



Social Development, Finance and  
Administration Division  
City of Toronto



**United Way**  
Toronto

# Strong Neighbourhoods: Responding to a Call to Action



A Progress Report on Strong Neighbourhoods Strategies

*No one – no family, no child, no senior – should be disadvantaged by where they live in the City... no one should have to accept inadequate services or limited opportunities because of the neighbourhood in which they reside.*

*There must be broader recognition that strong neighbourhoods are important pillars of city health and prosperity and should be a public policy priority.*

*There needs to be broader recognition that community services and facilities are a vital contributor to strong, vibrant neighbourhoods.*

The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, A Call to Action, 2005

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# 1 Introduction: neighbourhoods matter

Toronto prides itself on being a city of neighbourhoods. Our many neighbourhoods form a rich urban tapestry marked by vitality and diversity. In recent decades, however, Toronto's neighbourhoods have become increasingly divided.

More and more families on low incomes are living in neighbourhoods in the inner suburbs, while downtown Toronto is becoming home to wealthier households. This trend has led to growing concentrations of poverty in the inner suburbs: more poor families living in poor neighbourhoods and more poor neighbourhoods overall.

Worryingly, evidence also shows that Toronto's neighbourhoods are divided in the access they provide to services and opportunities. In the inner suburbs, the development of social infrastructure has not kept pace with broader social and economic change and these neighbourhoods lack the programs and facilities that contribute to the health, well-being and safety of their residents – the supports that can help poor families get ahead in life.

It was these inequities that in 2004 the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force sought to redress. Initiated by the City of Toronto and United Way Toronto, the Task Force brought together different levels of government and representatives from business, labour and the not-for-profit sectors.

The work of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force provided the foundation for action by the City of Toronto and United Way along with many other partners. Through their combined efforts, they have targeted resources, built new facilities where they are needed most, attracted investment from the private sector and senior levels of government, better aligned activities and engaged youth and other local residents in changing their communities for the better. These activities have been put to the test in 13 vulnerable inner suburban neighbourhoods.

The scale of the work has been significant. Since 2006, it is estimated that over \$180 million has been invested by the City, United Way, provincial and federal governments and community partners in 13 “priority investment neighbourhoods”.

This report provides an update on our progress to date. It describes what we set out to accomplish and why. It documents the work that has taken place, assesses the overall impact and sets out parameters for future directions. These parameters include building on the work undertaken to date, continuing the focus on supporting resident engagement and civic participation, increasing service infrastructure and ensuring that any activities are locally responsive to neighbourhoods.

This is just a start, a start that has laid a strong foundation of engaged residents, new infrastructure and an alliance of partners on which we can build. The social and economic exclusion that has taken root in Toronto has done so over several decades and results from many complex interactions within the city, the province and, indeed, globally. It will take a generation to turn around. If left unchecked, however, the worsening conditions threaten to undermine the health and prosperity of our entire city.



## 2 Identifying neighbourhoods in need

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In 2003, Toronto City Summit Alliance (now Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance) called upon the Prime Minister and Premier to implement a new fiscal deal for municipalities. This was required to support essential community needs, such as affordable housing, post-secondary education, newcomer integration, and social infrastructure in poor neighbourhoods.

The City Summit Alliance highlighted the fact that growing poverty and demographic change were driving demand for social services at a time of intense funding pressures on Toronto's network of social services. These competing pressures had led to community hot spots, "neighbourhoods where residents lack even the most basic programs and services". The City Summit Alliance's call reinforced the central message of the City of Toronto's 2001 Social Development Strategy, which identified the need for strategic areas for investment, expansion of social infrastructure and better coordination of service planning.

The urgency of the Toronto City Summit Alliance's call was reinforced by *Poverty by Postal Code*, released in 2004 by United Way Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development. The report showed that poverty in Canada's largest city was both deepening and becoming increasingly concentrated in the inner suburbs. These areas, which twenty years earlier had relatively few families living in poverty, were now home to 'high' and 'very high' levels of family poverty. Furthermore, *Poverty by Postal Code* echoed the message of Toronto City Summit Alliance: the development of vital services and facilities in these suburban neighbourhoods had not kept pace with the significant social, economic and demographic changes that had taken place there.

One of the disturbing developments in some inner suburban neighbourhoods was the increased incidence of gang activity and gun violence. The City of Toronto had already started to address these trends through the Community Safety Plan, unanimously adopted by Council in March 2004. The Plan took a holistic approach to community safety, balancing enforcement with prevention and focusing on promoting inclusion and opportunity for youth. The plan led to the identification of four neighbourhoods for targeted investment: Malvern, Jamestown-Rexdale, Jane-Finch and Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park (originally Kingston-Galloway).

In 2004, following the release of *Poverty by Postal Code* and the adoption of the Community Safety Plan, the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force was established. Led by the City of Toronto and United Way, the Task Force brought together leaders from the business community, labour,

fundors, community service providers and academics.

*Our vision of Toronto is one where all neighbourhoods have the community services and facilities that make them good places to live... Our vision is also one where neighbourhoods foster civic participation and inclusion.*

The vision of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, *A Call to Action*, 2005

Its goals were ambitious. The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force sought to articulate a vision for strengthening neighbourhoods in Toronto; to identify a mechanism for mobilizing investment in much-needed community services and facilities; and to advocate for change.



But the Task Force also went a step further, by identifying neighbourhoods in Toronto that faced the greatest challenges and should therefore be the place to start. The selection of neighbourhoods was based on two sets of criteria: analysis of services and facilities that already existed in neighbourhoods, which showed where the gaps were; and socio-economic data that showed which neighbourhoods would be most affected by a lack of services. These criteria are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force criteria for identifying priority investment neighbourhoods**

### **Criteria 1: Physical Proximity of Services**

The number of services that are not physically accessible to those who are most likely to use them, based on 11 key services:

- Recreation and community centres
- Libraries
- Schools
- Community health centres and hospitals
- Community-based children's services
- Community based services for youth
- Community-based services for seniors
- Settlement services
- Community-based employment services
- Food banks
- Community kitchens, gardens and markets

### **Criteria 2: Socioeconomic Indicators**

#### **Economic:**

- Median household income
- Percentage of population spending 30% or more on shelter costs
- Percentage of population aged 25+ who are unemployed

