

A Major Research Paper

HEAR MY VOICE- A RESEARCH PROJECT ON YOUTH NEEDS IN THE JANE  
AND FINCH COMMUNITY

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A Major Research Paper submitted to the Graduate Program in Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Education

Graduate Program in Education  
York University  
Toronto, Ontario

March 2017

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### **Abstract**

This research paper explores the current research on urban youth needs, and ways in which youth workers can develop and employ strategies to engage marginalized youth. The purposes of this study is to gain insight on the needs, challenges, and benefits of youth engagement for youth living in the suburban/urban Jane and Finch community, and explore youth knowledge of available resources and services to them in the community. In addition, this paper will give youth service organizations/ youth workers the opportunity to provide insight into the challenges and needs working with young people in the community. The findings from this study confirm that there is a significant amount of young people who are unaware of the resources available to them, and there are many challenges to service providers to reach and offer quality services to young people in the community.

## **Background**

In 2004, Griffin Centre received \$16,625 from the City of Toronto, Community Safety Initiative funding to work with residents of Jane and Finch community to develop a youth service strategy and a needs assessment of youth from the community. The research stemmed over a 1-year period, providing the opportunity for young people to become more civically engaged. This project was the beginning of creating a foundation of utilizing youth participatory action research in a priority neighborhood to address and develop strategies for youth concerns and challenges in marginalized communities.

This paper seeks to create a new report on identifying existing youth programming, service gaps, and issues facing youth and youth needs in the Jane-Finch Community. This report will compliment the initial report that was began in 2004, as an action based community research project, led by a youth program named the Young Leaders of the Inner City, a program of the Jane/ Finch Community and Family Centre. Griffin Centre, a children's mental health centre, led this initiative, which is an agency that offers multiple services in the community.

I initially became involved in the Griffin Centre research project as a volunteer in the youth department. I was new to the community, and felt this project was a great way to become more grounded in the community and grow my intellectual curiosity of youth and community needs of the Jane and Finch area. The young leaders comprised of 3 project coordinators, and 6 self-driven youth ages 15-19 who demonstrated an interest in bringing a voice to the youth population of this community. This group worked collaboratively to develop survey questions that would generate insight of understanding the needs of youth. These youth were instrumental in the development, process, and summative evaluations of the research project. The youth were engaged in the entire

process and were responsible for conducting interviews, distribution of surveys, and data analysis of the surveys. Approximately, 300 completed surveys were collected and the surveys were distributed to a purposeful sample of youth, aged 14-24, who were connected to various community supports and participated in programs and services offered in the community. The youth were also able to reach individuals who were “disconnected” from these immediate resources by hosting tournaments and community events. The surveys were distributed in spaces where youth frequented, such as local fast food franchises, libraries, and malls, to reach a multitude of youth from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, age, and gender. The intent of the surveys was to gain a deeper understanding of youth concerns, challenges, and barriers they’ve experience living in the community. This research project was also the beginning of a continuous interest in investigating concerns and creating strategies on how to address youth issues, which brings me to my intent of this paper.

This research paper provides a new exploration of youth needs in the urban/suburban Jane and Finch community, by collecting new data on youth needs of the Jane and Finch community. I have identified 4 goals of this research. The first goal is to engage young people and encourage them to be a part of a broader discussion that serves to analyze current youth needs, develop plausible solutions for long-term impact, and change the climate on youth programs and services in the community. The second goal supports the work of youth-serving organizations in the community, by providing service providers the opportunity to discuss their work through observations, relationships, and needs. Thirdly, the knowledge and information collected will be shared with service coordinators to reshape current programs and services offered. Fourthly, this research maintains the discussion from initial Neighborhood Action Report conducted in 2005, led by Griffin Centre and the Young Leaders. This research study

stems from my own personal experience working in the community, growing up in a priority neighborhood and co-facilitating the initial research project led by the Griffin Centre.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The decision to focus my research on re-examining youth needs, programming and service gaps is a result of my direct connection and experience working on the initial Jane/ Finch Neighborhood Action Research Report project, and both living and working in a marginalized community. Growing up in a low-income community was a very challenging experience for myself. The expectations were very low, and success meant graduating from High School. Beyond low expectations, from personal experiences, there were limited resources, supports, and programming for youth. My building was 1 of 3 complexes, one of which was a condo with a recreation centre that was shared amongst all buildings. The staff became mentors, and provided a safe space for young people, engage in sports, and other social- recreation programming, i.e summer camps. But after a while, there was a great deal of discussion amongst the building management, and the condominium board decided that they no longer wanted to share the space, therefore, revoking access to other building residents, including the youth residents. In addition to the centre being closed, outdoor basketball and tennis courts were closed, and parks were removed. These changes created many challenges, and displaced many youth and its residents, in the community.

My memory of this experience was my own determination to work with young people, and advocate for youth spaces that will engage youth, which led me to volunteering in the youth department at the Jane/ Finch Community and Family Centre as I was completing my undergraduate degree. The young leader's program was one of the several programs that I volunteered in. At that time, the group was in the preliminary stages of their research.

My participation in the execution of initial research stems from my interest in developing a voice for youth to steer change. My involvement opened my eyes to the



extent of the problems youth were facing in one of the city's priority neighborhoods. The research was grounded in recognizing and acknowledging the lived experience of the youth of marginalized communities, particular concerns around space, employment, sexual health and health support, police violence and harassment, and violence in the community. Since this report, there has been many changes in the community to address the voiced youth concerns expressed through the 2005 report. An investigation of space, particularly youth spaces and asset mapping was an essential outcome of this project. As a result of this project, The Jane-Finch Community and Family Centre received funding from United Way Greater Toronto to secure a unit in the local mall to create a youth space, named The Spot. I am currently the manager of settlement services at the job, and I also co-manage the Spot youth space. The attention the report increased and enhanced new and existing programs and services in the youth sector.

## **Statement of Key Questions and Discussion of Literature**

An extensive literature review was conducted to explore the following questions: What does the existing research say on urban youth needs? What strategies are used to engage marginalized youth? Does race and socioeconomic status affect the participation of youth in programming and services? In addition, to these questions, I wanted to understand the challenges youth service providers were facing working with the youth population, therefore, personal/professional insights were investigated using the following questions: What barriers exist for a service provider serving the youth population? How does service providers, who serve marginalized communities, view the importance of engagement and how do they define youth engagement? Does race, socio-economic status, or environment of the community affect youth engagement? Asking these questions was pertinent in identifying and understanding youth engagement strategies and how other mitigating factors that can prevent or influence their engagement. This major research paper will explore the broader key questions: What are youth perspectives on youth issues and needs?

