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Tuesday December 6, 2011

Dear Budget Committee,

My name is Liz Forsberg and I am the Managing Director of Art Starts, an organization that uses the arts as a vehicle to encourage social change in five underserved Toronto neighbourhoods. Art Starts has been building healthier communities through the arts for the last 19 years with the generous support from the Toronto Arts Council through their operating grants. To give you a taste of some of the projects we have worked on: we have used theater to address drug abuse and prevention among marginalized youth, we have helped youth to produce five original music CDs, trained over 50 youth to transform 10 graffiti covered walls into beautiful large-scale murals, produced multilingual theater productions and transformed a creepy abandoned house into a kingdom of awesome, to mention a few.

Our founding artists had a vision of bringing professional artists and community members together to address a number of critical issues such as social isolation, youth violence, addiction, mental health and settlement through the creation of relevant creative and artistic programming. At the time, the term community arts did not exist. Over the course of 19 years we crafted countless creative responses to pressing community issues with a great deal of success. This success comes, not only in the form of beautiful and meaningful artistic creations but, in forging positive and collaborative relationships across ages, cultures and communities. As a result, we have received numerous invitations from other communities to replicate our successes with them.

This work would not be possible without funding from the Toronto Arts Council. Our city-funded operating grant has enabled us to leverage countless sources of additional funding through foundations, donors, government and corporations. As a result we are now able to program in five underserved Toronto neighbourhoods. However, the need for arts-based programs to address critical social issues far exceeds our ability to fund them. Were we to receive a 10% cut to our operating grant, it would dramatically reduce our capacity to fundraise and thus result in a much greater loss for the organization and the five neighbourhoods in which we work. With this in mind, I urge you to re-consider your proposed 10% cut to arts grants.

Sincerely,

Liz Forsberg  
Managing Director