#### **Education:**

- Percentage of students passing the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test
- Percentage of population with college or university qualifications
- Percentage of population aged 15+ attaining less than grade nine education

#### **Urban Fabric:**

- Percentage of occupied private dwellings requiring major repairs

#### **Health:**

- Number of low birth weight babies per 1,000 live births

#### **Demographics:**

- Percentage of population with no knowledge of English or French
- Percentage of population who are recent immigrants
- Percentage of population by mobility status one year ago

Based on this analysis, the Task Force identified the nine neighbourhoods most in need of immediate and focused investment during the first phase of the strong neighbourhoods strategy. City staff, using a community safety lens, further analyzed the characteristics of vulnerable areas and recommended the addition of four more neighbourhoods, bringing the total number of priority investment neighbourhoods in Toronto to 13, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** *Priority investment neighbourhoods in Toronto*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dorset Park</li><li>• Eglinton East-Kennedy Park</li><li>• Flemingdon Park-O'Connor (originally Flemingdon Park-Victoria Village)</li><li>• Jamestown-Rexdale (originally Jamestown)</li><li>• Jane-Finch</li><li>• Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park (originally Kingston-Galloway)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lawrence Heights</li><li>• Malvern</li><li>• Scarborough Village</li><li>• Steeles-L'Amoreaux</li><li>• Taylor-Massey (originally Crescent Town)</li><li>• Westminster-Branson</li><li>• Weston-Mount Dennis</li></ul>
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The mechanism for mobilizing investment that the Task Force identified was based on work proceeding along three distinct but inter-related paths: Targeted Investments; Neighbourhood Perspective; and Neighbourhood Information. These paths would in turn be supported by three structures: Local Partnerships; Funder Partnerships; and Dedicated Staff Support. Over time, this approach would enable the Task Force’s vision for Toronto neighbourhoods to be realised. That vision comprised four key elements:

- Strong Neighbourhood Infrastructure
- Strong Social Programs
- Inclusive and Welcoming Neighbourhoods
- Cohesive, Participatory Neighbourhoods

The Task Force’s theory of neighbourhood change is represented in Figure 1.

City Council adopted the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy in October 2005. United Way’s Board of Trustees approved its Building Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy in 2006.

Toronto’s commitment to strengthening its neighbourhoods was recognized by other orders of government in 2006, when Prime Minister Paul Martin, Premier Dalton McGuinty and Mayor David Miller established the Intergovernmental Working Group to address issues of community safety. This co-operation laid the groundwork for significant resources flowing into the priority investment neighbourhoods and others areas of the city.

Figure 1: Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force theory of change





# the Hub

## 3 Implementation

This section looks at the work that has been undertaken since 2005 by the City of Toronto, United Way Toronto and partners in each of the four key areas identified by the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force.

## 3.1 Strong Neighbourhood Infrastructure

*Our vision is of a city where all neighbourhoods, regardless of the income levels of the people living there, will have a responsive mix of services and facilities that meets local needs and corresponds to both the size and characteristics of the population living there.*

The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, A Call to Action, 2005

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The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force was clear that poor access to services and facilities in inner suburban neighbourhoods was putting residents' health and well-being at risk. Over the past five years, a number of strategic investments have been made in physical and social infrastructure that responds to the needs of local communities: improving the alignment of existing service infrastructure, upgrading community and recreational facilities and building new service infrastructure.

### ***Community Hubs: responding to local needs***

The City of Toronto and United Way have worked closely with residents, social service agencies, the private sector and all levels of government to bring much-needed service infrastructure to communities across Toronto.

For example, United Way is working with partners to build multi-service Community Hubs in eight of the priority investment neighbourhoods. Although each one is unique, Hubs provide a central place that brings together local residents and service providers. They offer a broad range of services and programs that respond to community needs – including those of newcomers, seniors, parents, people seeking work, youth, and those with health and mental health needs. City services, such as public health and employment and social services, are located in the majority of Hubs.

Residents have been at the heart of Hub planning since their inception. Local people helped to identify the needs in their community that they wanted Hubs to address. All of the Hubs provide community space that residents can access for free to use for activities such as cooking, exercise groups and computer labs. As more Hubs open their doors, residents are also getting involved in decision making and service planning, bringing them into new kinds of relationships with service providers and continuing to give them influence over the supports provided in their communities.

Funding partnerships have been integral to the successful development of Community Hubs. UWT has committed approximately \$1 million to the development of each of the Hubs plus additional resources for operations. But five are also being developed in partnership with the Provincial Ministry of Health and Long-term Care as part of its Community Health Centre strategy, bringing significant additional resources to bear. Additional funding has come from other Provincial ministries, the Federal government, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and many individual and corporate donors. United Way's partnership with the City has also been essential to the development of Hubs, in particular its role in securing additional resources, enabling planning and development to proceed and in working together to engage other partners. In seven hubs, United Way's capital commitment has leveraged \$30million in capital funding from other funders.

When all are completed, the Hubs will provide permanent space for over 70 social service agencies, with many more using Hubs to support communities on an itinerant basis. Four of the Hubs (Eglinton East-Kennedy Park, Weston-Mount Dennis, Taylor-Massey, and Flemingdon Park-O'Connor) have now opened their doors and three (Jamestown-Rexdale, Westminster-Branson, and Dorset Park) will open in 2012. The Steeles-L'Amoreaux hub is projected to open within the next two-to-three years.

Other hub-like models have also been developed in Chester Le and Scarborough Village to maximize the use of community-use space. In these neighbourhoods, a lead organization takes responsibility for the use of an existing City-owned space, and a variety of organizations use the space to meet service needs identified through NAPs and other local networks. And specialized hubs have been developed at the Yorkwoods Library in Jane-Finch and the ProTech Media Centre in Weston-Mount Dennis through the POL fund. In these neighbourhoods, local youth have worked with adult allies to develop arts hubs and identify programming priorities that meet local needs.

### ***New youth-focused space***

In 2006, the City of Toronto committed \$13 million to fund new social and recreational facilities that would leave a lasting youth-focused legacy for communities in Toronto's 13 priority investment neighbourhoods. The Partnership Opportunities Legacy (POL) Fund has supported a total of 26 community infrastructure projects, including playgrounds, community and youth program spaces, community multi-service hubs, parks, and multiple sports facilities. For every dollar the City has invested in building this important community infrastructure, more than \$1.90 has been secured in partnership funding, bringing the total to almost \$38 million. Innovative partnerships have been developed with a wide range of partners, including IBM Canada, Nike and Microsoft Canada.