How can we reframe the negative public discourse of youth to a positive discourse that highlight assets and cultural wealth of youth residents? How can youth assets be strengthened through community connectedness? What does youth engagement look like in marginalized communities? How can we engage, connect, support, and maintain rapport with these youth? What current strategies/ principles/ frameworks exist for youth engagement? Do the existing models of youth engagement focus on working with youth of marginalized communities?

## Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this research study, I will be employing Delgado and Stefancic (2001) Critical Race Theory to support and heighten my understanding of the various approaches and guiding principles on how race and racism impacts youth development and engagement. I will be using CRT to contextualize how the underlying issues of race, socioeconomic status, and environmental racialization, play a key role in youth participation, engagement in community activities, and accessing services.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) as explained by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) “is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (p.3)”. I have chosen to use this theory as it will inform my lens of perspective, shifting the collective mindset of focusing on the issues, but rather creating solutions to address the problems. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) outlines the following themes of CRT speak to the underlying issues of race, power, and privileged as it relates to how it can potentially further minorities.

Table 1:

The Six tenets of CRT, as outlined by Delgado and Stefancic are as followed:

Theme	Characterization
Race as ordinary	Racism is difficult to address
Interest conversion	Race advances the system of the privileged vs. the non-privileged
Social construction	Race or races are products of social constructions of society.
Differential racialization	Dominant society racializes different minority groups, depending on needs
Intersectionality	Each race has its own history and origins
Unique voice of Colour	Minority groups are the experts in their own histories and are better able to communicate their experiences

Note. Adapted from “Critical Race Theory: An Introduction,” by R. Delgado and J. Stefancic, 2001. Copyright 2001 by New York University Press

From the outlined themes above, it is clear that Critical Race Theory can be used to study the factors of racism, discrimination, and oppression and its relationship to youth engagement of marginalized communities. Although racism is now an inhabitant in our society, it is not an ideology that people are born with; it is a belief that is taught and passed down by generations from those who exercise superiority based on race. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) contends that CRT ideas can be used to understand issues of concern, and attempts to understand our social situation and how to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better (p.3).

Yosso (2005) further builds on the CRT framework, by shifting the social knowledge and perspective from deficit thinking to the cultural wealth of individuals. In the article “Whose culture has capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth” (2005), Yosso explains, “the CRT framework can be used to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourses” (p.70).

Yosso argues that we need to move away from ideology that upper and middle class are the only two cultural groups that hold “capital”, by shifting our thinking away from the assumptions of the ‘lack’ of social and cultural capital required for social upward mobility, to look at the community assets or “community cultural wealth” that represents the capital that marginalized communities currently hold and maintain. As Yosso (2005) mentions, that CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of communities of colour as places full of cultural poverty or disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from these communities’ cultural assets and wealth (p.82). CRT adds to efforts to continue to expand the dialogue of racism to recognize ways in which our struggles for

social justice are limited by the discourse that omits and thereby silence the multiple experiences of People of Colour (p.73). Yosso (2005) further demonstrates that the definition and understanding of cultural capital were birthed from a white elitist point of view that has set the limitation on the idea of 'wealth'. For Yosso (2005), Community Cultural Wealth is defined as being "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and used by communities of color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (p.77). This paper will also demonstrate the wealth of community services as community assets, and the importance of investing into these social programs and services to strengthen and develop the youth community.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review was conducted as a direct result of my experiences working with youth who live in high-risk neighborhoods and growing up in a marginalized community. In addition, my varied work and personal experiences with delivering services to youth, selected courses and course readings have raised critical questions and discussions on youth engagement and youth spaces that require further exploration.

The purpose of this literature review is to gain better insight on the knowledge of available services and programming for youth in the community, and how they can better support the holistic development of youth living in the Jane and Finch area. This literature review will also provide context to the community itself, and youth engagement strategies, what youth engagement is, and how it impacts or plays a key role in youth development from adolescence to adulthood. It will also explore how service providers attempt to address the needs of youth and challenges to supporting and engaging young people. Lastly, and most importantly, the review aims to ascertain whether current literature exists that describe the impact and outcomes of an effective framework of youth development and engagement that can be adopted in marginalized and racialized communities.

## **Methodology of Literature Review**

The first section of the review will provide a brief overview of youth from urban communities, which will then be preceded by exploring the terminology of “at-risk” to provide the foreground for the paper. Following, I will explore the risk factors of living in urban communities and how they perpetuate stereotypes and possibly inhibit success. This will also be followed by protective factors that can be used to promote autonomy, confidence, and perseverance. This review will also look at how prevention and intervention programs have been introduced and integrated into urban neighborhoods to deter risk behavior and how youth engagement is critical to the strength, impact, and success of youth programs and services in marginalized communities.

The second section of this review will provide a context of the community. It will examine the current social conditions of this particular community and the current climate of the youth population. This review will also examine the principles of youth engagement. It will also look at strategies and barriers to youth engagement, which will include perceptions, ideologies, and challenges of youth engagement and the limitations youth programming. This review will be informed by scholarly texts that explore the context of youth engagement and current youth engagement frameworks in the United States and Canada.

The information acquired for the literature review includes works that were obtained from various sources and interdisciplinary search to gain a thorough depth of work that has also examined various aspects of this topic. Terms such as: “youth”, “young”, “adolescence”, “urban communities”, “urban neighborhoods”, “urban area”, “risk behavior”, “risk factors”, “protective factors”, “after-school programs”, to name a few were used to compile a vast variety of scholarly journals, peer-reviewed articles, books,

and conference presentations. Although the majority of data collected was U.S. based, I believe it speaks to and provides a foundation to the topic at hand.

### ***Community, Stigmatization, and Context***

Jane and Finch is an urbanized suburb located in the northwest area of the city. It is a sub-area of the larger Black Creek community and has one of the largest youth populations in the GTA. It is a community that has one of that has the most diverse social fabric makeup in North America, with over 80 ethnic-cultural groups and speaking over 112 languages and dialects (City of Toronto, Community Profile, 2006). According to Assets Coming Together for Youth (ACT For Youth, ), a research project conducted by York University and the Jane and Finch community, “Jane and Finch is also one of Toronto’s densest communities, representing one of the cities highest concentration of subsidized housing units. The community is characterized by distinctive clusters of multi-unit housing, high-rise, and townhouse dwellings that stand-out from the largely single-detached and semi-detached ownership-dwellings in the area” (<http://www.yorku.ca/act/janefinch.html>).

