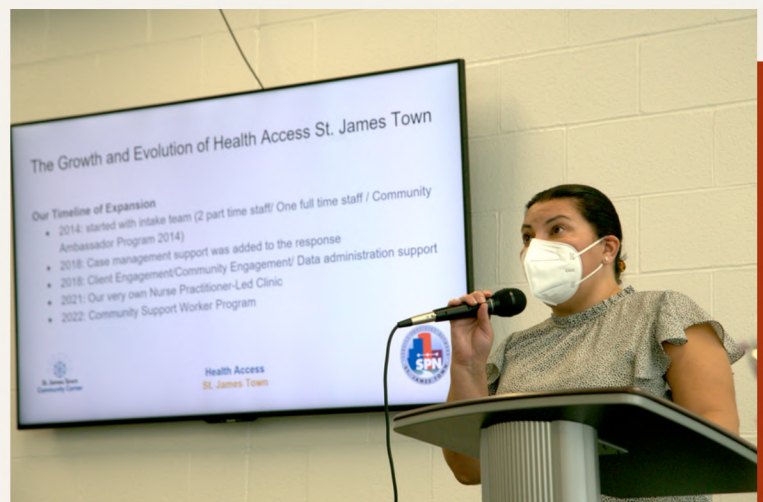


Screenshot from Black History Month event at The Corner

Many of the programs that connected Black communities in SJT dissolved at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants identified a need to restore programs that provide a platform for community discussion, where Black residents can share and exchange their experiences, supports, and resources. Some of the initiatives proposed during the sessions included: roundtables, therapy sessions, and community discussion groups. Overall, there was a critical need to emphasize recurring and structured community discussion. To address language barriers in programming and events, participants called for an increase in hiring people who speak multiple languages, a language directory at The Corner, and the planning of events that were catered to specific languages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Diversify programs offered to Black youth (some suggestions included chess programs, summer camps, history lessons).
- Increase programs for youth that teach Black history, with a focus on the impact of Black activists, scholars, and visionaries.
- Increase housing advocacy and tenant supports for Black residents.
- Implement ongoing forms of community discussion that allow residents to share their experiences, supports, and resources. This can be in the form of roundtables, therapy sessions, and community discussion groups.
- To address language barriers, hire people who speak multiple languages, implement a language directory at The Corner, and plan events catered to specific languages.



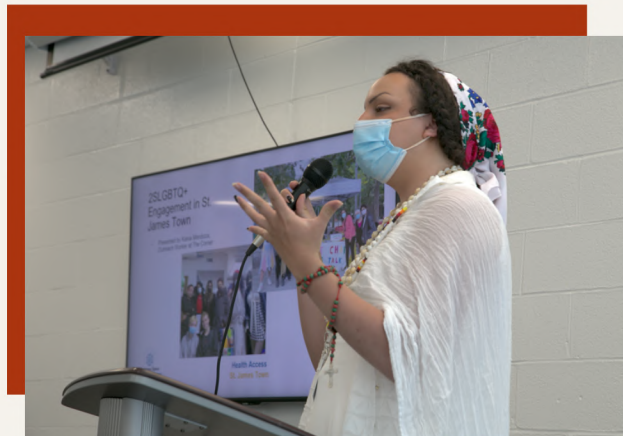
II. 2SLGBTQ+ COMMUNITIES

The 2SLGBTQ+ consultation sessions brought together residents of many backgrounds, with a breadth of experiences and new ideas. These conversations provided an opportunity for 2SLGBTQ+ residents to connect and support each other and led to discussions about mental and physical health, housing, and public safety.

2SLGBTQ+ MENTAL HEALTH

The participants highlighted that their physicians often demonstrated a lack of understanding or willingness to acknowledge their experiences as 2SLGBTQ+ patients. This was a primary factor that discouraged 2SLGBTQ+ participants from seeking further care. The healthcare experience almost unanimously was cited as bureaucratic and self-directed, which presented challenges to anyone navigating additional stressors including housing instability, food insecurity, and personal care.

