

Community. Design. Initiative.

April 2012



The Storefront recognized long ago, that youth, when provided the appropriate supports and opportunities, can lead the community in positive change.

When, in 2009, residents came together to ask for improvements to accessible space in Kingston-Galloway/Orton Park, it was not a far stretch for The Storefront to decide to use the new momentum towards design and construction as infrastructure to nurture youth leadership.

Youth Participant on his CDI Experience:

What I really liked about the Community Design Initiative (CDI) is the community exposure it gives me. It gives me a chance to participate in my community from a totally different perspective. I had no idea that so many different professions come together to make Kingston/Galloway a great place to live.

With CDI, I knew I was part of an organization that gives back. I finally found a way to contribute my community and help make it bloom and I am so grateful because I know not a lot of teenagers have this amazing chance. CDI is changing the way the East Scarborough Storefront looks, but it's more than that. Yes, we are renovating a boring building, but we are showing the outside world the heart and soul of this community.

I think CDI has changed the community because hopefully it has changed the stereotype or perceptions of teens in this area. Believe it or not I notice a difference in how people talk to me and even how they perceive me. The idea of a teenager working alongside professionals - respected in their fields like architecture and design - really surprises people.

As an ambassador I set an example for the youth who walk into the Storefront. I am proud to represent the youth in this community and to show our true potential to those who think that teens are the problem, not the solution.

Overall Goals

1. Design and build a safe accessible space at 4040 Lawrence that will support community members of all ages and cultures to find and share the supports and resources they need.
2. Design and build a community space in which the Storefront model can grow and flourish
3. Support local youth to be the lead designers of the project
4. Build the capacity of local youth by introducing them to the possibilities offered through various professions, including design, architecture, project management and numerous trades
5. Use a co-creation approach to the project that would ensure reciprocal learning at all levels: professionals learning from the youth while youth learn from professionals and from each other
6. Where possible, provide economic opportunities for local residents
7. Include the broader community in guiding the overall direction of the project
8. Use sustainable materials and reuse or reclaim wherever possible
9. Develop and implement a community design process model that can be replicated by others
10. Use a multi-media approach to capture the community design process and share it across the

Residents (youth and adult), architects, Storefront staff, artists, urban planners, academics, film makers, politicians and others underwent a dynamic charrette process which resulted in the co-creation of a project that is both meaningful and transformative. By the end of 2009, the excitement and momentum had built to encompass a wide range of goals and the idea of the Community. Design. Initiative. was born. (See sidebar)

The overall project involves renovating the existing building, expanding the building, including a 2nd floor to include more community gathering space, and rehabilitating the exterior grounds of the property. Youth are learning about sustainability and accessibility, in addition to architecture and design.

The Community. Design. Initiative. is unique in its approach to reciprocal learning. While our mentors are professionals in their world, we are very intentional about teaching the mentors about how to work in the community. Everyone learns from each other and respects the skills and experience people bring regardless of their age, education or profession.

What I really like about this project is that it is AUTHENTICALLY YOUTH LED! I've seen so many other projects that claim to be, but what they really mean is that youth are choosing paint colours. With CDI, we're working with youth on how to make good decisions; who needs to be involved; what kind of factors they need to consider; and the impact of their decisions. Then, we leave them to it and trust the process.

~Sherry Lin, Design Mentor

FACILITATING MEANINGFUL YOUTH LEADERSHIP

With CDI we are taking the approach of stewardship: the youth are vital members of their community and have so much to give. What we are creating is the foundation and infrastructure that makes it possible for local youth to play a leadership role in designing a key neighbourhood space. See sidebar for principles guiding the project.



Facilitating Meaningful Youth Leadership

1. Engage youth to help them envision, articulate and share their overall dreams for their community...and their community centre
2. Exploring with youth the materials and tools that can be used to design creative spaces
3. Introducing youth to progressive, enthusiastic, respectful and fun professionals who will help them to learn the skills they need to bring creative spaces to reality
4. Supporting design professionals to work authentically with local youth, ensuring that the youth are the one's leading the design process
5. Developing effective communication mechanisms to ensure a true partnership among professionals, residents and community organizers
6. Exploring with youth the possible ways they can contribute not only to the design and building of their community centre, but possibilities for their future
7. Trusting the youth and the process: making sure youth know what decisions that can make and then trusting that they will make them well

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Facilitating Meaningful Youth Leadership

8. Welcoming all local youth who want to contribute: university students, high school drop outs, youth with special needs etc
9. Building curriculum and process that starts where the youth are adapts to the youth who are present at each planning day
10. Developing meaningful curriculum that corresponds directly to the next phase of construction
11. Putting every effort into securing funding and working out logistics so that the youth can see the realization of their planning and designs as immediately as possible
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Since January, over 30 youth have been working with professionals to design Storefront's Shade and Naturalization Initiative. The youth come from various backgrounds and bring with them different skills, interests, abilities and aspirations.

In all our work, we try to ensure that each youth feels a sense of belonging and being valued. Young people succeed when they know what is expected of them and have the support to accomplish realistic goals. With CDI, we know that not all participants will become architects or designers, but we also know that these young people participate not only for the task at hand, but for the emotional connection to others. They have experienced supportive adult relationships, learned how to form close, durable human relationships with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviours and developed positive social values and norms.