James (2012) further explains the structural make-up of the community, he explains, “It is worth noting that, despite the cluster of subsidized high-rise apartments and townhouses, the area is not dominated by social housing. It is estimated that there are significant number of market rent units among semi-detached homes, townhouses, high-rises, and condominiums” (p.32). But, despite the fact that this community has a wealth of real estate, beyond the high rise, the negative stereotypes persist through the unfavorable media attention.

Jane and Finch has become nationally known as one of Canada’s most troubled neighborhoods in the GTA. Back in 2005, what was recognized as the city most violent year, was named the “year of the gun”-“ the city had fallen victim to “fifty plus gun related



murders of that year- many of them young black men shot by their peers- involved few gunmen and murder victims from Jane and Finch” (James, 2012, p.19). Yet, although many of these incidents occurred outside of the community, Jane and Finch became an object under a microscopic lens, a place that garnered much attention, and needs to be dissected, analyzed, and even more surveillance.

Jane and Finch became even more infamously known in 2007, when Jordan Manners, a 15-year old black boy was shot and killed at one of the local high schools in the community. With the increase media attention on black-on-black crime, crime, and violence in the community, it heightened and played into the creation of fear, but also solidified the community as being “ at-risk”.

James (2012, p. 20) further builds on the idea of “at-risk” community by elaborating that students from the urban high school, where the death of Jordan Manners occurred were considered to be at risk because of the community where they live and where such troubling incidents are seen to be inevitable. James further explains that:

“These neighborhoods are thought to be populated mostly by African descent. And while African Canadians might not be the largest ethnic-racial group at Jane and Finch, there is a tendency to categorize it as a “Black” area. This is likely why, as noted above Torontonians, the media and government representatives were looking at Jane and Finch during “the year of the gun”. (James, 2012, p.20)

Although Jane and Finch have been framed and perpetuated as Toronto’s top mayhem community, the issues of poverty, youth violence, and crime is not a homogenous issue to this community, it is a national concern. Just recently, memorials were held to recognize the shooting deaths of two young people, Shyanne Charles, 14

and Joshua Yassay, 23 and the one-year anniversary of the Danzing Street shooting. The incident was described as one of the worst incidents of gang-related violence in the city's history- Toronto police chief Bill Blair in a news article ("Tuesday marks one-year anniversary of Danzig St. shooting,"2013). This shooting occurred in another priority low-income social housing complex.

The stigmatization of the above-mentioned neighborhoods as James (2012) quotes as perpetually "troubled" neighborhoods, is the direct influence of the media construction of sustaining and branding marginalized, impoverished, and low social conditions perpetuating stereotypes and conjuring issues that emerge as isolated; and as inevitable situations. It is these events, in addition to, the ethnic, cultural, and SES of this community which places it within the "high-risk" or "priority neighborhood" category and a target for media infiltration.

As cited in James (2012) and Wacquant (2008) writes " these are the areas, where social problems fester and where "urban outcasts" reside, resulting in such areas getting disproportionately negative attention from the media, politicians, and store managers" (p.1). Wacquant further mentions:

"That stigmatized neighborhoods become known to outsiders and insiders alike, as the "lawless zones" the "problem estates," the "no go areas" or the "wild districts" of the city, territories of deprivation and dereliction to be feared, fled from and shunned because they are- or such is their reputation, but in these matters perception contributes powerfully to fascinating reality- hotbeds of violence, vice, and social dissolution. Owing to the halo of danger and dread that enshrouds them to the scorn that afflicts their inhabitants, a variegated mix of dispossessed households, dishonored minorities and disenfranchised immigrants, they are typically depicted from above and from afar in somber and

monochrome tones. And social life in them appears to be somewhat the same:

barren, chaotic, and brutish". (Wacquant, 2008, p.1)

Such stigmatizations of insolvent areas bring context of how the larger society perceives these racialized marginalized communities. But, further, how the residents are constructed into by-products of these endless perceptions of the mass media. In the article "Environmental Racialization: Linking Racialization to the Environment in Canada", Teelucksingh (2007) explains that environmental racism recognizes that individuals, populations, and communities bear a disproportionate burden of environmental risk due to their race or their perceived undesirability (p.647).

Teelucksingh (2007) further explains that racialization has consequences for the spatial organization of cities (p.648). For instance, in Toronto, many lower income neighborhoods are racialized, regardless of the actual racial composition of the neighborhoods and are more at-risk of criminal activity (Teelucksingh, 2007).

To further emphasize Teelucksingh, the understanding of environmental racism, those living in these "urban ghettos" have slowly come to understand the makings and stereotypes of their community. A small group has voiced their fear and disgust through media outlets, without realizing the potential damage it may have on the community they live in. These attitudes, through media, are misconstrued and understood as the representation of all residents in the community without any disclaimer. Further, add to the isolation of this so-called "priority" community and continuum of racialization of the Jane and Finch community.

In addition, these "attitudes" have become a cyclical conundrum for the younger people of the community, as it emplaces invisible and visible barriers to their growth as individuals of our society. So much so that it has caught the attention of the government to address and devise solutions. For example, one of the biggest systemic challenges to

young people living in priority “racialized” neighborhoods, is accessibility to employment. Many young people in the community are subjected to and victims of demographic prejudices, in which many of them are not seen as employable based on where they reside. This understanding has become the reality of most young people, which maintains on a macro scale, the cycle of poverty; and, on a micro level, feeds ideology of youth being viewed as problems.

In a reactive and intervention measure in part of the government, the Ministry of Children and Youth services announced the youth opportunities strategy to help youth build a brighter future by providing funding, opportunities and resources that will help young people reach their full potential. As outlined on the Ministry's of Children and Youth website- “The Youth Opportunities Strategy recognizes that some youth, particularly those in marginalized and stigmatized communities, often do not have access to opportunities and supports that would help them to be successful in life”. (<http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/news/backgrounders/01162007.aspx>.)