### ***Opening up schools for community use***

As vital as new facilities are, it is also important that residents have access to existing facilities. Schools have always been an important site for community and recreational activities. Since 2005, significant effort has been focused on realising the value of these assets for the community. The provincial government has provided funding to school boards to make schools in priority investment neighbourhoods accessible for community use free of charge.

Through the Focus on Youth Program, United Way, the Provincial Ministry of Education and local school boards have worked together to open schools to community agencies for summertime use. The program also offers opportunities for youth by employing them to help run summer camps. In 2009 alone, Focus on Youth worked with over 15,000 children and youth from priority investment neighbourhoods and elsewhere and employed 400 students.

### ***Dedicated Staff Support: Neighbourhood Action***

Neighbourhood infrastructure of a different sort has been developed through the City's Neighbourhood Action (NA) initiative which has brought City staff working in local areas together to find ways to plan and deliver services—particularly services for youth—in a more coordinated and effective way. The NA teams bring together representatives from key City divisions, the Toronto Public Library, Toronto Police Service, and Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC).

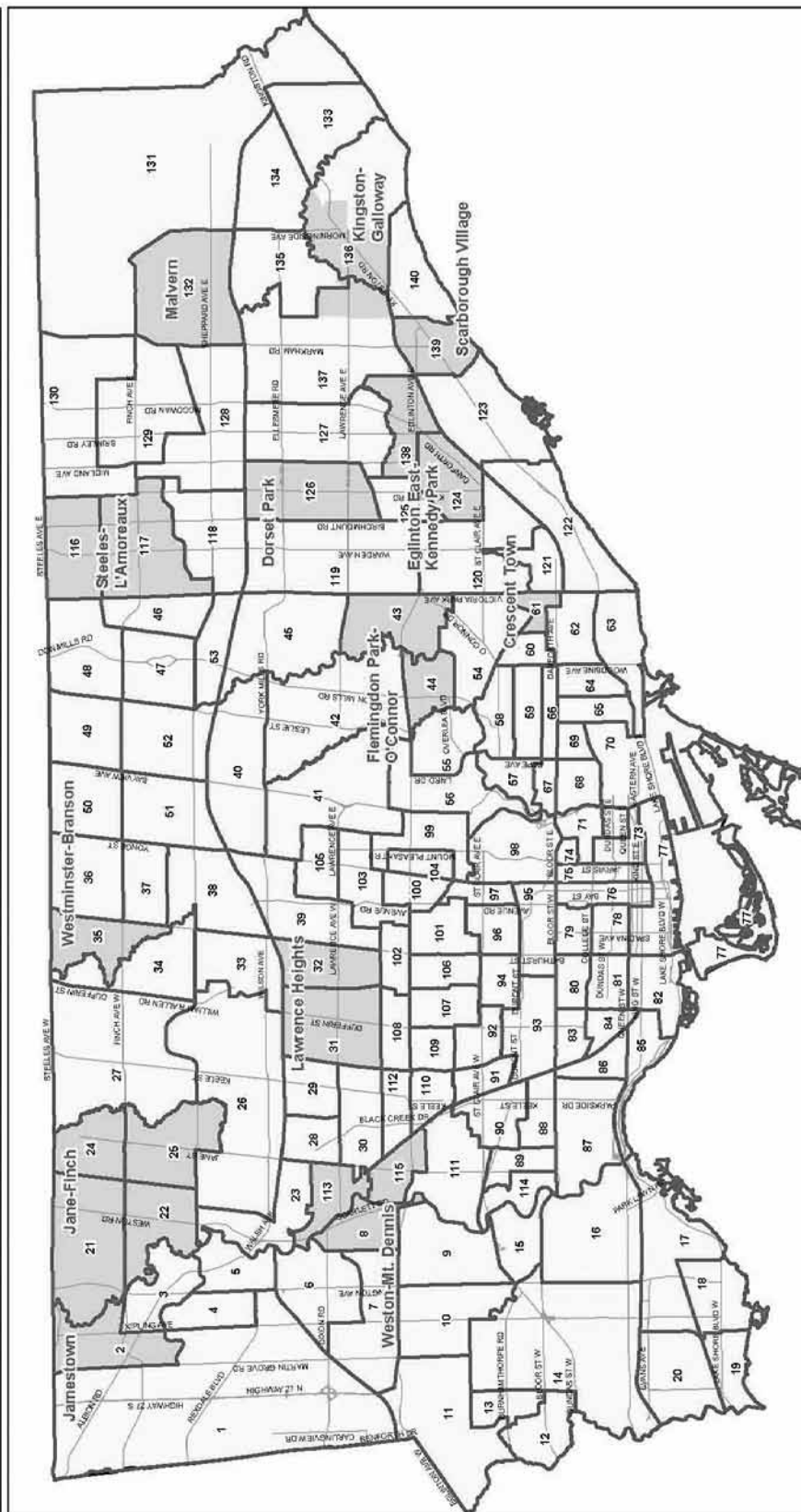
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The work of each Neighbourhood Action Team is complemented by a Neighbourhood Action Partnership which brings community partners to the table. Together, the Neighbourhood Action Team and Neighbourhood Action Partnership (NAP) in each priority investment neighbourhood coordinate services with an emphasis on supporting youth training, employment, engagement and justice issues; providing community and family supports; and improving service delivery.

The issues facing each neighbourhood – and therefore each Neighbourhood Action Team – are different. So are the local resources which can be brought to bear. Common to all, though, is a commitment to a collaborative approach: sharing information and working together to make the planning and delivery of services more effective. There is also a commitment to working with local residents and organizations to identify what resources are needed to improve quality of life in the area. To this end, many Neighbourhood Action Partnerships have worked closely with United Way-funded Action for Neighbourhood Change initiatives in the priority investment neighbourhoods (see Section 3.4). For example, in the Taylor-Massey neighbourhood, the NAP has incorporated a number of priorities identified by residents connected with the ANC, including those relating to safety and security and civic education.