Other commonly cited challenges were language barriers and a lack of cultural competence from healthcare providers. This remains a barrier to accessing care primarily impacting newcomer and immigrant populations, and these barriers are compounded for those seeking 2SLGBTQ+ specific care. This was highlighted in discussions on both mental and physical health, as participants accessed services from therapists, counselors, and Primary Care Providers (PCPs).



Participants found long wait times for therapists and counselors a primary deterrent for accessing appropriate and timely care. Wait-times are often longer than average when trying to schedule an appointment with a 2SLGBTQ-informed HCP, or someone who has demonstrated experience with culturally safe practice.

Particular attention was paid to the importance of supporting physical health to improve mental health outcomes. Participants highlighted how the barriers to accessing primary healthcare services can directly influence mental health outcomes. Therefore, access to both physical and mental health services must be supported and improved. Central to each of the discussions throughout the 2SLGBTQ+ community conversations were the importance of peer support for connecting residents to 2SLGBTQ-specific mental health and healthcare resources. Often, participants would leverage their informal networks of support as a primary resource.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2SLGBTQ+ Ambassador/systems navigator – many participants proposed having a dedicated ambassador or systems navigator that could help connect them to 2SLGBTQ+ specific healthcare resources.
- Peer Support Groups – In recognition of the critical role that informal networks of peer support have among many 2SLGBTQ+ communities, participants recommended expanding peer support groups to bridge the gap of waiting for professional therapy.
- Makeup tutorials and kits for trans women at The Corner 240 Hub.
- Newcomer drop-in sessions that are specifically dedicated to moving, dancing, and other activities to improve physical health.
- Increase number of 2SLGBTQ+ Counselors/Therapists available in SJT.

2SLGBTQ+ PHYSICAL HEALTH

The three main challenges with accessing healthcare outlined by participants were: 1) A lack of information on what resources are available for 2SLGBTQ+ health, 2) 2SLGBTQ+ friendly services are often at capacity, and private services are inaccessible, 3) PCPs often lack competencies to manage and support 2SLGBTQ+ health needs.

The most commonly cited challenge with accessing PCPs were long-wait times, especially for 2SLGBTQ+ friendly service providers. Residents seeking trans healthcare found it was inaccessible, even when a provider was identified, trans healthcare is expensive and often privatized. Some residents noted that a lot of the information that PCPs have on trans patients is outdated, which often made these healthcare interactions unsafe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Creation of a role for an ambassador or systems navigator that connects residents to LGBTQ+ specific healthcare resources.
- Increased programs and services specific to BIPOC LGBTQ+ residents (some suggestions included yoga, self-defence training, and trans and disability specific programming).
- Systematizing knowledge on 2SLGBTQ+ health services (with priority for BIPOC resources), inclusive of community assets and peer-led initiatives.
- Implementing a harm reduction cart at The Corner. Residents also recommended the cart include items for sexual health such as condoms, lube, dental dams, resources to promote safe sex, and information on where to receive sexual and reproductive healthcare.
- Increase in activities and programs that promote physical health.
- Continue Chai and Chat program and increase programs that bring together 2SLGBTQ+ residents.

In the past year, the SJT Harm Reduction Working Group has offered Naloxone training for residents. Expanding harm reduction in SJT and at The Corner continues to be a priority of the SPN in the next year. Currently, the SJT Harm Reduction Working Group includes organizations such as Sherbourne Health, Fred Victor, The Corner, Casey House, Renascent, Toronto Community Housing, and St. James Town residents.

2SLGBTQ+ HOUSING

The majority of participants indicated that they felt stuck where they were currently living (64%, n=14). Many of these respondents shared that discrimination was a primary reason they were not able to relocate. With the cost of housing in Toronto increasing, other participants found that even though many aspects of their housing situation were “unlivable”, they would not be able to access better conditions that are affordable to them.

Most of the participants indicated interest in learning more about their rights as tenants, and strategies to navigate the rental process with their landlords. Many of the challenges faced by residents were related to their relationship with their landlord, including evictions, responsiveness to poor housing conditions, and increases in rent.

