



**Yorkdale Community Arts Centre**  
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Charitable #134257765 RR0001

Monday February 2, 2015

To the Budget Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read my deputation. Unfortunately I had to leave City Hall before my number came up so I am submitting my deputation in writing in lieu of being able to speak with you in person.

My name is Liz Forsberg and I'm the Managing Director of Art Starts, an organization that brings artists and neighbourhoods together in community-building arts initiatives. We work as an arts organization-in-residence in four communities in North York and Scarborough, primarily in Toronto Community Housing neighbourhoods. Our initiatives are led by professional artists and engage children, youth, families and seniors. Our home base is located in the Lower Level of Yorkdale Mall (a BMR, City of Toronto space) but we also take our programs where people feel most comfortable gathering in their neighbourhoods – in local libraries, community rooms in apartment towers and in one case, a whole townhouse that is dedicated community space.

I'm here today to convey the importance of continuing to invest in the arts community to keep up with the investments of other major North American cities. I want to convey the positive impact your increased investments have already had on young people living in underserved Toronto communities.

In the first week of January, many of you may have walked by an art exhibit that was in the rotunda. It featured a colorful 9x6 ft diorama of a neighbourhood, a community quilt and other art works by the kids and youth of Villaways, a Toronto Community Housing townhouse neighbourhood in North York that is undergoing the early stages of revitalization. The pieces in this exhibit were created by 28 young people aged 4-15 from Villaways who have worked with artists from Art Starts since we began our residency 7 years ago. The young people in this neighbourhood grappling with the knowledge that they will be losing their homes within the next two years and moved to a new temporary home and new schools somewhere in Toronto. This is especially daunting as most have never lived anywhere else and experience limited mobility in the city.

In this project, these young Villaways residents worked with Art Starts to create an artistic vision of their hopes and dreams for a renewed neighbourhood. We worked with Councillor Shelley Carroll to bring this exhibit to City Hall where it was exhibited in the rotunda during the first week of January. We held a reception on January 7<sup>th</sup> where the young artists and their families made it down to City Hall where they shared their artistic visions to both their councilor and to the Mayor. They felt heard. It was a BIG deal. Councillor Carroll in turn gave them a tour of City Hall and her offices. For the majority of the participants this was their first time ever going to City Hall. Through this process they learned that they do have a voice and can be heard by the people we elect to represent them. If I may borrow a line from an earlier deputant, Karen Emerson of Children's Peace Theatre, this is an example of the arts sparking the fires of civic engagement.

This initiative at Villaways and the subsequent exhibit and trip to City Hall is just one example of the high impact youth arts initiatives that have been prioritized with new arts funding from the City via the Toronto Arts Council. I could speak to many more examples that come from the other neighbourhoods we collaborate with. But the most important thing I would like to convey to the



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budget committee is that community-engaged arts has a profound impact on the lives of Torontonians and the increased investments in the arts are seeding hundreds of high impact initiatives in Toronto neighbourhoods that have been left behind, in particular those outside the downtown core. Council's commitment to ensuring that arts funding is at par with other major Canadian cities is crucial to sustaining this type of work. I applaud you for the steps you have taken thus far to ensure adequate support for the arts and I encourage you to continue keeping this a priority.

Most Sincerely,

Liz Forsberg  
Managing Director



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