This initiative was one of the many initiatives that were implemented and complimented by Prime Minister Paul Martin announcement of \$50 million in funding for community agencies against guns and gangs violence, following a tour of a local school, community centre and housing complex, in the Jane and Finch community of November 9, 2005 to address the youth violence that occurred in the city that year. In fact, this initiative was the beginning of youth funding and youth strategic plans to curb youth violence and reduce barriers by providing accessibility to resources and employment. The Ministry of Children and Youth invested \$28.5 million in the first three years of the strategy to improve outcomes for youth and removing barriers in under-served communities, beginning primarily with neighborhoods in Toronto. With the support of government funding, although reactive, youth service providers in the Jane and Finch

community, as well as other priority neighborhoods were provided with the necessary financial support to provide coherent and productive programming to youth as a response to, again, delineating youth violence. But the service providers did not see this as an opportunity to be reactive, but proactive in finally being able to turn ideas into action, with this new wealth of funding.

This was also an opportunity to involve youth at the preliminary ‘blueprint’ stages in the engagement of developing, implementing, and influencing programs that were developed for them. The idea of youth engagement became the driving factor and birth of youth inclusion, utilizing the assets and wealth of adolescence in Jane and Finch, embracing their risk factors, developing strategies to minimize them, and finally building on their community wealth of protective factors.

### ***Exploring the lived experiences***

It is no secret that there is a disproportionate number of youth that resides in lower income communities. In Jane and Finch alone, youth represent 20% of the overall population of ward 8 (City of Toronto Ward Profiles, 2011). The reality of most urban communities is that there are populations of youth living in these communities, which in turn results in an increase in stereotypes, barriers, and low- expectations.

The needs of urban youth are very different from the larger youth population. Most urban neighborhoods have earned a reputation of being violent, gang infested, and overall unsafe; a pocketed community isolated and excluded from the larger society. The depiction of the community through the lens of the media has construed the perception of marginalized people and the community overall. The images depicted and the messages conveyed all focus on the dire need for society to protect themselves from the people of these neighbourhoods, which generated through media. So much so, that they

influence policy and funding direction with policing, legislation, and courts. All of which are presented to protect the wider society from the individuals of these of communities.

Yet, the social depiction of such communities rarely ever influences the increasing need of investment into the community unless it is to further surveillance, or police the community. It is very difficult to grow up in such a high profile low-income community; especially for youth that have complex needs, and are constantly trying to position themselves to become more resilient. Youth cope every day with dealing with root causes of violence.

Low- income, urban youths, most of whom are racialized minorities living in distressed neighborhoods are at higher risk for not developing the required skills needed to have a healthy transition from adolescence to adulthood. Environmental barriers expose at-risk youth to varying adversities that very often hinder the successful outcomes of their lives. Consequently, each context has evolved to provide protective factors that assist in mitigating the unconstructive effects and help to ensure the success of its community members.

Youth, who are pre-disposed to community violence and crime, are at an increase risk of facing challenges to adequate social and economic opportunities. The motivation of this paper hopes to address what the sector can do to better serve the needs of young people from this community.

Many of these young people have developed resilient behaviors. They have developed strategies to utilize their own protective factors to navigate the community and the system. For example, youth have accessed parents, mentors, community agencies to negotiate their paths through systemic racism and racial discrimination, isolation, lack of socio-economic opportunities, illicit drugs, and violence that characterizes their community. Werner and Smith's study cited in Bernard (1997)

indicates that these supports have assisted students, who were born into high-risk environments, in developing their innate resiliency and consequently achieving, despite the adversities they face. For some, this strengthens their value systems and their sense of individualism in their community. And for others, the lack of engagement heightens their risk to be involved in at-risk behaviors. Some of the coping mechanisms used to navigate through their community (e.g. resistant behavior, aggression, etc.) can potentially negatively affect their capacity to access opportunities, programs, and needed resources and support services. According to Learner et al (2000), and Besharove and Gardiner (1998),

“Youth disconnectedness, a term used to describe youths’ non-participation in community social systems such as schools, work, opportunities, has reached epidemic proportions in our society. These groups of young people are also higher risk to be in contact with the youth criminal justice system and being disproportionately suspended and expelled from high school in comparison to other youth. It is important to note that the interaction between young people and their environment is crucial on the impact of success a young person may have. Their response to and interaction with their environment can either increase their resiliency to barriers faced within their neighborhood or have an adverse effect” (p.799)

The focus of this literature review is to conceptualize the needs of at-risk youth in urban communities by focusing on emerging needs that have been captured by previous literature. The youth of urban communities are under pressure to debunk the myths and stereotypes of their community, but also the negative perception of youth from the communities these communities as well.

Literature has shown that young people living in urban communities require additional support and services that are not just limited to tangible learning. According to Ross (2002), youth also require social support that initiates their development to deal with the social pressures that are inherent in being a youth living within marginalized communities. "Youth living in urban areas of concentrated poverty need to overcome all of the challenges inherent in adolescence while navigating through the obstacles imposed by an often precarious environment" (Ginsburg et al., 2002, p.1136).

### ***Civic Engagement***

Understanding how youth, particularly from low-income communities connect with their neighborhoods has become a research interest for many academics and scholars over the last decade. This interest, according to Fogel (2004), Sarason (1974) and Zeldin (2002) stems "from the underlying assumption that individuals behave in ways that are in accordance with their perceived attachment to their community and its social networks" (p.336) Fogel uses the explanatory concept of Sense of Community (SoC) to explain the lack of community connection amongst youth. Fogel explains "various forms of crime, drug dealing, etc. are behaviors that suggest a lack of neighborhood attachment or lack of SoC" (p.336).

The idea of SoC, is parallel to Besharov and Gardiner (1998) concept of "youth disconnectedness" (p.799), which is used to describe youths' non-participation in community social systems such as schools, work, and opportunities" (p.798). Marginalized young people are at a higher risk of becoming in contact with the law and are disproportionately suspended and expelled from school in comparison to other youth from a different demographic residing. The disconnection of youth from their environment is created from the feeling of isolation and marginalization that has been created and perpetuated from the media and society as a whole.