When participants were asked what they look for in a neighbourhood that encourages them to stay, the main responses included: 1) affordability, 2) safety, 3) cleanliness, and 4) green space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consistent translation of housing information on notice boards.
- Increased accessibility to information on tenant rights and entitlements.
- Community cleanup services and programs that occur frequently. Residents suggested that these focus on neighbourhood green spaces and parks.

2SLGBTQ+ SAFETY

Neighbourhood safety was threaded throughout each discussion session, and the primary reason that 2SLGBTQ+ residents felt unsafe was due to discrimination. Whether the discrimination was coming from roommates, neighbours, or police, participants expressed how the effects of discrimination impact their ability to feel safe in the neighbourhood.

The majority of the safety discussion focused on policing, and participants shared their negative experiences interacting with police officers. Generally, they found that the presence of police often complicated or escalated situations, and that language barriers between some residents and police officers caused confusion and “more harm than good”. All participants expressed their frustrations with police in housing situations and crises, indicating that they are unhelpful in situations of eviction and housing disputes with landlords.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Creation of community safe spaces (buildings or lobbies with a security guard or community member that can provide support in crisis situations)
- Training community ambassadors or volunteers on strategies to promote neighbourhood safety.
- Community-led safety initiatives that provide an alternative to calling police in crisis situations (emphasis on peer-led programs)
- Creation of a 2SLGBTQ+ emergency support hotline.



III. NEWCOMER PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

The consultation sessions for parents and caregivers were conducted through several *Chai and Chat* events, a space for caregivers to share their experiences navigating the challenges imposed by the pandemic. The sessions had a primary focus on mental health and programs that could be useful in supporting caregivers through the transitional period out of social isolation.

Many of the participants at the Chai and Chat session had a general knowledge on programs available for parents in their community, with particular attention paid to the **Rose Avenue Parenting Centre**. Participants used the sessions to exchange their knowledge on programs and services that were useful to them, and while facilitators guided the discussion, it was also a space for parents and caregivers to connect and share resources. One of the main points offered by participants was the need for a greater number of programs to support the wellness of caregivers. In general, caregivers with younger children sought programs that were offered virtually, while parents of older children preferred programs that would encourage them to leave the house and stay active. Some of the programs requested include dance classes, yoga, and affordable spa/massages.



The main barrier that is prohibiting caregivers from participating in wellness programs is the lack of child minding services. During the Chai and Chat, participants spoke of past programs that operated through The Corner and allowed for residents to drop off children for short periods of time while they attended appointments or completed errands. This program was particularly relevant for newcomer parents who may not have family connections in Toronto to offer childcare support, and it is often not feasible for spouses/partners to take off work in these situations.

During the Chai and Chat, participants were asked to rank topics that they would like to learn more about to better support themselves through challenging times. The most cited topics were “Understanding my emotions” and “Communications, boundaries, and interpersonal relationships”, followed by “meditation/mindfulness as a coping tool”. The results of this question are provided in Figure 1.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implementing a child-minding program to allow parents and caregivers to attend workshops, programs, and complete errands.
- Expansion of programs focused on mental and physical wellness (including dance classes, yoga, and affordable spa/massages)
- Expansion of workshops covering identified priority topics (including “understanding my emotions” and “Communications, boundaries, and Interpersonal relationships”)



Figure 1: Responses to questions on future program content

IV. FILIPINO OLDER ADULTS IN SJT

HEALTHCARE AND ACCESS

Similar to the experiences of participants in other community conversation, lack of access to family physicians was a barrier to accessing primary healthcare. Many find it difficult to secure a family doctor that is able to take on new patients, while others who have a consistent PCP struggle with having enough time to communicate their needs and have to book several appointments for more complex health issues. The difficulty with finding a family physician is more challenging when searching for someone who speaks Tagalog or provides culturally aware care. Language was a main barrier to communicating their health issues and needs sufficiently and precisely to their PCP, and some participants would need translators to facilitate this process. Participants expressed that differences in language would not only make clinical interactions more challenging but was also a barrier to accessing other programs and services.

Participants often regarded the **peer nutrition program** as a successful initiative that was beneficial in the home and community. Parents expressed that the program helped them to cook and prepare food for their kids and that they valued access to the resident dietitian who led the program.

