



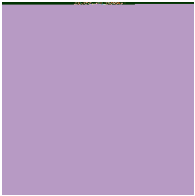
Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring 2011

# COMMUNITY CONNECTION

## GOOD JOBS FOR ALL

by Sharon Simpson

The Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project is now in its third year. As always this page of the newsletter is intended to offer you a brief insight into some of the other anti-poverty work taking place in and around the city. In the past three issues the focus has been on local neighbourhood based organizing activities. This time the aim is to offer you some information on a city-wide effort.



Formed in 2008, Good Jobs for All, a community-labour coalition, hosted a city wide conference in November of the same year. With over one thousand in attendance

participants shared experiences and engaged in dialogue on what policies are needed to ensure good jobs for both the present and future generation. A year later, this was followed by the Good Green Jobs for All conference.

While the group has twice proven they are capable of hosting successful conferences the question as to how sustainable such a broad base coalition, representing community, labour, social justice, youth and environmental organizations in Toronto is often posed. The answer may rest in the coalition's ability to focus on a common goal, in this case, good jobs, as a path to lifting many out of poverty.

To achieve this goal the coalition's work has focused on three key areas: investing in social infrastructure, a green economy for all and empowering workers. To this end they have

worked with grassroots community groups, residents and community social agencies to develop neighbourhood campaigns on equitable and accessible public services such as transit, library and recreation.

For example, in the Jane-Finch community they have worked with area residents and groups on greening the neighbourhood as well as putting forward progressive options to the municipal government on how committing to green manufacturing can create good jobs.

In order to empower workers the coalition has worked on giving voice to the unemployed and the under-employed through initiatives such as the minimum wage and the FIX E.I. campaigns. It is these efforts that have sustained the coalition.

As a group they have found the key to sustainability by working locally while thinking city-wide. This was apparent when they lent their support to the April 9, 2011 "Respect Rally". Attended by some 10,000 people, residents called on the municipal government to support, not cut, public

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# IN FROM THE COLD: SURVEY OUTREACH IN THORNCLIFFE PARK AND FLEMINGDON PARK

by Shabnam Meraj and Julie Chamberlain

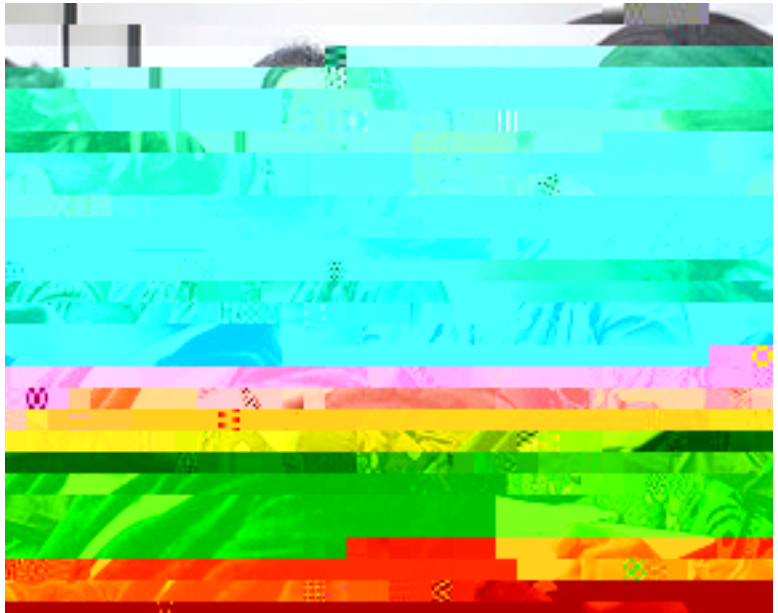
Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park are neighbouring communities in the central-east part of Toronto in Ward 26 Don Valley West. Connected to each other by the main thoroughfare Overlea Boulevard, a walk across the bridge brings you from one to the other – a cold and windy walk in the middle of winter. Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park were paired together as one site for the APCOL survey to reflect how the neighbouring communities are interconnected.