Besharove and Gardiner (1998), argues “youth who are disconnected more than 2 years are more likely to engage in activities that can potentially be problematic for the community”(p.804). “Youth Disconnectedness” amongst youth from the Jane and Finch area has been impacted by both external and internal factors. The external factors extend to community violence, poor relationships between youth and officers, gangs, etc. These elements are all a reality of the everyday lived experiences for many youth. This behavior, however, stems from internal barriers created by young people. These internal barriers are identified as poor self-esteem, a level of motivation, and fear or embarrassment of failure (Spitler, Kemper, & Parker, 2002). Understanding the numerous barriers and obstacles adolescents face is vital for them to have an internal drive and take responsibility for their success or create their own opportunity for success.

However, it is important to acknowledge the realities of many of these youth. The participation in community programs is not a priority for most youth; it is about survival. For service providers, understanding the barriers and obstacles marginalized youth face is vital in understanding the drive and determination for success or creating their own opportunities for success. These internal and external factors identified have both contributed towards the identification of these youth as being “at-risk”.

### ***Conceptualization of term “at-risk”***

The term “at-risk” is a concept that carries various definitions but all definitions have similar concepts of the term and all speak from a deficit-thinking model. “At-risk” is a term that has become attached to children and youth who are exposed to; and are experiencing hardship in varying ways: poverty, abuse, low academic achievement, mental health, and juvenile delinquency, and violence. According to Swahn and

Bossarte (2009), “the underlying rationale for using this shorthand to describe youth who may be high risk, at risk, or who live in high-risk communities is based on efforts to streamline resources and to maximize the effectiveness of targeted prevention programs and interventions” (p.225). This term is normally considered when speaking of young people from urban communities, because of their social location in society. Current and previous reports defined “at-risk youth as being homeless, street-involved, currently using illicit drugs, belonging to an ethnic minority, and/ or living in economically disadvantaged urban neighborhoods (Paterson and Pannesa, 2008, p.26). Youth from the Jane and Finch community has to often been labeled as being “at-risk”.

Previous research has consistently alluded to these youth as “deficits” of society. They have been labeled, scrutinized, and at times ostracized because of their postal code, rather than being judged based on their abilities and assets. It is understandable that these youth have fallen within the ideology of the self-fulfilling prophecy created by the wider society. However, I do not want to negate the experiences and engagement of other youth from the community, but rather, be inclusive to the representation of the experiences of all youth from this community. Many reasons why there has been a dichotomy between youth groups from the community are due to the relationships and connection one group has over the other.

Fogel (2004) and Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, and Notaro (2002) argue, “The influence of natural adult mentors may serve as a protective factor in some areas and increase the resilience of adolescent exposed to negative peer behaviors such as delinquency”. Fogel (2004) and Zimmerman et al (2002) research is similar to the literature on youth engagement and echoes the importance and benefits of positive adult relationships/ allies.

### ***Models of Youth Engagement***

Youth engagement is one of the most essential connections a young person can have. Not only does it help with skills development, it also provides the opportunity to create and have meaningful relationships. The term “youth engagement” has evolved over the last 5 years. It has taken on a broader context to be more inclusive to youth and what it means to be engaged. According to the Centre of Excellence of Children’s Well-being, Youth engagement is “The meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself. The kind of activity in which the youth is engaged can be almost anything - sports, the arts, music, volunteer work, politics, social activism - and it can occur in almost any kind of setting”. The outcome and impact of youth engagement is solely based on working from an asset-based approach when working with youth and the relationships developed between youth and adult allies. Research has shown that youth participation in local community after-school activities and programs has the ability to increase the protective factors of these youth, but consequently in higher risk youth (Fogel, 2004; Delgado, 1999; Parker & Franco, 1999).

Community organizations are increasing the number of activities offered during “high-risk” youth times to engage youth in positive spaces. These spaces aim to encourage civic engagement and have the potential for youth to rebuild a connection to their community (Fogel, 2004; Delgado, 1999; Parker & Franco, 1999). Innovative programs that encourage ownership, advocacy, and overall civic engagement have increased the level of investment and participation of youth. Fogel (2004) and Zeldin (2002) affirm these ideas, they state, “Creating opportunities for youth to participate in

neighborhood activities has strong potential as a strategic intervention intended to prevent youth disengagement from their immediate community” (p.337).

Many of these community programs aim to create “opportunities” for youth using the principles of youth engagement to create spaces and activities that promote pro-social behavior and relationship building. Patterson and Pannesa (2008) found that “young people who engage in positive community activities increase the probability for more sustainable interventions” (p.25), which in turn also increases the possibility of establishing friendships with peers who have similar interests and values. Patterson and Panessa (2008) research further demonstrates that there have been positive and stronger outcomes of youth engagement amongst “at-risk” youth, more than those who are less vulnerable. They further state that “at-risk youth are more likely to engage in interventions that promote and acknowledge resilience, rather than focusing on their deficits” (p.26).

“Engagement of youth is considered by many to be fundamental to the success of health, educational, recreational, and community programs in changing behavior” (Patterson and Panessa, 2008; p.25). Camino (2000) and Patterson and Pannesa (2007) note that “engagement activities may facilitate social integration into the larger community since such activities frequently provide connections to adult community leaders, promote community values and a sense of social responsibility, and introduce youth to community organizations and how they function” (p. 25).

The framework for youth engagement derives from the ladder concept of youth participation. The ladder concept is one the most widely circulated models of youth participation. (Patterson and Pannessa, 2008). The ladder concept was first introduced by Hart (1992, 1997), which proposes that youth engagement in programs varies on a

continuum between adult initiated with no youth input (level 1) to youth initiated with shared decision making with adults (level 8).