Diabetes was the main health concern experienced by participants, and they unanimously agreed that diet and exercise were their preferred method of treatment. Another key health concern raised by participants was COVID-19 infection and long-COVID symptoms. There was attention to the impact that social isolation and the pandemic has had on mental health. Other health concerns that were raised by the group include arthritis, chronic pain, heart disease, sciatica, and fibromyalgia. Physical health promotion through exercise programs at The Corner and other organizations have been an invaluable resource for symptom management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reinstatement of City Hall's Peer Nutrition Program, or a similar initiative to support those caring for children or senior relatives.
- Promote services in Tagalog and in buildings with higher Filipino populations.
- Expand language support for Filipino residents on navigating healthcare interactions.
- Coordinate a Tagalog seminar or forum led by a Filipino Dietitian or diabetes specialist. Existing pamphlets on managing diabetes could also be translated from English to Tagalog.
- Host a mental health discussion forum that allows residents to connect with the community and communicate the challenges they face with their mental health.
- Continued support for existing Filipino exercise programs offered through The Corner.

EMPLOYMENT & IMMIGRATION

For many participants, finding employment was challenging as professional credentials earned outside of Canada were not recognized as valid and transferable, and jobs would often require Canadian experience. For some, this experience was gained through unpaid volunteer work. For others, this was not a feasible solution, especially as many newcomers expressed a need to gain financial stability in Canada in order to support themselves as well as family members in the Philippines. Participants expressed how a lack of connections made finding employment more difficult and a general interest in connecting with Filipino associations and job networks as a valuable resource to supporting their employment process.

Filipino residents that were able to secure a job often faced discrimination in the workplace by co-workers, clients, and the public. They expressed that it is common to be overworked and that they are often expected to do tasks beyond what their job requires.

Many found the immigration process challenging and did not know where to begin. In addition to this, many residents found that they did not have the computer skills necessary to easily navigate the online components of the immigration process. For those working with an immigration worker, language and cultural barriers often limited them from receiving the full amount of support that they required. Residents expressed how expensive the immigration process is, highlighting the additional fees for related services and consultants. They were often unaware of free and subsidized services offered by The Corner and other organizations.

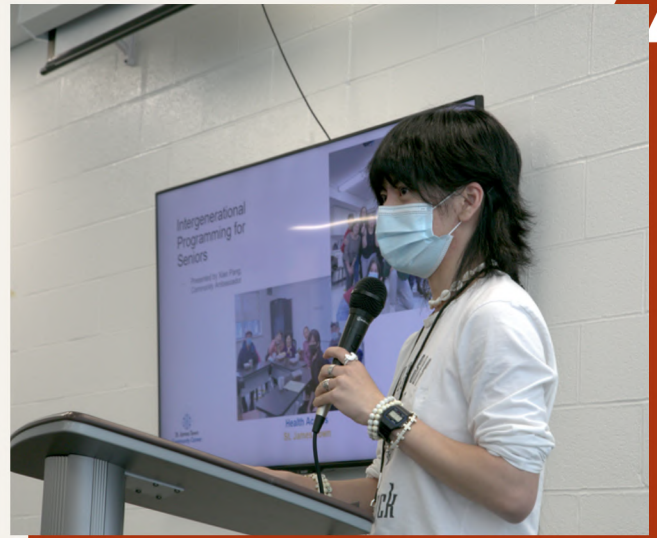
RECOMMENDATIONS

- Connect The Corner with a Filipino financial advisor or implement programs that teach participants skills in financial management.
- Promote Filipino networks for employment and immigration support.
- Promote services (specifically settlement workers, immigration consultants, ESL classes, employment consultants) that are offered in Tagalog.
- Create more Filipino programs to facilitate community-building among newcomers.
- Implement a Tagalog basic computer literacy class so that Filipino residents can better navigate the internet.
- Increased capacity and programming to support seniors and newcomers with filing income taxes.

V. CHINESE OLDER ADULTS IN SJT

The community conversations with Chinese older adults focused on the challenges residents faced in accessing family doctors and culturally appropriate food. Residents also discussed the services and activities that they would like to see in future programming for Chinese communities in St. James Town.

