

SJT Festival

Reporting & Evaluation

2024



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Executive Summary

The 2024 St. James Town Festival took place on Saturday September 7, 2-7PM, and was a huge success despite the inclement weather, with more than 1000 community members attending throughout the day! The St. James Town Service Providers Network (SJT SPN) organized a powerful festival theme and 5 SPN Tables (Youth, Seniors, Newcomers, Health Access & Advocacy Subcommittee). This year's festival theme, "Greener & Safer: Rebuilding & Reviving Relationships" was animated with the help of key community partners. Community Resilience to Extreme Weather (CREW) along with the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) and the local Fire Department helped animate Emergency Preparedness as part of this Year's theme. Neighbourhood Legal Services, 700 Ontario Street Tenant Association, ACORN and Workers Action Center animated the Equitable Development component of our theme. The Neighbourhood Group Community Services (TNGS), The Corner @ 240 and Toronto Community Housing Corporation Conservation Department helped animate the Share and Reuse element of our Theme. The Toronto Birth Centre, Call Auntie, Seven Generations Midwives, Support Enhance Access Service (SEAS), Anakbayan and Migrante helped animate our framework of Decolonization.



On top of this MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam and Councillor Chris Moise were in attendance helping to mark this festival as a significant community building event. Children's Book Bank, Black Health Access Connect, Muslim Food Bank Community Services, The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO), Hospice Toronto, Sick Kids, Woodgreen Community Services and many more partners also participated to make this event an exceptional opportunity to learn about local services and community groups.

We are indebted to John Laforme, a knowledge keeper and descendant from the Ojibwe and Mohawk people from Mississauga's of New Credit who shared 3 songs to open the festival in a good way. Minara Begum and Linidwe Sibanda, the Co-Chairs of the SJT SPN, shared opening statements outlining the festival's theme, thanking the festival participants and organizers as well as sharing a special thank you and best wishes to Robb Johannes, the outgoing SPN Co-chair. The 2024 SJT festival main stage offerings included 26 performances with a total of 96 performers, ranging from cultural group dances, live singing, recitals to kids performances. The Festival was an opportunity for SJT community members to come together to showcase their talent building local networks of belonging, cultural expression and pride of place. The Festival also provided a space for community economic development welcoming 5 food vendors and 8 non-food vendors. Momos, Biryani, Chaat, Haleem, Veggie Samosas and much more were on the menu. Non food vendors sold their hand made crafts, jewelry, clothing, kids toys and much more.

The SJT Festival is not possible without the SJT Service Providers Network who convenes more than 10 Subcommittees of its general membership and hired 3 Resident festival Co-Chairs to design and implement the festival over the course of 8 weeks. More than 60 Volunteers supported the festival. Thank you to everyone who made this year's Festival a huge success!



Introduction



The St. James Town Service Provider's Network, is a network of agencies formed to bring a collaborative partnership, excellence in health equity outcomes, community engagement and integrated service coordination approach to the community of St. James Town. The Network brings together local residents and community agencies in welcoming and collaborative spaces to promote community well-being. The SJT Festival is one such event that showcases SJT talent, creating spaces of belonging, friendship and pride through cultural exchange and community economic development. The Network organizes three annual flagships events amongst other annual celebratory events like the 'Black Futures/History Month Celebration'. These Flagship events include the Spring Gathering, the SJT Festival and the Leadership Forum.

This year the SJT Festival took place on Saturday September 7 from 1PM-7PM. Despite the cold, windy and wet weather conditions organizers and community members participated in large numbers. Gathering under tents to meet new people and reconnect with old friends. The festival welcomed 24 service providers and community groups; celebrated 27 art performances; and 10 non-food and food vendors. The SJT Festival supports the unique diversity of SJT communities' traditions, cultural identities and cultural expression through the arts and economic community development opportunities. This year marks the 12th year anniversary of the SJT Festival provides a platform for food, arts, textile and grassroots economic opportunities; engages a diverse volunteer pool of long time and new SJT community members; holds community awards honoring the meaningful work of local community members; acts as an outreach opportunity to build and support the communities access to the Corner's Hub services at 200 and 240 Wellesley Street East; and provides an opportunity for the Service Providers Network members to engage directly with community members.