## SHABNAM'S VIEW

During the survey process, researchers learned a lot about the Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park communities. They got a glimpse of the real issues with on the ground realities and learned to deal with different kinds of personalities and people.

Thorncliffe Park and surrounding communities are continuously attracting immigrants from many parts of the world. While the majority of newcomers are South Asian, significant numbers of Middle Eastern and Spanish-speaking newcomers are also settling in the neighbourhood. The physical layout of the neighbourhood is conducive to

social integration; it has accessible housing, schools, social and settlement services, all necessary facilities and public places.



Sharon Simpson from Labour Community Services listens to community researcher Shabnam Meraj. Photo Courtesy of Joseph Sawan

Yet in this community people don't know each other. Some people were reluctant to answer survey questions, and some people were ready because they were thinking that the researcher will just pass on to them some questionnaire they'll take and fill it up and give it back. Some people were friendly and welcomed the researchers warmly. Some of them were really short of time but they showed the great sense of citizenship and contributed in the survey, keeping in mind the interest of their community and neighbourhood.

Different strategies were used by the researchers for taking the surveys. Community members recommended responsible and interested community individuals for the task, and once researchers got some respondents they referred to other ones.

Sometimes directly asking people if they

feel this problem in the area?' and they say 'yes, we feel.'”

Community researchers had a clear sense that some systemic issues need to be addressed for things to improve in the neighbourhood. Employers and all levels of government need to make a real effort to solve problems like underemployment; many people in Thorncliffe and Flemingdon have the experience of getting stuck in low wage, precarious jobs that don't match their skills and education. One respondent suggested APCOL add a question to the end of the survey: “What do you think the government should do to decrease these problems of poverty?”

Another community researcher noted how the immigration system keeps some people from participating in their neighbourhood as much as they'd like – struggling to make ends meet and having refugee status recognized can be a family's main concern for years.

DO YOU SPEAK ANTI-POVERTY?

One of the challenges for APCOL

# COLLEGE/COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: THE POTENTIAL FOR COMBATING POVERTY AND DEVELOPING COMMUNITY LEADERS

by Kizzy Bedeau and Peter Sawchuk

If there is one thing that is clear from even a quick scan of anti-poverty activity in the Greater Toronto area, it is that there are almost as many ways to go about it as there are groups doing it. There are people and groups of all types doing some form of anti-poverty activity. They may include action coalition builders, change agents, community-builders, advocacy groups, and/or grass-roots organizations and, among such groups, there is often a diversity of individuals of all social classes, ethnicities, socio-economic statuses, sexual orientations, ages, and genders.

The complexity of people and groups involved in such work brings with it a multiplicity of areas of focus, be it education, employment, drug/substance abuse, food security, mental health, health and nutrition, housing, harm reduction or policing. At any social intersection, anti-poverty work can be organized.

Following the FoodShare and Kingston-Galloway Orton Park case studies APCOL partnered with the Community Partnership Office (CPO) at George Brown College to conduct a case study of its Construction Craft Worker (CCW) pre-apprenticeship program.

The Construction Craft Worker pre-apprenticeship program is a unique community capacity building program that aims to provide access and opportunity to education for underserved populations. The

case study followed participants through the pre-apprenticeship program and also carried out interviews with program participants, both current and past, to develop a clear profile of how such programs could contribute to participant's lives and potential for community engagement/activism afterward.

Participants in the pre-apprenticeship program are connected to a wide network of organizations across the Toronto downtown core. Many of the participants have close ties to the Regent Park, Moss Park and St. James Town communities. Based on the nature of the program and these more extended linkages, the case study sought to contribute directly to the residents and their communities in the downtown east area. It addressed not only their experiences within the program, but also the potential contribution the program made to the lives of participants beyond the immediate goals of the program.

This case study relates to the APCOL project theme of "Good Jobs" by examining how at-risk youth transition to quality employment, and the direct and indirect affects education and employment have on individuals and their surrounding communities. This basic theme of employment is among the four basic needs cited in the APCOL proposal; a) Health/Nutrition/Food Security; b) Safe Shelter /Housing; c) Opportunity for Adequate Education; and d) Access to Employment, Vocational Training and Living Wages.