The greatest challenges faced by residents in receiving healthcare were language barriers between them and their Health Care Provider (HCP) and finding accessible transportation between physicians, specialists, and other services. Residents often used translation apps but found that this was not a sufficient solution when communicating their needs to the doctor and when receiving instructions on medications and prescriptions following care. For residents that were able to access general practitioners that spoke Chinese, they often would be referred to specialists who could not. Many residents had family doctors that retired without notifying patients and had since found it difficult to identify a doctor with appointment availabilities.



A central point of discussion was transportation as a barrier not only to receiving healthcare, but also in accessing culturally appropriate food. Residents wanted to access markets in Chinatown for ingredients but were unable to do so. In a similar vein, all participants agreed that the neighbourhood could benefit from more programming that focused on Chinese residents to facilitate community and strengthen connection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Introduce on-site translators that can help to facilitate healthcare interactions, specifically with specialists.
- Increase translation services available after healthcare appointments, to help identify timing, dosage, and name of the medications prescribed.
- Programs, events, and workshops specific to Chinese community members (some suggestions included: floral arrangement, bead threading, Chinese arts and crafts, music).
- Increase cross-cultural programming that provides an opportunity for Chinese seniors to interact with non-Chinese seniors.
- Additional hiring of physicians and workers that speak Chinese languages in the neighbourhood.

SPRING GATHERING EVENT: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

+ ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Many of the residents had access to a primary healthcare provider, although visiting them became increasingly difficult throughout the pandemic. While access to a physician or nurse was not a primary concern, it was often referrals to specialists that became difficult to manage, with long wait-times and limited availabilities. Prolonged wait times and difficulty scheduling appointments was cited as the most common barrier to accessing healthcare by residents. Some groups agreed that there was a shortage of doctors available to provide care, and when they were able to book appointments the long wait times discouraged them from seeing the doctor.

Many residents had family physicians that spoke their language but were situated outside of St. James Town (some locations included: Markham, Scarborough, or downtown Toronto Chinatown). The pandemic made it difficult to access these doctors as they were limited by transit restrictions and decreased appointment availabilities. Appointments located outside of St. James Town (inclusive of specialists) was a common cause of missed and late appointments by residents.

When the facilitator asked about residents' knowledge about the role and scope of services offered by nurse practitioners, there was limited knowledge on what services could be provided, and who would be eligible to receive them. Language barriers were a main factor that limited the ability for some residents to understand what services nurse practitioners provided compared to other primary care providers. Often, newcomers expressed that the role of registered nurses and nurse practitioners differed by country, and this was a primary reason for not knowing their scope of practice. For those who were aware and utilizing NP services at The Corner, they shared that their knowledge of these services came from a pop-up vaccine team at 280 Wellesley. Others highlighted the important role of Systems Navigators in connecting them with the NP-led Clinic in a short period of time.



The conversations happening at the Spring Gathering event also provided a space for the Nurse Practitioner working at The Corner to join tables and educate residents on her scope of practice. Many residents found this valuable, and it quickly became a central point of discussion.

“Our group was lucky enough to have a nurse practitioner join our table to answer participants’ questions about the difference between a general practitioner and a nurse practitioner. The NP who joined us was able to provide insight and clarification into the role of a nurse practitioner – this provided valuable, first-hand information so community members could be better informed about their care.”

- Discussion Facilitator

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increased accessible information on the scope of services that nurse practitioners can provide, and who is eligible to receive them.
- Improved support for booking appointments, and reminders for upcoming appointments.
- Expanded language resources (esp. translation services and language classes).
- Increased healthcare services offered at nighttime and weekends.

A Nurse Practitioner-led clinic is available on-site at The Corner (200 Wellesley St. E) five days per week. The clinic provides services to individuals who do not have a Health Care Provider. These services include cancer screenings, sexual health, chronic disease management, prenatal care, healthy baby and child visits, immunizations, referrals, and more!



MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled us to develop creative strategies of coping with stress, anxiety, and isolation in safe ways. At the height of lockdown measures, the residents of St. James Town found innovative ways to connect with their community and support each other. During this community conversation, residents shared their knowledge on various strategies that they find useful in coping with feelings of sadness, anxiety, and stress. There was particular attention to spending time with family and participating in activities with small groups of close friends. Participants also suggested developing new hobbies (e.g., cooking, gardening, and yoga).