# City of Toronto Priority Investment Neighbourhoods



## Legend

- Neighbourhood (neighbourhood #)
- Priority Investment Neighbourhood
- Major Arterial Street

Notes: The PINs are composed of neighbourhoods, neighbourhood areas (two or more joined neighbourhoods) and one special area (Kingston-Galloway) which is built out of Statistics Canada Dissemination Areas (DAs). For information on all the City's 140 neighbourhoods, please visit <http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/neighbourhoods.htm>



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## 3.2 Strong Social Programs

*Our vision for strong neighbourhoods includes well-designed income support programs that provide all residents with quality of life and personal dignity. It includes a comprehensive affordable housing program that creates an income mix within neighbourhoods and reverses the trend of income polarization between rich and poor neighbourhoods. It is a vision where residents are not marginalized by their income level, and are not forced to live in pockets of highly concentrated poverty that are considered undesirable or unsafe.*

SNTF, A Call to Action, 2005

Since 2005 United Way and the City of Toronto have worked with partners to pursue many strategies to realize the vision of the Task Force for strong social programs. Activities have focused both on the long-term public policy levers that will help bring about systemic change as well as on action on the ground to improve the economic well-being of families and youth.

### ***Public policies that enhance quality of life and personal dignity***

In recent years, there has been a raft of public policy developments addressing issues such as income security, employment rights, housing, early learning and health – all of which are fundamental to the quality of life and personal dignity of families facing poverty.

One of the most significant is the Poverty Reduction Act (Bill 152), passed into law with all-party support in May 2009. The Act requires current and future provincial governments to set a poverty reduction target and plan of action at least every five years in consultation with community stakeholders and low-income people. The Act specifically identifies the need for a place-based approach to targeting poverty, recognizing the growing disparities between neighbourhoods.

Income security is being strengthened through the Ontario Child benefit, introduced in 2007 and increased in July 2009. Bill 48, the Payday Loans Act, came into effect in 2009, addressing another area of concern for low income communities. The 2010 Budget introduced new HST tax credits that cushion the blow of a harmonized sales tax for low income families. And, in December 2009, the government announced the creation of the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council (SARAC), which is due to report back in summer 2012.

Employment rights and conditions are being addressed through increased protections for temporary agency workers and better enforcement of workplace standards. Additionally, the minimum wage has risen every year from 2003 to 2010, now standing at \$10.25 an hour.

Housing was given a boost in the 2009 Budget which allocated \$5 million a year to municipal rent bank programs. In December 2010, the Province launched a long-term affordable housing strategy and a new federal provincial agreement on affordable housing was announced for Toronto in November 2011 allocating \$480.6 million over three years.

More broadly, since 2006 United Way Toronto has significantly increased the resources it channels to inner suburban neighbourhoods helping support families in these communities. The organization has brought four new agencies into membership from the inner suburbs and has increased its total funding to agencies serving these areas of the city. Between January 2006 and March 2010, 43% of all United Way's member agency funding – \$ 96.6 million – was allocated to agencies in the inner suburbs.

These developments have not been brought about by either the City of Toronto or United Way alone. But both organizations have played an important convening role, pro-actively engaging and consulting a wide range of partners on these issues. Through this strategic, targeted approach significant resources from all levels of government are helping to meet needs in priority investment neighbourhoods and other low income communities. Progress is often slow – and the current economic climate is working against poverty reduction – but it is important to recognize that many important steps have been taken to achieve systemic change.

### *Supporting children and families*

The health and wellbeing of low-income communities is being improved through a range of initiatives focused on preventive health services to children and families. And, as noted above, the Province has expanded its Community Health Centre program, bringing essential health and social care services to more low income communities.

Full day kindergarten for children aged four and five was introduced in 2010 and is now underway in many communities, representing a significant investment in the next generation of Ontarians.

On the ground, new resources and innovative programs are also helping families improve their quality of life. For example, the Investing in Families initiative, a partnership between Toronto Employment and Social Services, Toronto Public Health, Children's Services and Parks, Forestry and Recreation, provides single-parent families in Jane-Finch with integrated access to a range of supports including employment services, recreational activities, and health promotion for children. Elsewhere, Parks Forestry and Recreation has worked in collaboration with Children's Services to develop the *After-school Recreation Care (ARC)* program, providing essential support to parents of children aged 6 to 12 and job opportunities for youth.

### *Supporting kids in schools*

From 2007 to 2011, United Way partnered with Pathways to Education Canada to expand the program in three priority neighbourhoods (Jamestown-Rexdale, Lawrence Heights and Scarborough Village). The initiative provides local high school students that are academically at-risk and/or from economically disadvantaged communities with intensive support, such as tutoring,



group mentoring, and student and parent advocacy support. It also provides bursaries for all those who complete high school and are accepted into post-secondary programs. Evaluation of the pilot flagship site, in Regent Park, saw a reduction in school drop-out rates from 56 to 10 percent, while the proportion of young people attending post-secondary education increased from 20 to 80 percent. These positive achievements have continued as the program has been implemented in the other neighbourhoods.

### ***Employment supports for youth***

With strong support from community agencies, schools, colleges, employers and labour organizations, the City and United Way have delivered numerous programs to help young people gain skills, confidence and opportunities to enter the employment market. For instance, through initiatives such as *Youth Employment Toronto (YET)*, *Toronto Youth Job Corps (TYJC)* and *Malvern Youth Community Employment Program (MYCEP)*, youth are connected to a range of pre-employment supports and further education/training opportunities.

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The City has also put considerable resources into connecting young people to employers. For example, *Youth Employment Partnerships (YEP)* is a non-profit neighbourhood-based network of over 30 local agencies that connects youth to jobs ranging from entry-level to skilled. And the *Partnership to Advance Youth Employment (PAYE)* enables private sector employers to fill entry-level positions with pre-screened applicants living in the priority investment neighbourhoods.

As the largest employer of young people in Toronto, the City has also been honing its ability to employ youth in the Toronto Public Service. City hiring initiatives have helped find employment for over 7,000 young people in Toronto, with around 12 percent of those coming from underserved inner-suburban neighbourhoods. This work has been complemented by resources from the Province, such as through the *Summer Jobs for Youth* program, which has given youth in priority investment neighbourhoods job readiness training and support, summer work placements and post-employment support.