1	700 Ontario Street Tenant Association
2	ACORN
3	Anakbayan Toronto
4	Black Health Access Connect
5	Call Aunty
6	Children's Book Store
7	Community Resilience to Extreme Weather (CREW)
8	Fire Department
9	Green Thumbs
10	Hospice Toronto
11	Migrante
12	Muslim Food Bank
13	Seven Generation Midwives Toronto (SGMT)
14	Sherbourne Health Center
15	Sick Kids Hospital
16	Support Enhance Access Service Center (SEAS)
17	The Neighbourhood Group Community Services (TNGCS)
18	The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO)
19	Toronto Birth Center (TBC)
20	Toronto Community Housing Corporation, Conservation Department (TCHCT)
21	Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA)
22	Toronto Police Services, 51 Division
23	Toronto Public Library (TBL)
24	WoodGreen Community Services (WCS)
25	Workers Action Center Toronto



SJT 2024 Festival Theme and Highlights

This year's 2024 SJT Festival theme was "Greener and Safer: Reviving and Rebuilding Relationships". Indeed, when safe and green initiatives are conceptualized and articulated within mainstream media and dominant frameworks they seldom focus on the care needed to rebuild and revive our individual and collective relationships with the land, with each other and with ourselves. It is often community based visions for a greener and safer future that emphasize collective care and collective relationship building. All too often mainstream projects present safety and climate change through prioritizing the protection of private property and the mitigation of interpersonal violence while centralizing professionalized and/or privileged groups of people as the true change-makers often rooting themselves within Western traditions. The 2024 SJT Festival was an opportunity to build pride of place through showcasing more community-based definitions of 'Greener & Safer'. In this way the Festival highlighted four key pillars in championing a greener and safer community. 1) Emergency Preparedness, 2) Equitable Development. 3) Reduce & Reuse Model, and 4) Decolonization.

Emergency Preparedness.

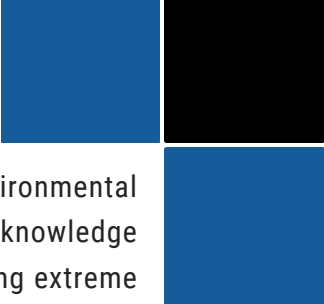
High rise neighbourhoods like SJT are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather events like floods and heat waves. The flood that took place in Toronto this past July 16 had a particularly devastating impact in SJT. Many vulnerable community members such as seniors and our houseless neighbours were deeply impacted. For example houseless community members experienced a loss of critical supplies and some SJT tenants experienced a power outage that lasted for days. The Corner community hub reported working tirelessly to support houseless community members with clothing, access to shelter during the flood, pet food and replacing critical supplies lost during the flood. The Corner hub community kitchen worked around the clock to provide cooked meals to homebound seniors that had no access to power. The 2024 SJT Festival theme was critical in drawing attention to the ways we can keep our neighbourhood safer during a neighbourhood-wide crisis.

Community Resilience to Extreme Weather (CREW) along with the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) and the local Fire Department helped to build participants' knowledge about what to do and what not to do in an electrical or fire emergency and during extreme weather events. The Corner hub conducted outreach activities making sure the most vulnerable in the community know about their services and are properly connected to local services.



Equitable Development.

Public and private developments and the maintenance and management of our existing neighborhood infrastructure is central to building a neighborhood that can help us protect our environment and support the wellbeing of all our neighbors. The SJT Festival celebrates the work done by many different stakeholders towards making sure tenants can stay in their homes, working to make sure those homes are stewarded with innovative green technologies, as well as advocating for public and private developments to respond to community needs and provide job opportunities for community members who have persistently and historically been left out of economic opportunities. The need for civic participation within the realms of affordable housing, green and innovative infrastructure and equitable development more widely, is at an all time high. This year's festival was an opportunity to build community-based tools to be able to keep their homes safe and build safer and greener infrastructure for the future capable of withstanding the increase in extreme weather events. Neighbourhood Legal Services, 700 Ontario Street Tenant Association, ACORN and Workers Action Center shared up to date tenant rights and workers rights information to help community members make sure they can stay in their homes and build neighbourhood infrastructure that meaningfully responds to the health and safety of existing community members and ongoing global climate events.



Community Resilience to Extreme Weather (CREW) along with the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) and the local Fire Department helped to build participants' knowledge about what to do and what not to do in an electrical or fire emergency and during extreme weather events. The Corner hub conducted outreach activities making sure the most vulnerable in the community know about their services and are properly connected to local services.