When meeting in-person was challenging and restricted, residents found creative solutions of using online spaces to connect with each other and feel less isolated. Some of the primary online channels used include FaceTime, WhatsApp, Zoom, and other platforms to send messages, videos, and calls to friends and family. Some residents found that attending language classes, and stress management workshops were important for facilitating connection with one another and feeling less isolated.



The group stressed the importance of having access to psychologists, therapists, mental health counselors, and family physicians as critical resources for supporting mental health and wellness. One of the main programming requests indicated by participants was to increase counselling and therapy resources in St. James Town, specifically available at The Corner.

Many were either unaware of the counseling/therapy services offered at The Corner or did not find them sufficient. There was also an emphasis on promoting physical and holistic health programming to support overall mental health and wellness. Some of these recommendations included dance, yoga, and music programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

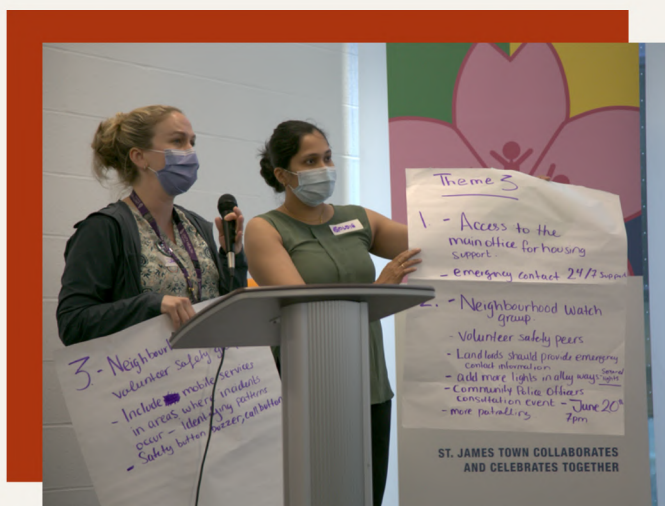
- Increase programs that connect SJT residents with mental health counselors/therapists in the neighborhood.
- Introduce more workshops and programs that promote physical health as a strategy of supporting mental health and wellness
- Continue or expand programs that offer a diversity of activities including cooking, gardening, yoga, Zumba, and music.
- Implement workshops on “Understanding stress and stress management”, “Meditation/mindfulness as a coping tool” and “understanding my emotions”

✓ SAFETY AS A FACTOR OF HEALTH

Neighbourhood safety and its impact on health was a central point of discussion throughout the consultation session. Many newcomers shared their experiences of not knowing what places were safe to access at night, who to contact in emergencies, and what safety procedures were in place if they found themselves in an unsafe situation. There was an interest in making this information readily available and consistently updated for newcomers, and other new residents moving into the neighbourhood.

