

New Connections



Arts and the Settlement Process in Toronto

A Community Conversation

July 14th, 2011

Oriole Peanut Community Garden

Background

On July 14, 2011 the **Neighbourhood Arts Network** and **Working Women Community Centre** brought together artists, community workers and arts groups for a community conversation. The conversation was focused on the relationship between the arts sector and the settlement sector in Toronto. The purpose of the discussion was to uncover some of the challenges that newcomer artists experience, to learn more about existing programs and supports, and to look at ways in which the arts sector and settlement agencies might work more closely.

This document provides a list of challenges that were identified by artists and cultural workers, as well as ideas for partnerships and programs that could help to address some of these challenges. The New Connections conversation marked the beginning of what we hope will be an ongoing dialogue between the arts and social service sectors, as we find more ways to share resources, connect, and work together.

Challenges and Solutions

Artistic Practice

- Hard to know where to obtain affordable art materials and where to find discounts.
- Transporting supplies can be challenging, particularly without a car.
- Need more access to free or affordable studio/rehearsal/storage/meeting space .
- Geographic isolation; affordable housing in one place and art facilities in another requires travel. This costs time/money or results in lack of connection
- More support or feedback on granting process. Some artists have applied many times unsuccessfully but don't know how to get feedback to improve their applications.

→ Possible Solutions

- Opportunities for workshopping grant applications could be helpful with grant staff and/or amongst artists; language support or proofreading would also be helpful in this area
- Arts programs could include field trips or orientation sessions related to finding materials and spaces within the city.
- More arts facilities could be embedded in or located close to affordable housing

Networking and Mentorship

- Perception that many positions and opportunities are obtained through exclusive or closed networks and connections
- Lack of knowledge about networking opportunities (no ads in the community)
- Limited options for training or professional integration programs for established adult artists. Focus tends to be on youth, not adults
- Volunteering often pushed as a first step to making connections and leading to future work. Many cannot afford to volunteer their time; generating income or

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developing a body of artistic work often take precedence. Volunteering opportunities can also be inconvenient or inaccessible, depending on location, time, and the application process (some require domestic credentials).

→ Possible Solutions

- Mentorship programs might help with orientation and integration (pairing newcomer artists/arts workers with more established artists/arts workers)
- Sharing success stories of other newcomer artists: what worked, how they made their connections
- More opportunities for face-to-face interaction and connection with other artists needed (not just other newcomer artists)—this helps to reduce isolation, builds networks, increases sense of encouragement and motivation.
- Organize events to open up networks within different arts disciplines and make them more inclusive (for example, in the visual arts, connecting galleries/curators with newcomer artists)
- Compiling a directory of newcomer artists that others could get in touch with for advice
- Updating newcomer communities about art events and opportunities
- Hosting info sessions about services available to newcomers

Training and Qualifications

- Qualifications needed to work in various educational settings create barriers both because there is so much variation and because some require significant investment of time, additional training, or funds
- There can be a lack of recognition of prior accreditation or experience from elsewhere.
- Post-secondary training options for artists are expensive and focus on serving domestic students or emerging artists. There are efforts to recruit international students but not necessarily newcomers; there may also be few supports in place once students are enrolled.
- Perception that credentials are often valued over experience and credentials from Western countries are given more legitimacy

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→ Possible Solutions

- Hosting professional development workshops targeted towards adult/experienced/professional newcomer artists, instead of focusing exclusively on youth or emerging artists

Arts Employment Information

- Settlement services provide support for a variety of careers, but there is a lack of information about arts careers. The arts may not be perceived as a viable career option by settlement agencies, or they may need to be approached by arts organizations.
- Educational and training opportunities are very scattered across organizations – there is no centralized hub.
- Little support for navigating an arts employment search

→ Possible Solutions

- Employment programs for newcomer artists/cultural workers who are coming to Canada with a history of practice in the field. These programs exist for other professions, such as medicine.
- Arts organizations and settlement agencies could collaborate more closely on the development of hubs. Since settlement agencies already know how to reach out to newcomers, they could help disseminate information about arts engagement and career opportunities.
- Need a hub where educational and training opportunities can be listed
- A standard package of information about arts for newcomers would be useful, but also need to move beyond access to information, how to put info into action.
- Professional development workshops on CV or portfolio development, interviewing, where to look for arts employment.