Reduce & Reuse Model

The Corner @ 240 Wellesley St East is the City of Toronto's first Share and Reuse Hub. ThisShare & Reuse space aims to support a culture of reusing, sharing, repairing and repurposing items to prolong their life. This model works through educating residents about the importance of waste reduction and reuse; providing opportunities for sharing and repairing; offering skills training and creating job and economic opportunities; and creating a space for community members to gather. The SJT 2024 Festival proudly showcased the Reduce and Reuse Model as well as other energy conservation strategies. We believe when everyone works together to make small daily changes like sharing, repairing, repurposing, or energy conservation, our collective coordinated efforts have far-reaching impacts. The Corner Hub, the Neighbourhood Group Community Services (TNGCS) and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation Conservation Department helped animate the 'Reduce and Reuse Model'. This model empowers everyone with the know how and tools to make huge impacts in their own lives and the community at large. Not only making huge impacts on our environment but also alleviating social isolation and building networks of belonging and social advocacy.

Decolonization

SJT SPN is building and developing our relationships with Indigenous lead organizations in the Downtown East with the goal of increasing our organizational and intellectual resources to provide coordinated and meaningful service provisions to SJT Indigenous community members. The festival is indebted to Seven Generations Midwives Toronto (SGWT), The Toronto Birth Centre (TBC), and Call Auntie for their participation. SGMT, TBC and Call Auntie emphasize the importance of understanding the significance of traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices to the sexual and reproductive rights of Indigenous community members. Call Auntie in particular supports and celebrates Two-Spirit, non-binary, trans, and Afro-Indigenous relatives. These organizations' work are integral in building the SPN's anti-oppressive, decolonial and intersectional analysis. We are also thankful to Support Enhance Access Service (SEAS), Anakbayan and Migrante for not only sharing about their critical services but also building our communities' understanding of what decolonization can look like from an international lens.

Festival Activities

Reika Master

This year once again Hospice Toronto proudly showcased a Reiki Tent, where three dedicated volunteers offered their expertise in this gentle healing practice. Just like in previous years, the community embraced the Reiki services with enthusiasm, with over 20 participants experiencing profound relaxation and stress relief. Reiki, known for its ability to promote healing through the simple laying on of hands, resonated especially with seniors and community members, who emerged from the tent feeling deeply calm and rejuvenated. The event beautifully underscored the vital role that complementary therapies play in enhancing well-being and strengthening connections within the community.



Bouncy Castle

The Bouncy castle was a huge success and required organized supervision both for the castle itself and for the surrounding area. Kids were organized along their age group when entering the castle and were closely supervised by parents as well as volunteers.



Mehndi (or "henna tattoo")

The Muslim Food Bank and a Corner community volunteer, Jenna Yousif, organized Mehndi stations. Mehndi is a cultural art form. It uses a paste created with henna, popular in South Asia, North Africa, East Africa and the Middle East. There are many different names for mehndi. More than 30 community members were able to get a henna tattoo over the day.



Face Painting

SPN supported 7 Service Providers tables. One of which was a Youth table. Sick kids lead the face painting activities with lines that lasted the entire festival. Youth volunteers had a blast painting faces in bright colors and inventive creations.



Backpack Giveaway

Toronto Community Housing Corporation in collaboration with The Corner and Toronto Police Services 51 Division gave away more than 250 school backpacks. Registration to receive a free backpack was organized prior to the festival and a number of backpacks were made available to families and youth who were not able to pre-register.





SJT Community Awards

There were 11 awards given out in total to individuals who live in SJT and have made outstanding contributions to the SJT community. The Youth Award (24 and under) went to Anushen Selvasegar for helping vulnerable residents learn more about heat-related health issues.

The Seniors Award (55+) went to Serwat Chaudhry for being a warm and welcoming figure to all newcomer parents in the community and has been part of the SJT community for over 40 years.

The Newcomer Award (up to 5 years in Canada) went to Mail Mohamed Ismail, a newcomer to Canada and resident of SJT for his outstanding contributions and leadership in the community. The 2SLGBTQ+ Award went to Shahzad Mudasir who has been volunteering at various organizations including HQ Toronto, TNO & Sherbourne Health to support folks from the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

The Social Enterprise Innovator Award went to Rajkumar Loganathan for being an amazing help to community members especially those who are newcomers to Canada. The Food Security Advocate Award went to Michael Gomes who provides free food runs to seniors. He has been providing support consistently for the past 10 years to marginalized families. Beckie Mbedha was recognized with the Advocate Award for her work in increasing the community's understanding of affordable housing and the shelter system. Zoe Kende was recognized with The Environmental Advocate Award for being kind and generous with her expertise, time and contributions to creating public green spaces. The Outstanding Local Business Award went to a local business, Timeless Collective located at 574 Parliament Street and run by Lala for making affordable fashionable clothing for community members and helping vulnerable community members connect with local services.