The city's community colleges have been leaders in developing innovative programs to support youth in Toronto's priority investment neighbourhoods. Centennial College has offered youth in the Malvern and Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park neighbourhoods free training in fields such as auto repair, HVAC (Heating Ventilation and Cooling) maintenance, audio-visual production and first aid. The college also provided bursaries to five graduates of the program, enabling them to continue their education. And in the Jamestown-Rexdale neighbourhood, Humber College Institute has delivered a free pre-apprenticeship program in building maintenance. Seneca College, in partnership with the City and other organizations, ran a pilot project in Jane-Finch combining graphic design and life-skills training.

Finally, the labour movement has been an active sponsor of training programs as part of the Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy. For example, the Central Ontario Building Trades provide a 12-week program that provides youth from priority investment neighbourhoods with exposure to the construction trades. And the City has worked with Carpenters Union Local 27 to pilot the



**Figure 2: Social Programs for Children and Youth– Quick Facts**

More than 5,600 adults and 13,800 children have benefited from the Investing in Families program since 2008, enabling them to access essential health, employment and recreational supports.

29 After-school Recreation Care sites in priority investment neighbourhoods provide daily recreation and care for 860 children and employ more than 140 youth five days per week for 10 months a year.

Of the 784 youth who received Youth Employment Toronto case management support in 2010, two-thirds secured, employment, obtained training, or returned to school.

Over 5,000 employers and industry organizations use the Youth Employment Partnerships network to recruit youth aged 15 to 29.

Between 2007 and 2009 over 7,000 young people have been employed by the City of Toronto; approximately 12 per cent have come from under-served neighbourhoods. Toronto Sport Leadership has helped over 600 students obtain skills and certification to enable them to work in a sport-related job.

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Youth Build Toronto project. This is one of the City's first experiments with using its purchasing and contracting process to advance its goals in other areas. In this case, the City's purchasing process was used to contract with a vendor willing to employ ten young people who were provided with paid training as they worked on the expansion of a youth facility in Weston-Mount Dennis.

### 3.3 Inclusive and Welcoming Neighbourhoods

*The Task Force vision of the City's neighbourhoods is one of inclusion, of places where diversity is celebrated and respected. It is a vision of neighbourhoods where families and individuals from all walks of life are welcomed, whether they are newcomers or long term residents. It is a vision of neighbourhoods in which people feel a sense of pride and belonging, irrespective of their level of income, physical and intellectual ability, ethnic, cultural and racial heritage, religious beliefs, and gender or sexual orientation.*

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SNTF, A Call to Action, 2005

#### ***Including youth in communities***

A sense of inclusion is particularly important for young people as they make the transition from childhood to their adult years. As set out above, providing skills training and job experiences to young people has been a primary focus of efforts by the City, in particular, to build a sense of inclusion and strengthen neighbourhoods. But the City and United Way have also invested in many other initiatives aimed at helping enrich the lives of youth and motivating them to take action to bring about positive change in their communities.

The Youth Challenge Fund (YCF) was established in 2006 as a partnership between the Government of Ontario and United Way Toronto. Focused on the 13 priority investment neighbourhoods, the program was designed to mobilize, convene and engage hard-to-reach youth, and to challenge community members to embrace the ideas and leadership of Toronto's young people. This approach empowers youth as they build relationships with community organizations and institutions, and allows partners to collaborate and develop new skills and work in more effective ways with young people.

YCF-funded initiatives address a broad range of issues affecting youth, such as violence, racism, isolation, negative self-image, and disengagement from school, work and the community. The initiatives use creative, collaborative approaches with tools such as sports, arts and culture, multimedia, gang-exit strategies, anti-oppression workshops, leadership training and mentorship supports to engage youth in meaningful ways. Not only do the initiatives run relevant programming for youth, but many have enabled access to spaces in the community where young people can meet, work together and build relationships.

To date, YCF has invested \$42.5 million in 111 youth-led initiatives. The program has enabled over 1,000 young people to play direct leadership roles in developing and implementing initiatives. It has assisted an additional 5,000 youth to learn new skills and become engaged in their community through unique programs, services, supports and mentorship. Additionally, YCF has



helped create 19 youth-designated spaces across the priority investment neighbourhoods (with 15 more currently in development). Together, these will provide essential youth-led supports to hundreds of youth across the city.

### ***Supporting communities in crisis***

Community safety is one of the most significant factors in creating a strong sense of belonging in neighbourhoods. United Way Toronto's Vertical Poverty research showed that in communities where safety is a major problem, people feel less connected to their neighbourhood and are more likely to want to move away.

Since 2004 the City has been working to address this issue in a number of ways. There is now coordinated support for communities experiencing violent incidents and other traumatic events through the City's Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP). Through this initiative, City divisions, Toronto Police Service, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and community groups work closely with local people across three critical spheres of crisis management: Intervention, Preparation and Prevention.

At the intervention stage, the Community Crisis Response Program staff work with local stakeholders to assess the impacts of traumatic incidents, such as shootings or stabbings, and marshals the resources required to support affected communities.

In preparation for critical incidents, CCRP staff have engaged community stakeholders and established local networks across the city. These have led to neighbourhood-specific protocols that ensure that when there is a crisis in the neighbourhood, the response is coordinated, fast and appropriate to that community.

Long-term strategies aimed at crisis prevention are also developed at a neighbourhood level by community safety networks. These are often supported by other City staff and a community agency operating in each area.

Another key program of the City of Toronto to address community safety is Prevention and Intervention Toronto (PIT). Administered by the City and delivered by JVS Toronto, PIT's goal is to reduce the proliferation of gangs in three priority investment neighbourhoods heavily affected by crime: Jane and Finch, Jamestown-Rexdale and Weston-Mount Dennis. The three-year pilot project, funded by the National Crime Prevention Centre, focuses on youth between the ages of 13 and 24 that are already involved in gangs or at risk of becoming so. The program has three consecutive intake streams of 100 participants each over the duration of the project.