In addition to this direct connection to the four basic needs, this case study also emphasized the importance of learning, in the context of employment transitions, of individuals and how they may be developing into potential activists and community leaders. In this way the case study offered an opportunity to explore the transition of non-activists toward various forms of community participation and activism.

#### SOME KEY FINDINGS FOR ANTI-POVERTY ACTIVATION AND COMMUNITY

The case study revealed important answers to many questions. These included the barriers and supports in work placement, the distinct types of pedagogy and classroom-based learning in the program, prior school experiences, beliefs about education and





*Simon: Oh yeah for sure now.*

*Interviewer: Are you likely to make a contribution to the community now more than you would before?*

*Simon: I think a lot more because the neighbourhood I grew up in, with people my age or even the young bucks it would be an important thing to do. Growing up in my area there was nothing but shooting and drugs and the weed and all that nonsense so I would want to, maybe not alone, but I would like to see my neighbourhood*

# WESTON - MOUNT DENNIS: A RESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Zannalyn Robest

I first heard about the APCOL research project through my involvement with the Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) as a resident representative. The research was an opportunity to see how people of the area felt about issues in the neighbourhood. I was also hopeful about the possibility of the research findings serving as a quantitative document with which to organize and seek change.

Not all residents were willing to be recorded but all that I spoke with discussed with me their personal histories, what brought them to Weston - Mount Dennis and the problems that need addressing. Here are some of the issues residents spoke of during the interviews I conducted:

**MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION:** Taking a walk down Weston Road you are struck by how many people seemingly suffer from mental health and/or addiction issues. We are lacking a body, venue or mandate in the area to help families deal with the issue from a recovery perspective.

**HEALTHCARE:** Access to quality health-care is also a major issue. There is an over-reliance on clinics for primary health-care and the private doctors' offices in the area are often satellite locations that serve the area on select days.

**UNEMPLOYMENT/UNDEREMPLOYMENT:** According to City of Toronto statistics the population of Weston - Mount Dennis is not significantly unemployed. Indeed Weston

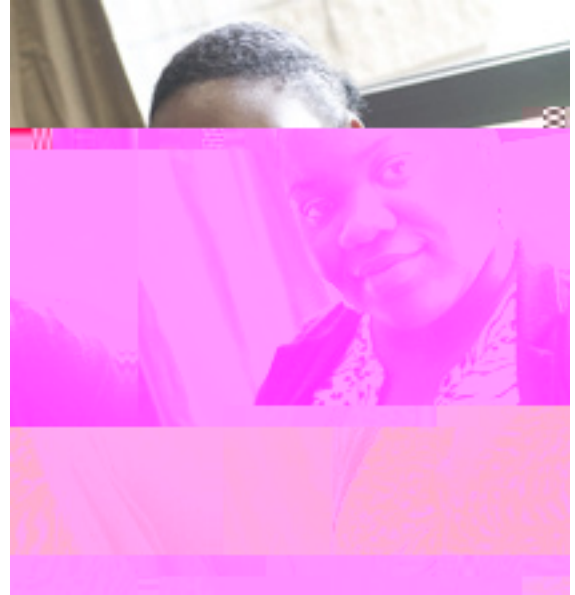


Photo of Zannalyn Robest Courtesy of Nabil Shash

- Mount Dennis goes to work but looking strictly at employment rates misses the point; underemployment, precarious labour and exploitation are issues related to employment in the area. Part-time work with no benefits or full-time hours at rates that fall below the minimum wage are the realities for many people who I spoke with, myself included.

**COMMUNITY DIVISIONS:** The homeowners of Weston - Mount Dennis are well-organized; they have numerous organizations that ensure that they have a strong voice and input in any changes that are happening in the area. The problem is tenants are not always included and little space for their participation is created. Tenants need to be

engaged in order to make these organizations truly reflective of the diversity in the area.