The SJT Scholarships provide recipients with \$500 and are awarded to 2 individuals under 25 years of age who will be attending a post-secondary institute in September 2024. The first scholarship was awarded to Mashiha Mohamed Ismail for making creative/artistic contributions in St. James Town, and for volunteering with CREW and helping seniors and kids in need during the weather crisis. The second scholarship was awarded to Hina Bhatti for her significant contributions to community engagement and leadership in St. James Town.

SJT Festival Planning Process

The festival is organized by the SJT SPN. Below is a list of the Core Planning team. SPN members also organize themselves into subcommittees. Resident co-chairs were hired from the SJT community to facilitate the subcommittees. This year the planning timeline spanned 8 weeks. Below are brief descriptions of each subcommittee collectively written by the Resident co-chairs, Goldie Paul, Rajkumar Loganathan and Ikenna Oguike.

SPN Member Organization	Organizational Representatives
Unity Health	Orit Adose
The Neighbourhood Organization, SPN Co-Chair	Lindiwe Sibanda
The Neighbourhood Group Community Services	Touhida Choudhury
The Corner, The Neighbourhood Organization	Ana Teresa Portillo
The Corner, Steering Committee	Guy Sack-Tlana
The Corner, Steering Committee	Lovelyn P
The Corner, Sherbourne Health	Nayanthi Wijesuriya
The Corner, Sherbourne Health	Aditi Thakker
The Corner	Priyanka Purushotham
The Canadian Housing Corporation	Samuel Maloney-Lee
Progress Place	Bailey Stoeckle
Hospice Toronto, SPN CO-Chair	Minara Begum

1) Vendor Spotlight

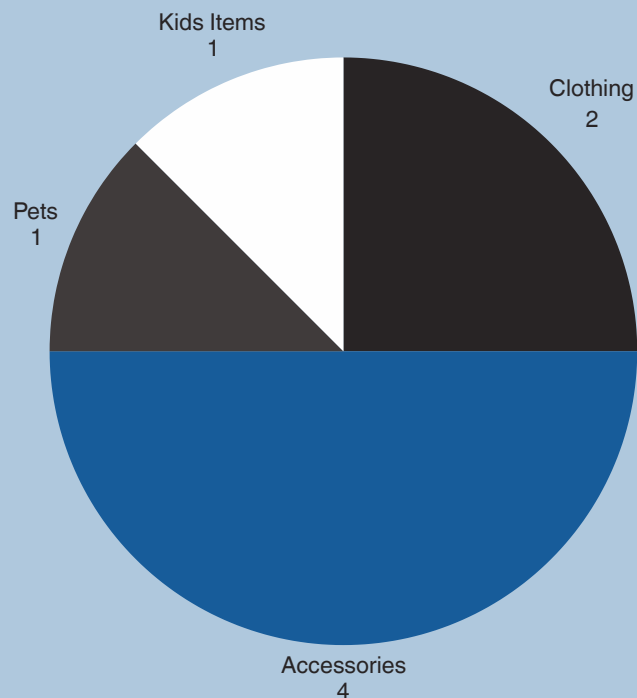
As part of the festival, we invite residents to set up stalls to showcase their personal small businesses and talents and encourage them to work on their hobbies to sell products. This year the festival hosted a good mix of food vendors and non food vendors with 5 vendors selling food items and 8 vendors selling non food items. Food vendors included a variety of delicacies on sale from momos, rotisserie chicken, biryani, haleem, vegetarian samosas, vegetarian rolls

and vegetarian burgers and some chaat snack items. When it came to non food vendors, the residents showcased handmade crafts, clothing, kids toys, and jewelry at nominal prices.

This year we also had some treats for pets! A resident who runs a local business related to pet products put up some goodies for our furry guests. This year we collected a nominal fee of \$20 to help with the logistical costs of tents and tables. Each vendor was provided small signage, table cloth and sanitization supplies. The team also conducted a vendor orientation with the participants before the festival to ensure the needs of the participants were met and to inform them of the festival theme and how they could support the community through their stalls. Even though we had some rough weather, the vendors were pleased with the turn out and the sales.