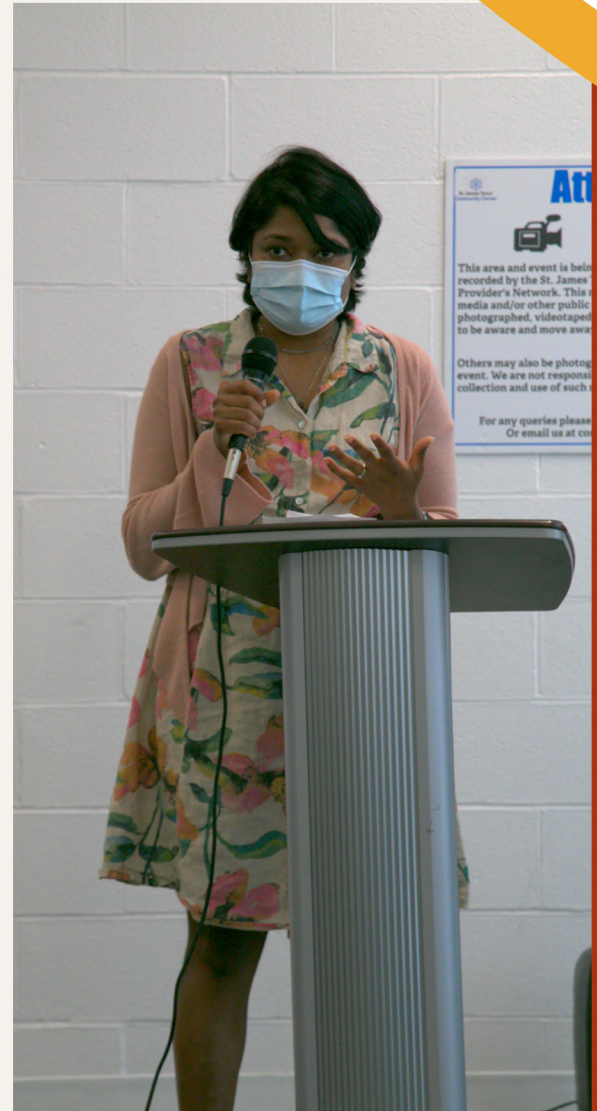
Another important point of discussion was the possibility of expanding participation in a general committee for safety and safety procedures. There was consensus that this committee should involve representatives from building management, businesses in SJT, and residents to promote safety on the streets, and within buildings and parks. If there were particular concerns raised by residents, this committee would be vital in rectifying these situations. Throughout the discussion, residents stressed the importance of engaging youth in safety initiatives.

There is currently a safety sub-committee under the SPN. This committee has been active in creating neighbourhood crisis protocol (some of these topics include fire, flooding, and suicide response protocols).



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Community-led Safety Initiatives:** Some residents wanted to explore increased security/patrolling officers or building better partnerships with law enforcement as a strategy for improving neighbourhood safety. Importantly, other residents suggested that their safety would be compromised with the increased presence of police and forwarded that there would be greater benefit from community-led safety initiatives. There was a general interest in expanding programming and workshops on de-escalation and harm reduction, without the use of weapons[1]. Some residents expressed interest in a buddy program, matching up residents with each other, or ambassadors whenever accessing services or completing errands in the neighbourhood.
- Residents suggested that neighbourhood safety may be improved by increasing camera/CCTV or emergency buzzers in frequented areas.
- To keep the neighbourhood clean, residents suggested increasing the number of publicly accessible washroom facilities, and waste disposal (e.g., garbage cans, cigarette ash boxes) in St. James Town. There was particular interest in expanding garbage cans and waste disposal specific to pets and other animals.



[1] Models of community-led crisis response have recently been implemented in other parts of the city, such as Kamaamwizme wii Naagidiwendiiying, an Indigenous-led crisis response team servicing downtown west Toronto¹

FOOD SECURITY

Rising food prices have compounded the challenges residents face to accessing affordable, culturally appropriate foods. Residents expressed that most food resources were outside of St. James Town and that travelling wasn't feasible, sustainable, or convenient for many. Food banks were a critically important source of accessing food, but residents overwhelmingly expressed that they frequently experienced long lines and wait times at any free or subsidized food program. These long periods of waiting were dangerous, especially for seniors. In general, there was limited knowledge on the balcony gardening workshops offered at 240 Wellesley, but residents indicated an interest in workshops that allowed them to grow, harvest and support their own ingredients and foods.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Promotion and Expansion of Balcony Gardening Workshops