A 2011 evaluation of PIT by the University of Toronto showed positive results among those that the program worked with. Youth exhibited improved perceptions of themselves as students, and over 60 percent reported having recently received an award or positive recognition at school. Overall, clients spent less time with gang-involved peers; spent more time engaged in pro-social activities; had improved attitudes towards employment; improved behaviour in school;



displayed less favourable attitudes towards crime and interpersonal aggressiveness; learned how to control their anger; and reduced negative contact with the criminal justice system through reduced levels of criminal victimization, violent offending and non-violent offending. Although the evaluation could not attribute these positive changes to the PIT program alone, the analysis suggests that it has contributed to these outcomes.

## 3.4 Cohesive, Participatory Neighbourhoods

*Our vision is of neighbourhoods where residents have the opportunity to participate in and shape community life, where people have places to meet, the capacity to lead, and the ability to make plans and identify neighbourhood priorities, based on sound knowledge of their neighbourhoods.*

### ***Supporting communities to take action in their neighbourhoods***

A key component of United Way's Neighbourhood Strategy is Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC). Originally funded as part of a Federal pilot, the initiative supports residents to lead and make change in their neighbourhoods. United Way partners with community-based agencies to implement ANC in all 13 priority investment neighbourhoods, providing funding, capacity building, planning, and learning support. The local partner agencies employ staff to support the resident engagement and organizing in each neighbourhood.

Residents of all neighbourhoods participate in an annual planning process, through which they set out their vision and priorities for their community. Over 400 residents have participated in capacity building and training opportunities, including leadership development, facilitation, team building, communication, problem solving and peer coaching. ANC sites support over 70 resident-led groups across the neighbourhoods, ranging from broader resident associations to issue- or project-based groups. There are also many informal social or recreational groups supported by ANCs, which are essential to supporting vibrant local communities.

To support the engagement work of ANC, United Way has raised over \$1 million to implement resident-identified and resident-led projects in priority investment neighbourhoods. These Resident Action Grants are designed to address one or more of the resident-identified priorities in the neighbourhood and involves local people in all stages of the planning, review, approval and implementation of the projects. To date, ANC has implemented 114 Resident Action Grants. Projects include community gardens, community festivals/celebrations, recreational programs, educational/training programs, and civic engagement initiatives. Although important in themselves, the real value of these projects is that they help to foster the kind of community life that the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force identified as being so critical to strong neighbourhoods.

But residents alone cannot turn their neighbourhoods around. So, with support from ANC staff, local people have connected with important stakeholders in their community, including local service agencies, politicians, businesses, and City of Toronto divisions. In a number of cases, these connections have led to on-going resident representation on decision-making tables, collabora-

tive projects or initiatives, and the leveraging of funding or other resources. In particular, ANC-NAP collaborations have led to some important projects in priority investment neighbourhoods. For example, in Malvern a community resource guide was developed that has been widely disseminated to residents in the neighbourhood. ANC members and the NAP table in Rexdale created a Crisis Response Protocol for residents. In Dorset Park, ANC worked with NAP partners to develop and administer a tenant survey to identify the needs of local apartment residents. And residents in Taylor-Massey successfully gained NAP support for the development of a commercial kitchen.

Ensuring that young people participate fully in the lives of their neighbourhoods is also an important part of building strong neighbourhoods. To build connections with youth, Parks, Forestry and Recreation has strengthened its complement of outreach workers who are working throughout the city to connect youth to programs and services. In addition, the provincial government has further bolstered outreach services funding community agencies to hire 39 additional youth outreach workers.

A range of engagement opportunities have also been put in place for youth to ensure they have the skills required for full participation in their communities. For example, Involve Youth, a youth-led community action initiative in seven priority investment neighbourhoods, incorporates intentional learning and skill development, decision-making and leadership, identity supports and social awareness for African-Canadian and other racialized youth. The project has resulted in the development of neighbourhood-based youth councils in the seven areas. The project, which is led by the City of Toronto and funded in partnership with the United Way Toronto, Canadian Heritage and the Youth Challenge Fund, is one example of the kinds of opportunities that have helped to build participatory, cohesive neighbourhoods.



# 4 Measuring the impacts

## 4.1 Building a foundation for community impact

### *Mobilizing and leveraging investment to support under-served communities*

The strong neighbourhood strategies outlined in this report have touched many lives and effected significant change. The targeted focus on specific, priority investment neighbourhoods has enabled the City of Toronto and United Way to mobilize and leverage many millions of dollars in additional investment to strengthen these communities. Together, in the past six years, this has led to around 1,200 initiatives, engaging thousands of residents across the 13 priority investment neighbourhoods.

But beyond the funding, the strong neighbourhood strategies have raised understanding at a public policy level of the need for a place-based approach to strengthening communities. And the dedicated focus on priority investment neighbourhoods has also led to increased discussion in the media and the public domain more broadly of the trends playing out across Toronto and of the growing geographic divide between rich and poor in the city.

### *Building strong partnerships for strong neighbourhoods*

In pursuing the vision and goals of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, the City and United Way have invested heavily in building strong partnerships with a wide range of organizations. This is witnessed through the many Provincial and Federal initiatives that have been successfully aligned with neighbourhood action in Toronto, as well as the new forms of partnership and collaboration that have taken shape between local service providers, community agencies and private sector partners.

Partners are seeing the benefits of this action. Police officers talk about their increased ability to fight crime by taking a coordinated approach and working closely with community organizations, residents and other stakeholders in priority investment neighbourhoods. Service providers report that they are better able to understand and meet the needs of local communities by working through dedicated resident engagement channels. Organizations representing business publicly champion a focused approach to building a cohesive city.

### ***Building social infrastructure in underserved neighbourhoods***

The goal of building new neighbourhood infrastructure and delivering strong social programs is being realised in many parts of the city. New community hubs, the revitalization of youth facilities and efforts to open up other types of publicly-owned facilities are improving the resources available to existing services, helping to bring new services into underserved neighbourhoods and improving access to social services for local people. In many cases, they are also providing essential space for communities to initiate their own community building activities.

These efforts are being supported by improved coordination and planning at the neighbourhood level, as City divisions and United Way work together and with other partners in new ways.

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Evaluations of work on the ground have been promising. For example, the University of Toronto found that very positive benefits had been achieved by the City's gang intervention project in a number of neighbourhoods. And early indications from the monitoring of United Way-funded hubs indicate that they are seeing increases in service use and are leading to new collaborations between agency partners.