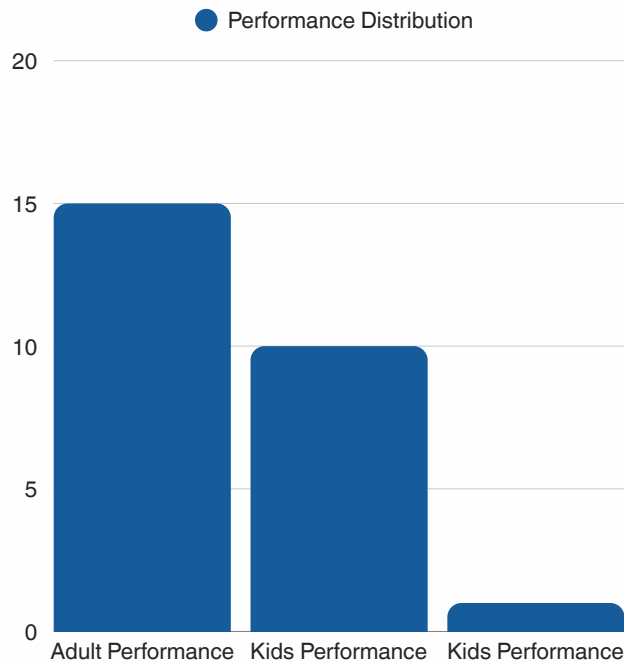
The planning team for the Vendor and Tabling Subcommittee included members from TNO, Unity Health, The Corner@240 and the Resident Co-Chair. We met every Thursday through the month of August to plan for the festival. We discussed strategies on application process and dates, criteria for selection of vendors, and planned the Vendor Orientation.

NON FOOD VENDOR - ITEM DESCRIPTION



2) Performer Spotlight

The festival's main highlight is the entertainment factor that brings together the diversity of cultures and residents, young and old. We had 26 stage performances with a mix of group and solo performers. Along with performances from local Indigenous artist, Damian Krypt, we showcased a cultural burst of live singing, dancing, recitals and kids performances. Close to 96 participants performed through 26 acts including 35 adults, 25 seniors and 27 kids.



We had over 30 little fashionistas of the future show us a mix of style, culture and art through their kids' fashion show. The festival had participation from the Seniors Group, the Mandarin Group, SJT kids dance groups, Tamil Bharatnatyam and many Independent performers from the community. One of our residents prepared a festival theme song for us which helped us wrap up our festival in an inclusive and lively manner. All performers were given an honorarium with some performances being sponsored by Pizza Pizza, Sweet Addictions pastry shop, and the Toronto Police. We were delighted to receive multiple interests but had to limit participation to those who submitted before the deadline.

The planning team for the Performances Subcommittee included members from The Corner@240 and the Resident CoChair. We met on Thursdays through the month of August to plan for the festival. With planning from registration forms, selection criterias and contacting participants to inform them about their time slots and planning for the online orientation. On the day of the festival we had volunteers to help the check-in process for performers and assisting them with their on stage performance. Please check out Regent Park TV's broadcast of the event here:

Please check out Regent Park TV's broadcast of the event here: _

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mylb9f99Kkc&t=7s>

And their full coverage here:

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBouNs39kz8&t=2552s>

3) Volunteer Coordination, Outreach, and Registration

This subcommittee led efforts to recruit, organize, and support a diverse team of volunteers who played a crucial role in making the SJT Festival a big success. Our outreach strategies engaged community groups, local organizations, and residents through direct outreach, social media, and email campaigns. The registration process was user-friendly, accommodating volunteers both online and offline, ensuring inclusivity across different backgrounds and technology access levels. Key volunteer roles included event support, information booth staffing, safety management, and setup/take-down assistance. Prior to the event, volunteer training and orientation was conducted in a hybrid format with approximately 60 volunteers participating. By collaborating closely with other subcommittees, we streamlined the onboarding process and addressed any logistical concerns. This approach ensured that volunteers felt supported and excited to contribute. The strong community connection fostered through our outreach resulted in an impressive turnout, reflecting the festival's inclusive and vibrant spirit. Approximately 40 volunteers showed up the day of.

4) Community Safety & Crisis Response Subcommittee

The community safety team came up with key community safety strategies. This included 1) a color coded and walkie talkie communication system, 2) training to support vulnerable community members in distress for all the volunteers, 3) and a safety team of 5 community members who coordinated crisis and safety response protocols, and 4) a Crisis Response Matrix. While no safety concerns emerged during the festival the training and protocols put in place created a sense of mutual care and support. The safety training module provided a Crisis Response Matrix that listed potential risks and best ways to respond as well as an overview of how to support community members in varying degrees of distress.