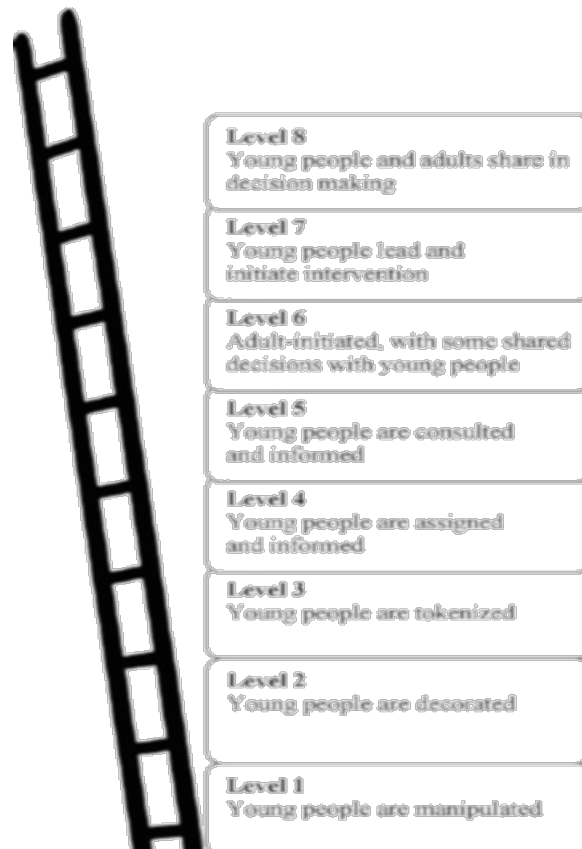


Fig. 1. Harts (1992, 1997) ladder of youth participation (engagement)

Hart (1992) and Hart, Espinosa, Illtsum and Lorenz (1997) argue that the first three levels on the ladder of youth participation are acknowledgement of the need of youth engagement. Not just at the participatory level, but also in the creation and development phase. “They indicate that the greatest benefits are achieved by adopting a participatory model” (Paterson and Panessa, 2008, p.25). Harts (1992, 1997) ladder of youth participation also identifies the indicators to determine the level of youth participation in programs and activities focused towards the youth population.

Although Harts (1992, 1997) model of youth engagement is widely referred to and used by many youth programs, there has been alternate youth engagement models developed by other researchers and academics that hold similar principles of Hart's model, but "do not share the idea of organizational commitment to youth engagement but rather indicate that there maybe different levels of engagement. However, it is important to not that models stress the benefits of full engagement." (Paterson and Panessa, 2008, p.25)

Research on the engagement of "at-risk" youth in community based programs in addressing the "overall "needs have marginalized youth is limited. Most of the recent literature reviewed on youth engagement examined only the positive outcomes of health related prevention and intervention programs and after-school programs. However, evidence from research has shown that higher risk youth that are engaged in some type of positive and/or intervention program has increased positive outcomes as a result of building resilient behavior. Furthermore, there is some evidence that shows that "positive outcomes of engagement are stronger for at-risk youth than those who are less vulnerable" (Paterson and Panessa, 2008, p. 26; Mahoney, Schweder, & Statin, 2002) and that they are more likely to fully engage in interventions that promote and acknowledge their resilience, rather than focusing on their deficits" (Paterson and Panessa, 2008, p. 26; and Bellin & Kovacs, 2006).

Paterson and Panessa (2007) argue that youth engagement is an ethical imperative. They note, "The foundational principle of engagement of youth in programs that affect them, is that this engagement is an ethical imperative (p.26)". Golding, Dent, Nissim, and Stout (2006) further resonates this idea by stating, "that there is a moral and ethical requirement that the voice of the recipient is heard in the design and evaluation of programs that have been created for them". Further, Mitra (2002) "situate this ethical

imperative within the ethical principle of autonomy". It is essential to the idea of youth engagement. As Patterson and Panessa (2008) note, "...interventions that are responsive to the ethical principle of autonomy provide an opportunity for at-risk youth participants to provide input and feedback about the relevance and appropriateness of the design and implementation of the intervention. They recognize their right to make decisions about programs that affect them" (p.26). Autonomy encompasses the right to make informed decisions but also the right to receive interventions that are relevant to one's need and life goals (Halpern et al, 2004). Authentic engagement means youth are completely involved and engaged in the decisions regarding program development.

### ***Youth Prevention and Intervention Programming***

Youth programs have been identified as a key component of youth engagement. Social youth prevention/ intervention programs have been introduced over the last two decades to disadvantaged communities to ameliorate high-risk behaviors. Wang et al., (1997) state, "The multiple risks and adversities faced by many children and youth cannot be addressed by the family, school, or community alone. Rather, the resources within these three contexts must be harnessed if we are to advance toward solving the educational, health, psychological, and social problems that confront families and their children" (p. 15). These programs have been implemented as a positive effort to respond to the voiced needs and requests of youth in the community, to reduce risk behaviors, and to ensure youth of urban communities are afforded opportunities similar to youth from affluent communities. As cited in Mauricio (2008), argues that:

"...providing the required resources for early intervention programs for at-risk students can reduce the gaps in social inequity. An example of this support is the over-determining success concept (Boykin as cited in Slavin, 1997) involves the provision of services that anticipate and deal with many of the problems that

students face. The process begins as schools identify all of the possibilities, which may cause a student to fail. Then, the personnel employ strategies to diminish these circumstances". (p.8)

Although the example provided is directly linked to education, the context in which it supports prevention programming is comparable to community based programs and services. The programs and services focus on offering holistic services that can be proactive on barriers that can impact success.

Literature on youth programming generally has argued that the overall goal of youth programs should be to promote positive youth development, even when seeking to prevent problem behaviors. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003), notes that, "Youth development programs help youth navigate adolescence in healthy ways and prepare them for their future by fostering positive youth development" (p.172). "Youth development programs can provide developmentally rich contexts where relationships form, opportunities for growth in multiple areas proliferate, and development occurs" (Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003, p.171). Programs vary in how they include these objectives in programs. However, generally speaking, youth development programs support participants in developing "competencies that will enable them to grow, develop their skills and become healthy, responsible, and caring youth and adults" (Roth, Brooks, and Gunn, 2003). As previously mentioned, programs that acknowledge youth resilience, are more likely to engage youth (Patterson and Panessa, 2007, p.26). Successful youth programs are not just about how many youth are participants, but also how they have contributed to the development, implementation, and culture of the program.

Youth participation in community programs is highly recognized as a protective factor. Youth participating in the development of program activities are keen to actively



participate and be engaged, and therefore increase aptitude for resilient behavior. Fogel (2004) notes “neighborhood organizations are increasingly calling on youths to participate in service and program activities in order to encourage youth civic engagement and attachment to their community” (p.337). Fogel (2004) continues the discussion, by stating “creating opportunities for youth to participate in neighborhood activities it has strong potential as a strategic intervention intended to prevent youth disengagement from their immediate community and society” (p.337).