#### FEELS LIKE HOME

That said I feel at home in Weston – Mount Dennis. I have even listed my Weston address as my official address with the government of Canada as opposed to my mother’s Ottawa home, which served as my permanent address while I attended York University. In the seven years since I moved to Toronto to study I have held five addresses never really feeling like any one neighborhood was where I could see myself living for any extended period of time.

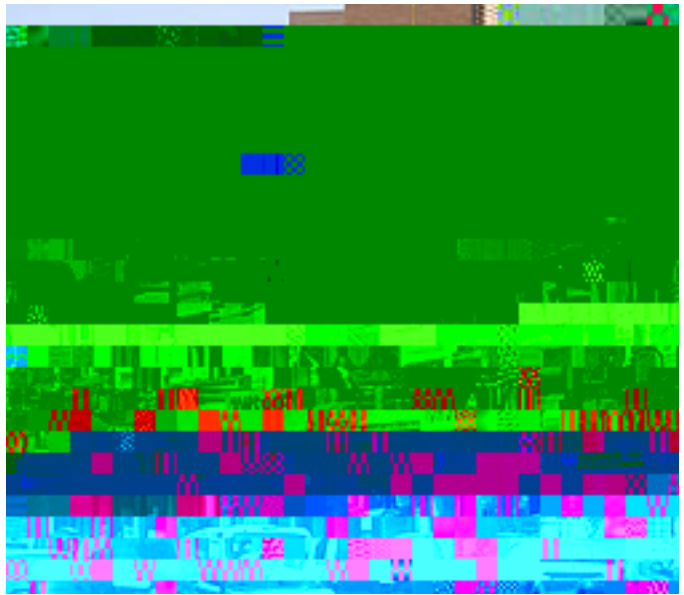
The APCOL research gave me an opportunity to learn about this neighborhood whose quirks I have come to appreciate. In fact many of the people I interviewed agreed. Even as they acknowledge the problems, they cited their desire to stay in this neighborhood. Although the survey questions were not directed at uncovering the Weston – Mount Dennis charm it is important to acknowledge the good things so people understand why they should be concerned and mobilizing to better their neighborhoods rather than to move elsewhere.

Whatever the area lacks, it makes up in the architectural beauty of its old buildings like the libraries and churches and the charm of its tree-lined streets. There is something appealing about the lively hustle and bustle of people running errands; the entrepreneurial spirit visible from the pervasiveness of the ‘mom and pop’ stores in the neighborhood; the old men who get together in the summer at the corner of Weston and Lawrence to

play board games. Lastly what I consider the perfect slice of heaven, the bike and footpaths that run along the Humber River, are right at my doorstep.

#### SMALL BUSINESSES

Weston - Mount Dennis has numerous nationalities who call the area home. Many of the small businesses are owned and operated by immigrants who serve the particular tastes and demands of specific nationalities. One of the survey questions focuses on the presence of big box stores, I wondered at whether they are considered an asset due to their abilities to provide work to a large number of residents or a problem. Small businesses that operate with a small employee pool mean fewer jobs are available. I see the negative implications for employment but feel that a healthy balance between large chains and small businesses is what is needed as they are a distinct feature of the area.



The intersection of Weston Road and Lawrence Ave. West Photo Courtesy of G. de Montmollin

### WESTON LIONS PARK

The area lacks a community centre where all residents can come together to organize. The result is a fissure between immigrant Canadians and native Canadians and the homeowners and tenants. While the Weston Lions Club is a great resource it is not a community centre and some of the divisions seen in the neighbourhood are duplicated by how the facilities are used. At the end of summer 2010 one of the three baseball diamonds was converted to a soccer field. I am excited to see the kinds of diversity this will bring to that section of the park.

### HUMBER RIVER PATHS

The bike and foot paths are wonderful to explore and a nice reprieve from the concrete and hustle and bustle of cars on the main roads of the area. People picnic and barbecue, have birthday parties and interact in a different way in that area. Men can be seen fishing, and families spend quality time without having to commute or pay a fee. The paths also serve as the exercise regimen for old and young.