5) Social Media, Branding, and Communication

This subcommittee oversaw the festival's digital presence, ensuring a cohesive and recognizable brand image. Our content strategy, which promoted festival highlights, volunteer opportunities, and sponsor partnerships, enabled consistent community engagement. We leveraged social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, as well as email call-outs and phone outreach to previous festival volunteers. Our messaging was aligned with the festival's theme, "Greener & Safer: Reviving and Rebuilding Relationships," emphasizing sustainability and community rebuilding post-pandemic.

We partnered with local influencers and community organizations to broaden our reach, and the use of posters, digital flyers, and videos further strengthened our brand visibility. Through email newsletters and event updates, we kept the community informed about program additions and changes, resulting in heightened excitement and anticipation. This strategy significantly boosted the festival's visibility and created a strong sense of engagement leading up to the event.

6) Venue Setup and Take Down

This subcommittee led logistical planning to ensure a smooth and efficient festival. Our team meticulously mapped out the event layout, organizing everything from stage placement and vendor booths to community activity zones while ensuring all safety measures were in place. Collaborating with local vendors, the technical crew, and service providers, secured all necessary equipment and materials on-site before the event. Volunteers played a crucial role, assisting with setting up and dismantling tents, tables, and decorations. After the event, the take-down process was completed efficiently, with all materials cleared promptly, leaving the venue in its original state.

7) Stage and Sound Subcommittee

The stage and sound subcommittee was set up to organize the flow of the event in collaboration with the venue setup and teardown team as well as the event coordination team. This subcommittee coordinated the rental of the sound equipment and met two times. The day of the festival the committee members helped with the positioning of the stage, organized music and playback audio for performances and ensured microphones were set up for good use.



Evaluation

A total of 31 hard copy evaluations were filled out towards the end of the festival with the help of festival volunteers. Volunteers reported that they felt festival participants did not participate in evaluations due to weather constraints. 39% of respondents indicated they were 'very satisfied' with the festival while 48% shared that they were 'somewhat satisfied' with the festival, 10% said 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' and 3% said 'I don't know'. When asked how did they hear about the festival 32% said from 'family, friend or neighbour', 19% said a 'flyer or poster', 19% said from 'The Corner Staff/Ambassador Team, 13% knew about the festival by 'walking by', 10% said The Corner Outreach Engagement Team, and shared they heard about the Festival through The Corner, and only 6% had heard about the festival from service providers in the SJT area. 55% shared they would be 'likely' to recommend or bring a friend/family to next year's festival, 35% said they would be 'very likely' and 6% said 'not sure' and 4% said 'maybe'.

In evaluating the different elements of the festival 53% indicated the festival performances were 'good', 37% reported they were 'very good', 10% reported they were 'fair' and one person did not respond to this question. 57% reported that the festival activities were 'fair', 30% indicated that they were 'good' and 13% said they were 'very good'. With regards to the information partner booths 55% reported they were 'good', another 35% said they were 'very good' and 10% shared they were 'fair'. 52% shared that the food vendors were 'good', 26% shared they were 'very good' and 19% said they were 'fair' and 3% said they were 'very poor'. Some respondents noted that more food options could have been provided supporting residents with different dietary restrictions (ex. Gluten free). When evaluating the non-food vendors 55% reported they were 'good', 24% reported 'very good' and 21% reported 'fair'. 48% reported the festival location was 'good', 23% reported it was 'very good', 23% reported it was 'fair', 3% reported it was 'poor' and another 3% reported it was 'very poor'. 67% reported that the safety and crisis response at the festival was 'good, 23% 'very good' and 10% reported it was 'fair'. 52% of respondents found the volunteers and staff to be 'good' 35% reported they were 'very good' and 13% reported they were 'fair'. 52% of respondents reported that they found the cleanliness and atmosphere 'good', 26% reported they found it 'fair', 16% reported they found it 'very good', and 6% reported they found it 'poor'.