Although we believe that youth development programs hold great virtue for improving the lives of young people, we should be mindful to not create unrealistic expectations. One program, although very influential and life changing cannot act as the prototype of all programs, but rather lead as an example and share knowledge to parents, schools, and other community programs of its success to reach and connect with other youth. Young people are not homogenously socialized by one individual factor, but are raised in the community, and should be supported by community programs, schools, and neighborhood. Paterson and Panessa (2007) acknowledge that at-risk youth are not a homogenous group. The needs of these youth vary, but the challenges they are facing are similar. And, it is also important to identify the factors that promote engagement differ in significance and meaning among various at-risk youth populations (French et al., 2003). Like the old saying goes “it takes a village, to raise a child”. The best way to reach, engage, and positively influence young people through programs is by developing a web of opportunities, making options available to all young people and ensuring those options are framed using the positive youth development model (Roth, Brooks, & Gunn, 2003, 1998; Merry, S.M., 2000; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2000)

### ***Positive Youth Development***

“Youth development programs prepare young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a structured, progressive series of activities and experiences, which help them obtain social, emotional, ethical, physical and cognitive competencies. They address the broader developmental assets, which all children and youth need (such as caring relationships, safe places and activities, good physical and mental health, marketable skills, and opportunities for service and civic participation), in contrast to deficit-based models, which focus solely on youth problems” (Damon, 1997; Damon & Gregory, 2003)

Youth programming has become an essential element of youth engagement. To better understand youth programming, it is important to understand the frameworks and principles of youth programming. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) introduce three defining characteristics of youth programming: program goals, program atmosphere, and program activities (Brooks-Gunn, 2003, p.172). The goal of youth development programs is to promote positive development, even when seeking to prevent problems behaviors (Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003). “Seeking to support the development of youth means being clear about what one hopes to accomplish – what are the goals of a youth program, what outcomes will demonstrate that these goals have been achieved, and what activities are most likely to produce these outcomes?” (Bonnell & Zizys, 2005, p.11)

Youth programs help adolescents build internal capacities and assets to build resilient behaviour. The atmosphere of youth development programs is an imperative tool in maintaining and engaging adolescents. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) explain, “the positive, youth centred atmosphere, or tone, conveys the adults’ belief in youth as resources to be developed rather than problems to be managed” (p.172).

In addition, the atmosphere in these programs reflects the “ideal” familial home, where there are supportive adults present to empower young people to develop competencies and resiliency. Lastly, program activities vary in how they are developed and implemented. However, it is a space, according to Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) that provides formal and informal opportunities for youth to nurture their interests and talents, develop new skills, and gain a sense of personal or group recognition. The activities of many youth development programs are leadership development opportunities, academic supports, and health education information (Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

One of the major benefits of positive youth development through programming is that it recognizes youth as resources that need further development, rather than problems of society that need to be managed. Providing and initiating youth to be involved is not just limited to seeing them as a uniform group, it requires individual attention, cultural appropriateness, and recognizing and acknowledging difference supports to develop group dynamics. Providing a safe space for all, and giving the responsibility of the group allows any group to determine the group culture and dynamics, thus, making them responsible for how the group works together. It is important to understand that in trying to further the goal of youth programming and youth development, it is necessary to provide and work from a holistic youth development framework that encompasses respect, connecting and building networks and relationships, in addition to the principles of the positive youth development.

Learner et al (2000), also provides a recipe for the success of positive youth development through programming. She summarizes the ingredients of positive youth development into the 5 Cs:

- a. Competence in academic, social, and vocational areas

- b. Confidence or a positive self-identity
- c. Connections to the community, family, and peers
- d. Character of positive values, integrity, and moral commitment
- e. Caring and compassion

Lerner et al (2006) approach compliments all aspects of promoting positive development in the lives of youth. She firmly believes that families, schools, and communities all have the capacity to embody the resources required to provide youth with these qualities through various avenues, and as a collective. Youth, in general, require a support unit, access to safe places, challenging experiences, and lastly, caring people daily. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003), capture the true essence of positive youth development by stating “ positive youth development should encompass all our hopes and aspirations for a nation of healthy, happy, and competent adolescents on their way to productive and satisfying adulthoods, and the future of this can be accomplished through constructive and positive youth programming”. But before we can completely divulge into engaging in and promoting positive youth development through programming, we have to retract to the actual needs of youth now, and how service providers are addressing these issues. The following section of this paper will discuss the methodology and data analysis.

### **Methodology of Data Collection**

Qualitative data collection methods were employed to give depth to researched questions that were explored and to further support my findings in the literature review. This research utilized mixed methodologies of data collection to gain information from multiple data sources- one-to- one interviews and surveys as the primary means of data collection. As explained by Creswell (2013) it is not reliable to depend on one source of data to provide an in-depth understanding of a topic but to diversify the information collected to incorporate multiple perspectives. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants from various disciplines within the social service sector to participate in the interviews.

Data was collected in 2 ways: First, a protocol consisting of distributing surveys to youth to gain insight into youth needs in the community in addition to gaining information of services used by participants. Second, the researcher conducted interviews with youth service providers to gain deeper insight into working with youth who face multiple barriers. By using interviews it will provide the opportunity to intimately discuss and explore the issues of youth needs and youth engagement.

### ***Participants***

It was my intention to design a survey that could illustrate the needs of youth from the Jane and Finch community. The sample population for the surveys was aimed towards 50 youth between the ages of 17-24, males and females who access services and programs in the Jane and Finch community. Surveying a diverse group of youth, varying from a different race, gender, and age; engaged and disengaged youth was particularly important because it will not only inform but will add value to the current research of youth needs from urban communities. This approach was best suited for the

nature of this project, as it allowed the opportunity to receive greater responses from youth.

Furthermore, to gain alternate perspectives on youth, I approached 10 youth service providers to participate in the one-on-one interviews. Out of the 10, I selected five community stakeholders to complete the interviews that sought to engage at-risk young people in coordinated and structured programs that work towards identifying and building the developmental assets of youth. The interviews allowed the opportunity for service providers to discuss and share their understanding and relationships of the youth they work with and would like to discuss challenges and gaps in services working within the youth social service sector field. To facilitate the interviews and surveys, a semi-structured interview process was developed, consisting of 10 questions. The size of the participant group was determined based on the services most accessed by youth that emerged from the surveys and the focus of the particular neighborhood. The participants in the interviews consisted of youth service providers from the health, community and family centres, employment, education, and art sectors field.

Surveys were distributed at various community events, i.e. Freedom Fridayz, basketball tournaments, and within local youth mentorship, sports, and recreational, health, and art programs. 200 surveys were distributed; to ensure that 50 completed surveys could be reviewed. Survey letters were given to facilitators of programs, to provide an overview of the research project.