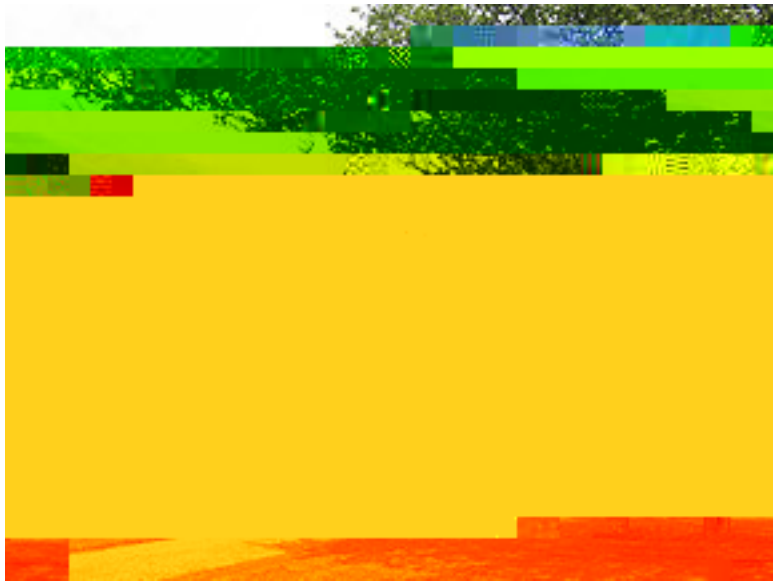
### INGREDIENTS FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

You can always find people at a local restaurant, coffee shop or bar. In that sense I feel the community is well positioned to unite and make changes for the better. There is a sense of community rooted in the knowledge that my struggle may be your struggle. There are already many organizations that have a strong voice in the area, however, they need to

be more inclusive. The issues of the most vulnerable residents should not be ignored but addressed.

We need a community centre; we need a substance abuse and mental health strategy. Opportunities need to be created for the success of the people who face barriers to education, employment and safe housing. One of the survey respondents pointed out that the cut-off age for programs geared toward youth in the community needs to be raised. I agree and feel that funding needs to be diversified to not only support youth but also to support the parents that they live with, and address their living situations.

The residents of the area need to come together to mobilize around these issues. We must recognize that it is in all of our own individual interests to ensure that our neighbour is okay. I am hopeful that the APCOL research will serve as a tool with which to do this work. z



Weston Lions Park. Photo Courtesy of G. de Montmollin

As part of my graduate program in Adult Education and Community Development at the University of Toronto I travelled to India to spend 6 months with a Gandhian non-violent people's

*Ekta Parishad* is organized as a federation of organizations and individuals governed by a national council at the national level. It is structured similarly at the provincial and district level. The leader of the movement is Shri P.V. Rajgopal. He is a long-term Gandhian activist, trainer and leader. Many of the organizations that are part of the federations were started by Rajaji or his protégés.

The first key lesson for students of social movements is the grounding of the movement in people's material lives and problems. The basis for organizing and mobilizing is the strong relationship of trust built over several years by *Ekta Parishad* workers carrying out community education, and community leadership development activities and delivering services that directly impact on people's lives. Some of the services they deliver include: educating the communities about bureaucratic processes for different government services, helping out the community in accessing these services, advocating on their behalf with government officials.

Community education also includes making the connection between the poverty communities experience and the systemic inequality due to poor implementation of government welfare schemes and lack of control over livelihood resources. Their activities in the villages include forming village level community based organizations, identification of issues, planning and carrying out non-violent social actions for the resolution of people's issues and organizing communities for development related initiatives.

I am differentiating between the services workers deliver and the activities they carry

out to point out the trust they earn by working for the community's welfare. People realize that the worker's translate their words into action and begin to trust them.

The second lesson from *Ekta Parishad* comes from considering the movement's analysis and framing of core issues. In India, like in Canada, there are structural determinants that are based on birth. Structural determinants of poverty like race, gender, class and sexual orientation can be comparable to the caste system in India. The commonality in both these structural determinants is that they are determined by the family in which one is born.