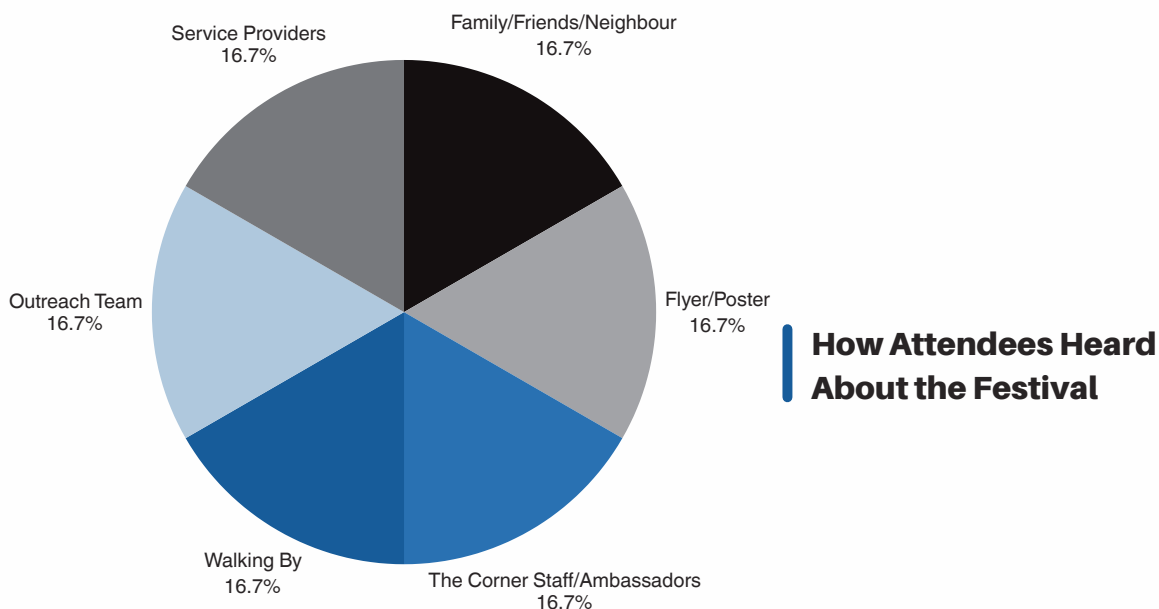
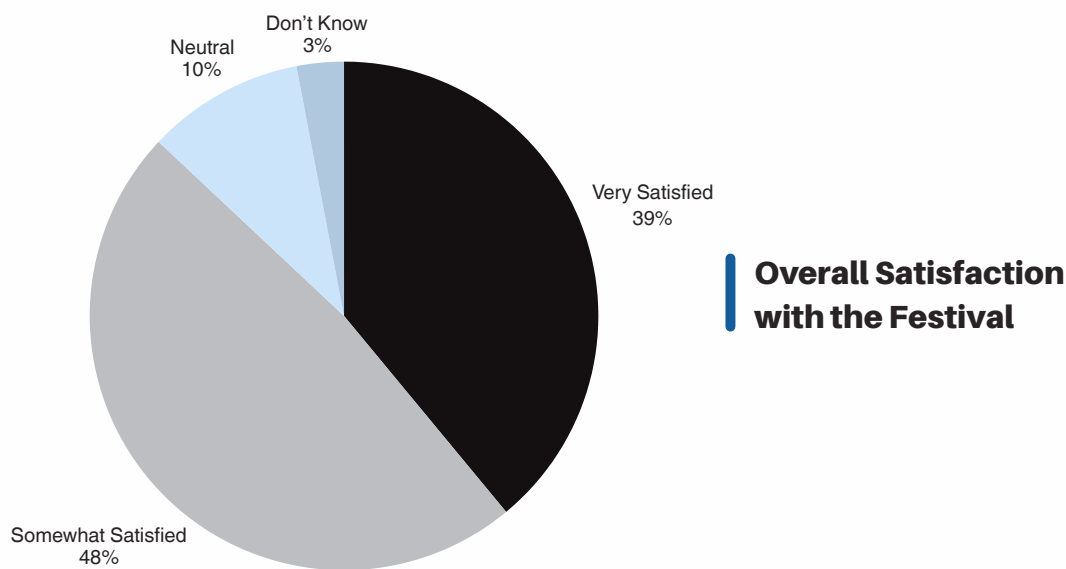
55% of respondents reported that they found the waste reduction and green initiatives to be 'good', 26% reported 'fair' and 19% reported 'very good'.