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Language Barriers

- Newcomer artists may experience language barriers in navigating resources, funding applications, professional development, etc

→ Possible Solutions

- Language training that is designed for people in the arts field could be helpful, or language support services to enable more effective arts networking

General Observations

- Programs tend to focus heavily on youth; lack of support for adult/established artists
- Newcomer artists are frustrated with being put into silos (i.e. cultural silos or immigrant silos) rather than more effort being put into integrating more diverse people and practices into the “mainstream”.
- Mentorship is a critical role that can’t be filled by the sharing of information – needs individuals to take an active role as cultural connectors.
- Many programs offered address one particular barrier but not others. Barriers intersect and build on one another; we need programming that is more holistic rather than fragmented. Seeking out help for all areas can be time consuming and hard to achieve when they are not integrated/coordinated

Examples of Arts-Related Programs

Working Women Community Centre has just completed a two-year project called **Arts in the Garden**, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The first phase of the project involved arts classes for newcomers in the community garden; during the second phase, artist participants transitioned to the role of teachers. Class topics ranged from ceramics to oil painting to Persian and Chinese calligraphy. The group also worked collectively on a major mosaic project, to be installed in the community garden as a walking path.

Arts for Children and Youth is running a summer program in North Etobicoke called **Cultural Mosaic**, intended to engage newcomer youth. Youth must live in local community housing to be eligible for the program. AFCY runs a number of community arts and arts education programs across the city. Visit <http://www.afcy.ca/programs/programs-in-communities/> to learn more.

Other Arts-Related Programs

[Cultural Access Pass](#) (Institute for Canadian Citizenship)

[OUTREACH](#) (Gallery 44 & Community Partners)

[Voices](#): The YMCA Newcomer Youth Film Project (YMCA)

[N.E.A.T.](#) Walking Tours (Culturelink)

[Afghan Sewing Circle](#) (Afghan Women's Organization)

[Arts & Crafts Women's Group](#) (North York Community House)

[Open Studio Program](#) (SKETCH)

Community Conversation Participants

[Neighbourhood Arts Network](#)

[Toronto Arts Council](#)

[Toronto Arts Foundation](#)

[Working Women Community Centre](#)

[Arts in the Garden](#)

[Afghan-Canadian Senior Centre](#)

[Arts For Children and Youth](#)

[YMCA Voices Project](#)

[Frontline Partners with Youth Network](#)

[Schools Without Borders](#)

[A.N.A.S.A. Collective](#)

If you or your organization would like to be involved in future community conversations and networking events, or if you would like to join our mailing list, please contact naninfo@torontoarts.org or call 416.392.6802 ext.212.

About Us



Toronto Arts Foundation exists to provide the creative opportunity for donors to support the arts in Toronto. TAF believes that a great city demands great art, and by supporting, celebrating, financing and advocating for Toronto's local artists, we're improving the quality of life of all Torontonians.

To learn more, please visit www.torontoartsfoundation.org



A project of the Toronto Arts Foundation, the **Neighbourhood Arts Network** is the place where arts and community engagement meet in

Toronto. We catalyze new discussions and relationships. We collect research and share information. We help artists and community organizations do what they do best: enrich Toronto and transform it into a more vibrant, beautiful, liveable city.

To learn more, please visit www.neighbourhoodartsnetwork.org



Working Women Community Centre is a non-profit and charitable organization that provides immigrant women and their families with opportunities to improve the quality of their lives through self-development and community action.

To learn more, please visit www.workingwomencc.org

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“Arts and creation are always at the bottom of the list for newcomers. They have this giant list of things they need to take care of: finding a place, finding a school, getting to know the community... Arts are always pushed to the bottom of that list. But it’s an important part of getting settled. My dream is that art will eventually be recognized and supported as an important part of the immigration and settlement process.”

- *Nasrin Khatam, Working Women Community Centre*



This document was compiled by Skye Louis, Amy Goudge, and Leah Burns.

To learn more about the **Neighbourhood Arts Network**, to become a member, or to find out about upcoming events and opportunities, please visit us online at www.neighbourhoodartsnetwork.org or call 416.392.6802 x212