But *Ekta Parishad* does not restrict itself to identity. Instead, the analysis places the responsibility of poverty squarely on the State's shoulder. According to *Ekta Parishad's* analysis, poverty in India, in which majority of the population live in villages and forests, is linked to lack of control over livelihood resources like land, water and forest. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure people's control over their livelihood resources.

The issues are framed in such a way that government is held accountable for poverty and for delivering sustainable interventions that serve not just to increase welfare and social security related programs but to create an enabling environment that promotes self-reliance among the poor in the villages of India.

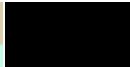
This solution will also address urban poverty by addressing it at its root-cause level. *Ekta Parishad* leaders see urban poverty in India as being primarily due to migration of rural poor into urban areas, and their inability to adapt to a structure and environment that is alien to them.

Addressing rural poverty will stem migration of rural poor into urban areas and solve the problem at a fundamental

# COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS LEARN ABOUT THE APCOL SURVEY IN ST. JAMES TOWN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSEPH SAWAN

The most recent APCOL survey training led by student researchers took place on May 3rd when three youth and four women from St. James Town were trained to do the survey in their neighborhood. Pictured on this page are Bindu John, Sun Zhu, Agnes Thomas, Amna Shah, Nivethan Amrithulingam, Adwoa





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## RECRUITMENT

Often times community organizing emphasizes the need for resources to drive recruitment. While there is evidence that people respond positively to having space and time for getting involved, most people cite their friendships as the primary way they first became involved in activism.

## MOTIVATION

Understanding motives for involvement can potentially help us sustain involvement in a healthy and positive manner. If someone n

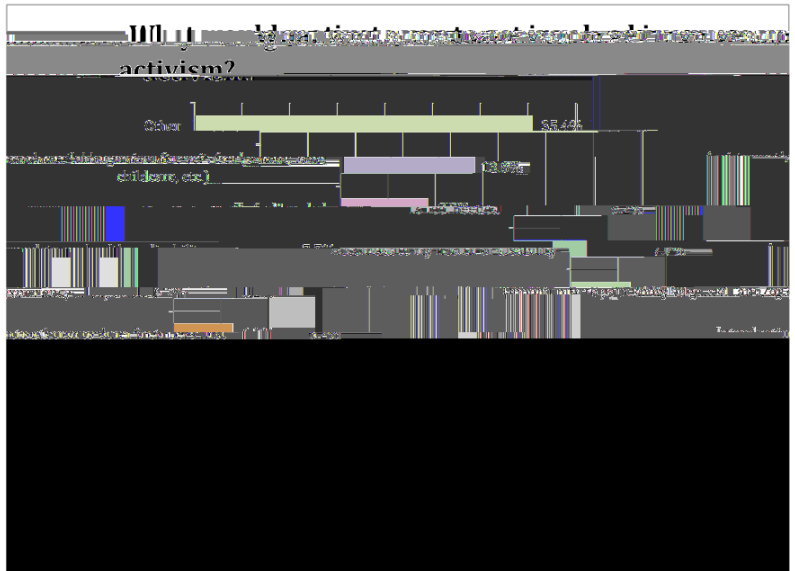
## SUSTAINING ACTIVISM

If we have good space, excellent organizations and plenty of time, will people remain involved in activism? Well, we must consider all aspects of involvement, and here we can see that the drive to be involved with the issue and other people, and being able to impact one's community are the most important components in sustaining activism. When anti-poverty activity becomes a part of one's everyday life, contributing to one's basic human needs, then we may be more likely to continue our involvement over time.



## RECRUITMENT

Community outreach is probably one of the most challenging aspects of community organizing activities. We often find ourselves tired and frustrated when people continue to ignore our calls to action. As we begin to talk to more 'non-participants' it is becoming clear that among many reasons, some factors that motivate activism require minimal resources and emphasize the importance of relationship building.



Could it be that one of the key motivating factors is the desire 'to feel needed'? How can we develop organizing strategies that are inclusive and informative?

KEEPING