When asked what was their favorite part of the festival was, 3 people did not respond. Out of those who responded 37% mentioned the performances, 24% mentioned the food, 13% mentioned the social interaction, 10% mentioned festival activities, 7% said the information partner stalls, 3% mentioned the colourfulness, 3% said everything and another 3% said they don't know. When asked what can be improved for next year 7 people did not respond. Out of those who responded 21% mentioned 'nothing', 17% suggested the festival activities can be improved, 13% mentioned the location, another 13% said the weather, 8% said the festival can be more affordable, 8% said the food can be improved and another 8% mentioned tents and vendor set up equipment can be improved especially for windy weather conditions. 4% mentioned the festival can be improved by the main stage programming starting on time, 4% said the 51 Division backpack give away could be improved and another 4% said police presence can be improved for next year. When asked if the festival was inclusive 38% said 'yes', 29% said 'very much', 26% said 'somewhat' and 6% said 'not really'. Some respondents indicated that the festival was not inclusive because there were not enough places to sit that were protected from the rain and the wet weather also made the stage stairs difficult to access for performers.

Out of 30 respondents, 53% said 'yes' the festival theme, 'Greener and Safer: Rebuilding and Reviving Relationships', does relate to them. While 34% said they related 'very much' to the theme and another 13 % said 'somewhat'. When asked if they learned something new out of the 17 people who responded, 29% mentioned they learned about local programs they did not know about, 26% shared they learned about the festival being an annual event, 18% mentioned learning about local service providers they weren't previously aware of, another 18% shared that they didn't learn anything new, 6% reported they learned about local vendors and another 3% shared they learned that most of the programs being showcased by organizations are free.

When asked what programs they would like to see offered in SJT 4 respondents did not answer. Out of those who did, 41% mentioned ESL classes, 23% mentioned self-defense classes, another 23% mentioned social interaction, 9% mentioned music programs, 8% said they were not sure, 5% indicated the need for more diverse programing, another 5% mentioned more mental health programs.

6 respondents did not answer when asked if there were any services that were currently lacking or inadequate in SJT. Out of those who did respond, 22% mentioned employment services, 17% mentioned mental health services, 17% said nothing, 11% mentioned affordable child care, 11% said food services, 11% said they were not sure, 6% mentioned legal aid services, 5% said social media content. Only 5 respondents answered when asked how organizations and agencies can better meet the needs of residents. 3 answered either 'no' or 'nothing', 1 answered not sure and another said 'they do great job'. Finally, out of the 24 people who responded when asked if they would like to volunteer for next year's festival, 13% responded 'yes' and 88% responded 'no'.





Key Learnings

The SJT Festival was a big success. For instance, 87% of evaluation respondents reported in the affirmative that the festival theme did relate to them. Summarizing the resident evaluations and the various festival debriefs that took place, there was strong consensus to decrease the amount of performances by incorporating a tryout component. Where similar acts could be assessed together and the most successful being slotted in for the final event. It was also suggested that while individual service providers had activities at their booths, future festivals could incorporate larger scale activities that could encourage more interactive participation.

There was unanimous support for changing the festival day so that it does not coincide with the Cabbagetown BIA Festival and instead be scheduled in August so that community members could enjoy the warmer weather. The inclusiveness of the event suffered from the lack of spaces protected from the rain. The wet and windy weather also made it difficult to access the stage area, specifically for seniors. . With regards to advertising, emphasis can be put on service providers sharing the event with residents in greater numbers for future festivals.

It was noted volunteer engagement could be improved through hiring specialized experts, such as a professional photographer or sound expert to work alongside volunteers, who could provide training and support the day of the festival. The bulk of volunteer roles went towards labour intensive work such as clean-up, set-up and take down. The festival itself would not be possible without community volunteers. In order to show appreciation for this, future festivals can incorporate in their budgets funds to provide volunteers with honorarium. The volunteers were invited one week after the festival to a volunteer appreciation party where volunteers got to reconnect with one another and sign up for future festival volunteer opportunities. Lastly, future festivals would benefit from an investment in increased investment in festival equipment such as tents, reusable party supplies and a heat source for food vendors.

Conclusion

The SJT 2024 Festival was a big success engaging approximately 800 residents throughout the day. The “Greener & Safer” theme was well received and festival booths activated by service providers, non-profit organizations, local groups and elected officials made the day fun and informative. We are indebted to the community volunteers who made the festival possible making sure the festival grounds were set up, had organized lines, festival information and community safety support. The SJT Service Providers Network is thankful to its members who joined the core planning team as well as the festival subcommittees. Special thanks go to the three Resident Festival Co-chairs, Goldie Paul, Rajkumar Loganathan and Ikenna Oguike, who seamlessly worked with the service providers to coordinate and execute an amazing event. If you or someone you know is interested in joining the planning for the 2025 SJT Festival or join the festival’s volunteer team please feel free to email: ✉ festival@stjamestown.org