### ***Increasing the capacity of local residents to improve their neighbourhoods***

For neighbourhood change to be sustainable, it has to begin with the people who live there. Through initiatives such as United Way's Action for Neighbourhood Change and the City's Neighbourhood Action Partnerships, more and more local people are getting involved, leading positive change in their neighbourhoods and influencing others to take action in response to resident-identified priorities.

Feedback from residents involved in these initiatives shows that they are seeing the benefits: residents feel more connected to each other and to their neighbourhoods, strengthening community ties; they feel supported in taking on leadership roles locally, helping to engage their neighbours, helping to lead and advocate for change; and they are better able to identify priorities for their particular neighbourhood. Similarly, community members that have participated in Neighbourhood Action Partnerships have been very positive about the ways this has enabled them to work with and influence others.

Overall, many of the results envisioned by the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force are being achieved. Residents feel that their neighbourhoods are more inclusive and welcoming, and that their pride in where they live has grown. Targeted neighbourhoods are more cohesive and participatory, with places for people to meet, and residents actively engaged in shaping, leading and planning community life. And the services and supports that these neighbourhoods severely lacked are increasing.



## 4.2 There is more work to be done

The work of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force was founded on compelling evidence of the ways in which Toronto had changed in recent decades. In particular, longitudinal analysis of Census data showed that up to the year 2001, poverty in the city was worsening and that it was increasingly concentrated in Toronto's inner-suburban neighbourhoods – areas that were poorly equipped to meet the needs of growing numbers of low-income residents.

The Task Force was clear that these trends had taken root over several decades and that it would take a generation to turn around. But it was also clear that if allowed to continue unchecked, the worsening social conditions threatened to undermine the long-term health and prosperity of the city.

Since the Task Force convened in 2005, further evidence has shown that these trends have continued. United Way Toronto's Vertical Poverty report – which used 2006 Census data – showed that poverty concentration had increased in the inner suburbs well into the last decade and, furthermore, that it was increasingly concentrated in high-rise apartment buildings.

Also since the Task Force undertook its work, Toronto has been through one of the most difficult economic times in its history. Many industries that have long been pillars of the economy have been shaken to the core. Thousands of people have lost their jobs. And those who were struggling even in good economic times have fallen further behind.

What these trends point to is the need to continue to build resilience in neighbourhoods across the city: to help the community recover from the economic downturn by strengthening the social services people turn to when they need help and by investing in long-term strategies that create lasting change and help mitigate future uncertainties.

The scale and nature of the challenges faced in Toronto's high-poverty neighbourhoods today necessitates approaches that are strategic, focused and firmly grounded in the broader social and economic context. Furthermore, as with the Strong Neighbourhoods Strategies of the past five years, they must have a long-term commitment to deep rooted change for these neighbourhoods and their residents.

## 4.3 Understanding neighbourhood change

In this broader context, one of the challenges faced has been measuring change within priority investment neighbourhoods. There are many examples of individuals and groups that have benefitted from particular programs and initiatives. But there is a need to go further in demonstrating the impact of investments in priority investment neighbourhoods; to evidence change over the long-term and, where possible, to measure the cumulative impact of multiple interventions across neighbourhoods.

In 2012, new Census data will become available, enabling planners and policy makers to understand the broader change that has occurred across neighbourhoods since 2006. This data should also assist in decision-making as it relates to further targeting of resources to neighbourhoods most in need.

Toronto also now has the benefit of a new analytic tool to determine relative needs in neighbourhoods across the city. When it is fully operational, Wellbeing Toronto will serve as an important monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy. Combining demographic data and information about neighbourhood services and facilities, Wellbeing Toronto enables residents, community agencies, funders and governments to measure the wellbeing of Toronto neighbourhoods.

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During 2012, Wellbeing Toronto will be expanded to include indicators that will be used to assess and monitor the strength of the community service system in neighbourhoods. Using these indicators, the City will establish benchmarks for key community supports required for neighbourhood wellbeing. The benchmarks will help identify neighbourhoods that would benefit from increased investment in services.

#### **4.4 Continuing the work**

Community change takes time and on-going commitment. But through the Strong Neighbourhoods Strategies led by the City and United Way, the seeds of change have taken root in inner suburban neighbourhoods across Toronto.

This is a journey that will continue to evolve and grow as the City and United Way work together and with others to take the lessons learned and apply them to efforts to continue to improve neighbourhoods.

This means building on and sustaining the social and economic gains made to date in the 13 priority investment neighbourhoods – continuing to support residents to lead change in their communities; maximising the opportunities brought about through increased service infrastructure; and ensuring on-going coordination and alignment of the resources that support these neighbourhoods. It also means continuing to work closely with partners at all levels to leverage additional resources and ensuring that work on the ground is aligned with broader public policy development.

The work must continue to be locally responsive, accounting for the distinct characteristics of each community, including its challenges, its opportunities and its history of community engagement and service delivery. In this way, new resources and interventions effectively build upon existing infrastructure rather than introducing additional organizations, processes or structures to the community.

The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force set an ambitious challenge for Toronto: to revitalize neighbourhoods that had been negatively impacted by long-term social and economic trends and historical under-investment. Over the past five years, by taking a targeted approach and working with partners from all quarters, the City of Toronto and United Way Toronto have laid a solid foundation that has resulted in stronger local service and community infrastructure, stronger social programs, more inclusive and welcoming neighbourhoods and more cohesive, participatory neighbourhoods. It is this foundation that we now need to continue to invest in and build upon.

