

Building Community-Centered Resilience in the Face of Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated that municipal led emergency response efforts, while critical, are insufficient in reaching and supporting people living in marginalized circumstances both during the response and the recovery phases of a major shock. In this uncertain world, community-centred resilience is becoming critical as some of our most marginalized citizens are faced with increasing shocks related to health, climate or violence.

The following example comes not from the COVID-19 crisis, but from a violent incident in East Scarborough, an inner suburban neighbourhood of Toronto. Although an act of violence is a different kind of shock, the following example offers a lot to our understanding of how a Connected Community Approach (CCA) helps communities prepare for, respond to, recover from and regroup after major shocks and emergencies of various kinds; it's an example that offers insights to be considered for COVID-19 recovery efforts.

On July 12th, 2012 two young people were killed and 22 others injured at a barbecue on Danzig Street in East Scarborough, Toronto. At the time the incident had been described as one of the largest mass shootings in Canadian history. In the face of this crisis, a coordinated response was mobilized which put grassroots leaders at the forefront and worked with and alongside community efforts, rather than running roughshod over them. While simultaneously integrating supports from the City's Divisions, social service organizations and others ready to help.



The community was **prepared** to act in a networked, coordinated way because people and organizations had, over time, invested in creating a connected community including multiple networks and coordinated communication mechanisms across the community. The community was, therefore, able to **respond** with multiple coordinated actions, facilitating responses among 70 organizations/grassroots groups within days of the incident. The coordinated actions included community crisis response, elevating community voice and the coordination of services, resources, and facilities.

These coordinated efforts allowed partners, BIPOC youth and other grassroots leaders to help East Scarborough to work together to **prevent** another tragedy and to **prepare** for and **respond** to community "shocks" in the future.

After the Danzig experience, the community engaged in shared learning and debrief meetings that supported the community to learn from the experience. These regrouping efforts resulted in a community-wide strategy (KGO ACT) designed to strengthen the community's collective ability to support its youth. For the next three years, 12 organizations and dozens of Indigenous, Black and other racialized/marginalized youth used a Connected Community Approach to work together on a project that placed youth identified priorities at the centre of organizational responses and program design; making the community increasingly more resilient. The youth involved took on central roles in leading groups for other youth and educating the supporting organizations about the kind of initiatives youth want to see in their own communities.

A Connected Community Approach helps communities reflect on, heal after and learn from major shock events. This approach supports **collective processes** to evaluate what worked, what didn't work and why from a community perspective; it helps municipalities learn new ways to support intentional, co-ordinated preparation, response, recovery, learning and strengthening activities at the community level. This swift community response was possible because of the work that was done **proactively, before a shock or emergency happened.**



In the wake of COVID, on the heels of the City of Toronto Resilience Strategy and informed by two research projects: Connected Communities in a time of Physical Distancing and Healthy Resilience Communities, the Centre for Connected Communities, the City of Toronto and the Dalla Lana School of Public Health are approaching recovery from a community-centred resilience perspective: working with three Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) communities to bounce forward to build stronger, more prepared, coordinated and supported communities for a better future.

Investing in and supporting marginalized communities to build their own resilience plans proactively, allows people to help their neighbours faster. Combining investment with the intentional use of the Connected Community Approach also increases the capacity of City services and organizations to better coordinate their actions based on what that community needs most when faced with an emergency no matter what the cause. Using a Connected Community Approach to community-centred resilience increases collaboration and communication, builds social capital, and weaves networks, making communities stronger and healthier over the longer term.

To learn more about C3's work on community-centered resilience visit:
connectedcommunities.ca/resilience/