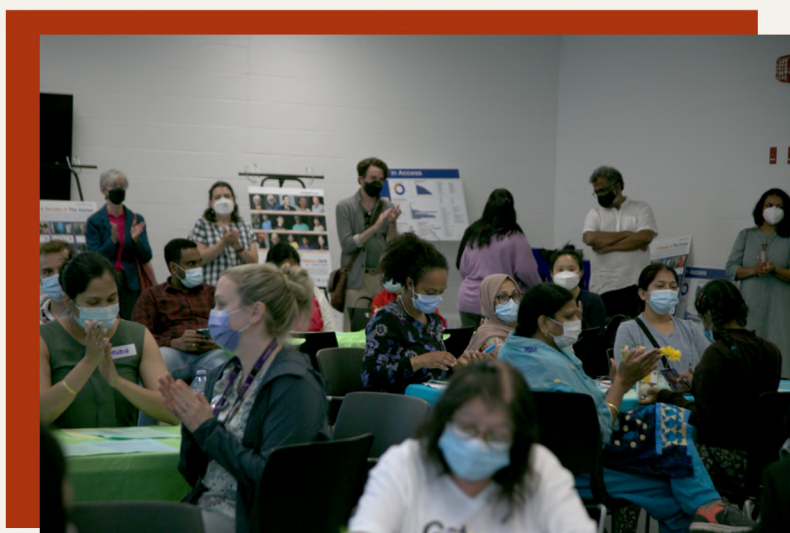
While there was considerable interest in balcony gardening workshops, those currently offered at 240 are underutilized and not widely known to residents. Residents recommended the expansion of these programs as a priority for future food programming. Other residents who were unaware of these programs at The Corner suggested increasing the promotion and outreach to raise awareness.

Ambassadors/Patrol for Senior Residents

The safety of senior residents was threaded throughout many of the conversations had during Spring Gathering 2022. Residents proposed having community ambassadors either patrolling or accompanying residents that are seeking help. These volunteers could also be stationed at food banks during peak waiting hours.

During the pandemic several organisations of the St. James Town Service Providers' Network, including but not limited to Progress Place, Hospice Toronto, Sherbourne Health and TNO stepped up and partnered with the St. James Town Catering Collective to provide nutritious meals at no cost to community members who were facing food insecurity including those who were homebound and facing difficulties in meal preparation. Volunteers in the community dropped off meals to homebound residents. The Corner functioned as the meal pick up point for the other residents.

In February 2022, the SJTSPN launched a food insecurity working group, under the Community Engagement Subcommittee. This working group is co-chaired by a dietitian at Sherbourne Health, and a community resident who leads the SJT Catering Collective. This working groups brings together local service providers and residents to discuss food security initiatives and opportunities for collaboration.



CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Healthcare Access

There were a range of reasons why participants found it difficult to access a family physician or other primary care provider, including: language barriers, long wait-times, appointment availability, and lack of cultural competence by the HCP.

Community-led Safety

Neighborhood Safety can be improved by community-led initiatives. The solutions that were proposed varied between community conversation, but often included community members or ambassadors as a key driver of these initiatives.

Food Access

With the rising cost of food, nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food options are increasingly inaccessible. Programs that are supporting free and subsidized food are operating above-capacity, and this has impacted the wait times at food banks, and availability of resources.

Language Resources

There is a critical need to increase the availability of language/translation services offered in St. James Town. Many groups indicated that language differences are a primary barrier to accessing healthcare, community programs, and other services. Residents have proposed solutions including increased translation services, hiring of employees who speak multiple languages, and a language directory at The Corner.

Mental Health Promotion

Community groups emphasized the importance of promoting mental health through holistic methods. This included physical health programs (such as Zumba, dance, and sports), social programs to keep community members connected, and skills-based workshops (such as gardening, music, etc.). Importantly, this should complement, but not replace access to therapists and mental health counselors.

Childminding Resources

A barrier to accessing healthcare, community programs, and other services is often the lack of accessible child-minding services. While this was a central topic throughout the conversation with parents and caregivers, many other residents expressed that they were often unable to attend appointments or community programs as they had limited options for temporary child-care.

CONCLUSION

This year's Spring Gathering event marked another year of resiliency, success, and growth in the St. James Town neighbourhood. While we face unprecedented times in the COVID-19 pandemic, St James Town continues to show how creative solutions and community support can help a neighbourhood collectively work towards a fair and equitable pandemic recovery.

Our community conversations allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the specific needs and strengths of different groups within St. James Town. While facilitators guided these fruitful discussions, they often found that much of the conversation was organic and driven by shared experiences, ideas, and solutions. The community conversation format allowed participants to feel comfortable expressing the challenges they faced, and this was met with understanding and empathy from other participants.

The community experiences and recommendations outlined in this report will be brought to various subcommittees of the Service Providers Network, the City of Toronto, and other key stakeholders, and used to inform future policy and program development.