***We help young people
feel safe enough to try
new things and new
ways of being
themselves.***

Shade and Naturalization Project

January is slated for exterior landscaping and a “shade and naturalization project in which the youth will:

- Plan for The Storefront’s exterior landscaping, implementing concepts of environmental sustainable construction and naturalization strategies
- Explore the possibilities offered through various professions, including design, architecture, urban agriculture, energy management, eco-education and the building trades
- Design and create movable shade structures
- Develop presentations for the broader community and facilitate discussions that will guide the overall direction of the project
- Using “conceptual” knowledge to create practical solutions to a local problem
- Helping youth learn public speaking and presentation skills

In addition to building social connections, these youth are building and mastering skills, and developing confidence in their ability to master their environment. CDI encourage young people to try something just beyond their current abilities.

CDI youth have learned about water conservation, shade, rehabilitating green space, sustainable construction and how to read architectural drawings, use software to sketch out their plans, and how to present all of their ideas to the broader community.

Each week, the curriculum is designed to teach a new concept, allow the youth to experiment with the ideas, and present their ideas to the other youth. Then collectively, they take the best elements from each of the ideas presented and incorporate them into a final plan. Most youth participants came into CDI with absolutely no knowledge of architecture or design. After just three months, they can not only understand, but also articulate concepts.

Every week we show and explain our ideas to others in the group. I used to hate that because I was so nervous speaking in front of a group! But now I'm used to it and it's even helping me in school. It's no big deal anymore. And it's funny – I actually know more about design and architecture than my family and friends. My teachers are so impressed with everything I've learned. Yea, I really do use the skills that I learned at CDI!

~Youth Participant

The Storefront has several staff dedicated to developing and maintaining the support system and infrastructure that allow youth leadership to flourish. As the project develops, more and more of the staff functions are provided by our Youth Ambassadors: local youth who work with the other staff, the youth leaders and the professionals, by taking on pieces of the work normally done by adult staff.

- Training of professional mentors: ensuring that all the professionals engaged in the project have the tools, information, trust, good will and opportunity to meaningfully support youth leadership in KGO. Each mentor is trained in how to engage effectively with youth and how to support them while nurturing their ability to lead
- Ensuring that youth are welcomed into the process and are able to take advantage of the opportunity: reaching out and engaging with new youth not yet involved in the process, checking in with youth currently in the process, building and sustaining trust and ensuring there are as few barriers as possible for youth who want to take a lead in designing community space.
- Brokering relationships between residents and professional mentors: helping to bridge the two worlds
- Organizing mentoring sessions: co-coordinating the schedules of multiple professionals and youth, keeping everyone aware of updated information on the design, funding and opportunities, ordering snacks, facilitating field trips to inspiring and informative spaces in and around Toronto.
- Providing framework and foundation for community input: assisting youth in leading community discussions where residents of all ages can voice their ideas, concerns and opinions

Storefront's Youth Ambassadors are youth from the community who have gone through at least one semester as a participant and are hired on as staff for a minimum of one year. Ambassadors receive extensive training in youth programming, community development, and public presentation skills. Youth Ambassadors find ways to honor the uniqueness of each individual youth and the cultures represented, as well as balance the adult desire to "get things done" with the ability level of the participants. They take pride in being considered as equals — an experience they don't find in many places. This bridging role between adult professionals and youth participants is one of the key success factors for CDI.

PROFESSIONAL MENTORS

CDI youth may join the program not knowing much about architecture, but they're not the only ones learning new things. The professionals in the project may join in not knowing much about youth engagement.

This is where the mentoring takes an interesting turn. Storefront staff and the Youth Ambassadors help the professionals learn how to work with youth, using best practices from community development and youth engagement principles.

Underlying every activity and lesson is the question: How do we plan our curriculum to ensure that every youth is properly engaged and supported to accomplish their goals?

The Youth Ambassadors, alongside the mentors ensure that:

- Young people receive adult attention which focuses on the needs of the individual youth
- Youth participants know "what's next" and have an agenda posted
- Tasks are assigned based on interest and ability.
- There is a plan for those who are not engaged
- Youth participants understand the assignment and any questions are answered before they get started
- Lessons are engaging and varied, including breaks and "energizing" activities
- There is a "check out" at the end of the evening and youth know what's coming up in the next session

The professionals engaged in this project provide numerous supports to the project, including:

Advising on overall project: developing the overall structure for the eight phases of development, making connections with guest mentors, exploring possibilities for capital funding (including introducing us to possible donors), assisting in capital funding proposals

Developing of curriculum: each session requires custom made curricula so that, by the end of the 16 weeks, the youth have the tools, skills and resources they need to make the decisions necessary to design and build the next phase

Mentoring the youth: 5-6 hours per week for 16 weeks dedicated to teaching youth about architecture, design, ecological processes, and the systems and urban planning issues related to the renovation and expansion of The Storefront building.

Community Design Initiative is an embodiment of how East Scarborough Storefront is working differently in the community. Eager to partner with the Laidlaw Foundation because Laidlaw and The Storefront share a vision of authentic youth leadership, The Storefront has developed a model that is leading to attainment of our vision for a vibrant and engaged community.

BUDGET

Activity	Details	Overall Budget	Live Green	Laidlaw
Co-ordination: liaise between youth and professionals	“Backbone” function includes full time staff the training of Ambassadors	18000		18000
Youth Leaders (Ambassadors)	Salary for part-time Ambassador	3,037		3,037
Mentoring	ERA and sustainable.TO architects	18,463	17,000	1463
Admin	Tides Canada Initiatives 10%	4,200	1,700	2500
Total		43,700	18,700	\$25,000

Storefront was able to leverage both funding from Live Green Toronto and pro-bono contributions from the professional mentors. The overall budget was adapted to ensure that the youth had all the supports that they needed to make CDI a huge success