# Appendix A:

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	2004	2005	
CITY	<p>Adopted Mayor's <i>Community Safety Plan</i> which identified 4 neighbourhoods for targeted investment</p>	<p>Invests in <i>Partnership Opportunities Legacy</i> fund (26 community infrastructure projects)</p> <p>29 After-School Recreation sites operating in priority investment neighbourhoods</p>	
UWT	<p>Released <i>Poverety by Postal Code</i></p> <p>Adopted "neighbourhoods" as new strategic priority</p>	<p>Implemented ANC in 4 more neighbourhoods</p> <p>9 Resident Action Grants funded</p> <p>Initiated <i>Focus on Youth</i> Program in collaboration with province and local school boards</p> <p>Partnered with Pathways to Education to expand program to 2 priority investment neighbourhoods</p>	
CITY- UWT	<p>Established Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force</p>	<p>ANC residents start connecting with Neighbourhood Action Partnerships</p>	

# Strong Neighbourhoods Timeline





	2006	2007	
CITY	<p>Adopted <i>Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy</i></p>	<p>Established Intergovernmental Working Group on Gun Violence with provincial and federal government</p> <p>Implemented Neighbourhood Action initiative</p> <p>Implemented After-School Recreation Care program</p>	
UWT	<p>Implemented ANC in Scarborough Village in partnership with federal government</p>	<p>Adopted <i>Building Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy</i></p> <p>Established Youth Challenge Fund in partnership with province</p> <p>Implemented ANC in 4 more neighbourhoods</p>	
CITY- UWT	<p>SNTF released <i>Call to Action</i> identifying 9 priority investment neighbourhoods</p> <p>City recommends addition of 4 areas bringing total to 13 priority investment neighbourhoods</p>		

	2008	2009	
CITY	<div>Initiated Investing in Families Program in Jane-Finch</div> <div>Initiated the Investing in Neighbourhoods job placement program</div>		
UWT	<div>Implemented ANC in 4 more neighbourhoods</div> <div>48 Resident Action Grants funded</div> <div>Strategic Plan, <i>Community Matters – More</i>, continued focus on strengthening neighbourhoods</div>	<div>Hub Mid-Scarborough opens doors</div> <div>37 Resident Action Grants funded</div>	
CITY- UWT		<div>City acquired space for multi-service Community Hub in Rexdale-Jamestown to be developed in partnership with UWT</div>	

		2010	2011
CITY- UWT	CITY		
	UWT	<p>AccessPoint on Danforth hub opens doors</p> <p>The Hub @ Victoria Park opens doors</p> <p>20 Resident Action Grants funded</p>	
	CITY- UWT	<p>Resident-led Community Crisis Response Teams established in 8 neighbourhoods</p> <p>Resident groups from 3 neighbourhoods collaborated with Toronto Public Health to create digital stories on resident-led food initiatives</p>	<p>City approves purchase of land at former Timothy Eaton School with goal to transfer to YMCA to build a hub with Scarborough hospital and agency partners</p>

# Appendix B:

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 <p><b>TAYLOR-MASSEY</b></p> <hr/> <p>Multi-service Community Hub (with Community Health Centre) – AccessPoint on Danforth</p> <p>Improvements and Community Programming Space at Detonia Park Clubhouse</p> <p>Multi-sport and Park enhancements at George Webster</p>	 <p><b>DORSET PARK</b></p> <hr/> <p>Multi-service Community Hub – in development</p> <p>Multi-sports complex &amp; common space at McGregor Park Community Centre</p> <p>Youth space development by Dorset Park Youth Council (YCF)</p>	 <p><b>EGLINTON EAST-KENNEDY PARK</b></p> <hr/> <p>Multi-service Community Hub (with Community Health Centre) – The Hub Mid-Scarborough</p> <p>Warden Woods Community Centre</p> <p>Outdoor park/ playground</p> <p>Pro-Tech Media Centre at Kennedy-Eglinton Library</p> <p>Youth-focused programming space at Don Montgomery Recreation Centre</p> <p>Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre (YCF)</p>	 <p><b>JAMESTOWN-REXDALE</b></p> <hr/> <p>Multi-service Community Hub (with Community Health Centre) – in development</p> <p>Cricket pitch at Thackeray Park</p> <p>Youth programming &amp; recreational space at Elmbank Community Centre (YCF)</p>
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# Development of Community Space in Priority Neighbourhoods



## JANE-FINCH

Improvements  
to Oakdale  
Community Centre

Arts Hub at  
Yorkwoods Library

Youth programming  
space development  
provided by TCHC/  
Firgrove (YCF)

Equipment &  
furnishings for youth  
drop-in in Yorkwoods  
Mall (YCF)

Renovate youth  
programming space  
at PEACH (YCF)

Equipment &  
furnishings for youth  
lounge & resource  
centre in San  
Romanoway (YCF)

Youth Centre by St.  
Alban's Boys & Girls  
Club (YCF)



## KINGSTON- GALLOWAY- ORTON PARK

Youth programming  
space at East  
Scarborough Boys  
& Girls Club (YCF)

Outdoor community  
space



## LAWRENCE HEIGHTS

Outdoor lighting  
at Neptune TCHC  
Complex

Skateboard park at  
Bathurst Heights  
Collegiate



## MALVERN

ProTech Media  
Centre & indoor  
youth hub at  
Malvern Library  
(YCF and POL Fund)



**SCARBOROUGH VILLAGE**

Youth lounge & playground at Scarborough Village Community Centre



**STEELES L'AMOREAUX**

Multi-service Community Hub – in development

Community Space & Child Care Centre at Chester Le Junior Public School

Outdoor multi-sports pad & mini soccer pitch

S'LAM Youth Hub (YCF)

Youth programming space in Chester Le (YCF)

Renovate youth programming space in TCHC building (YCF)



**FLEMING-DON PARK-O'CONNOR**

Multi-service Community Hub – The Hub @ Victoria Park

Renovated gym & youth programming space at O'Connor Community Centre

Youth programming space at Dennis R. Timbrell Recreation Centre (YCF)

Youth media/arts studio (YCF)



**WESTMINSTER BRANSON**

Multi-service Community Hub (with Community Health Centre) – in development

Facility Renovations, Youth Lounge & Dance Studio at Antibes Community Centre





## WESTON-MOUNT DENNIS

Multi-service Community Hub (with Community Health Centre) – Jane St. Hub

Community & youth focused space at 1652 Keele (YCF)

ProTech Media Centre & Youth Arts & Education Hub

Renovate recreational youth space by Frontlines (YCF)

## SERVING MULTIPLE PRIORITY NEIGHBOURHOODS

Youth lounge (The Jewil Project) (YCF)

Renovate for youth dance/fitness studio at Tropicana Community Services

Space for alternative education, nutrition, and leadership program for at-risk youth at Monsignor Fraser Alternative School

Arts & culture centre for youth (YCF)

Service & resource hub for emerging youth organizations (YCF)

2 youth programming spaces for Redemption Reintegration Services Initiative

Youth space for social enterprise (YCF)