### ***Interviews***

Service providers that participated in the interviews were also provided with a written consent form that outlined the research project, interviewer contact information, research objectives, data collection procedure, and their rights as a participant in the

interviews. They were also made aware that participation in this research is voluntary and were required to sign the consent form if they agreed to the terms of the research before they were interviewed. Participants were made aware that they can draw from participating at any time, without penalties, and any information collected thus far, would be destroyed. It was also communicated that if participants decide that they no longer wanted to participate, it will not affect their relationship with the institution or place the participant of undue risk (Creswell, 2013). Participants were also assured that their anonymity and identity will remain confidential, the researcher will be mindful of protecting the participants' privacy and thus will provide pseudonyms to mask their identity unless they agreed to have their names in the study, only the researcher would only know their identities. Pseudonyms have been applied to the participants of the one-on-one interviews to protect their identity and the identity of their employer.

### ***Data Collection and Management***

Primary sources of data used for this study included surveys results and in-depth one on one semi-structures interviews. The responses of the surveys were to elicit responses on (1) the needs of youth and uncover desired programming, (2) identify barriers and challenges to participation in programs (3) identify barriers and/or challenges in accessing resources in the community, (4) identify knowledge of youth community resources, and (5) share results with youth service providers to inform their outreach and services. Subsequent to the facilitation of surveys, the one on one interviews were conducted with youth service providers. The service provider's chosen were based on the findings of the results of youth accessing or lack of knowledge of service. Youth service providers were interviewed once they confirmed their interested and a date and time was set to meet. All five interviews were conducted during the winter 2013/2014 when service providers were available. Before I began the interviews, I verbally explained the overview of the research and discussed the privacy and confidentiality of the study. I also provided a research summary sheet, similar to the consent form, for the interviewee's records. The length of the interviews ranged from 20-35 minutes, and with permission, I audio recorded the interview session to capture the essence of the discussion and to ensure the accuracy of the interviews. After the interviews were completed, the audiotape of the discussions was transcribed and checked for accuracy.

### ***Data Analysis: Survey Results***

The results of the surveys indicated the following:

#### ***a) Lack of knowledge of services***

Out of the sample of 50 surveys, 85% of youth surveyed indicated that they were unaware of the services offered in the community. Although most youth that completed



the surveys were attached to a program or service provider, they expressed knowledge of only that service provider they are attached to. The results from this question were not surprising as many youth “stick” to the providers they know, and that has a lot to do with the rapport and relationship they have with that service provider or agency.

***b) Financial restraints***

The results from the survey indicated that 86% of youth identified financial restraints as a primary reason for not accessing programs and/or services. Even though, programs were being offered at no additional costs to the participants, young people prioritized finding employment. In reviewing the survey results, it was indicated that 91% of youth responded to finding a job and retaining employment as being important to them, than accessing a program and service. I believe that many of the youth who provided this response was most likely unaware of the employment supports and services that are offered in the community. The sample that identified this challenge represented 8% of the total amount of surveys distributed as not be connecting to a service provider.

***c) Biggest needs/concerns facing youth in the community***

Out of the 50 completed surveys collected and analyzed, youth reported the following: 39% required help with employment and training, 21% needed academic support, 16% recorded health as being a concern, 8% identified healthy relationships as a concern 6% violence related supported, 4% recorded mental health as a concern, 4% needed substance abuse, and 2% recorded the need for support/ services for sexuality support, The data collected from the surveys demonstrated a greater need for service providers to make their services more visible in the community. The data also showed that young people are still vulnerable to their needs and require support to address all needs.

### ***Interviews Results***

The data analysis of this study revealed that service providers shared similar perspectives when it came to servicing the community. Several distinctive factors were identified by interview participants, which they believe prevented them in providing services that address youth needs, living in the community. The challenges identified are as followed: a) Funding and funding restrictions; b) limitation within current roles; and, c) space and time/ accessibility. In addition to the findings of service providers, youth also identified several barriers to preventing them from participating in, and or accessing services: a) lack of knowledge of services; b) family responsibility; and. c) financial restraints. These findings are major themes that emerged from the results of the research. Findings of the study also showed that when youth are given the opportunity to be fully engaged citizens, they are more likely to advocate for change in their lives and become more successful in every aspect of their lives. Findings also showed that when service providers are provided with the necessary resources, they are capable of offering long-term services; and meet the needs of youth.

#### ***a) Funding and Funding Restrictions***

Many service providers have identified funding restrictions as a barrier to offering quality services to youth. The funding climate has changed significantly over the last 5 years, although initially back in 2005, there was an increase in programs and services; there has been significant changes and greater restrictions with financial resources available to community service providers. Not to mention, the lack of investment of permanent staffing to carry out these programs and services. Some of the restrictions include, funding becoming theme specific, for example, violence prevention, mental health, what they fund i.e. newcomer youth, poverty reduction, violence prevention, etc.; lack of sustainable funding or a maximum amount of funding and time frame indications;

quantity over quality; the constant justification of needs of funding, and the most recently is the greater control of funds and involvement from funding bodies, to name a few.

This is a major issue for service providers as it has become more difficult to serve clients within the outlined limitations, Participant 1(P1) explains, *“these limitations and restrictions are impossible to work within, there are constant reports to justify and prove the work that you are doing, which is taking away critical time to be working with our clients”*. P1 continues by referencing the time frames of funding- *“what impact do funders really expect us to have within 6months, 1 years, or even 3 years- they don’t understand the process of engaging youth, they don’t understand the population we are serving and the multiple barriers and needs they have.”* But it is not only the funders and P3 mentioned that *“Service providers have become more competitive in applying for additional funding which has also created a divide amongst us, as they are no longer working together to attain funding, but competing against with one another”*- this statement is an accurate depiction on how funding drives and divides the work service providers offers and how they serve the community. P2- expressed their concern around contract work and quality of service, they share- *“its about having real relationships with youth and have them believe that you will always be there to help them when the reality of the situation is that you are only there for a temporary time frame, to achieve outline goals, and move on to new contract work, there isn’t really any investment into youth programs and services, or even youth. Everything is, and everyone has a band-aid approach to working with youth”*P4- further explains, *“there has been an increased focus on the number of individuals served over the quality of services being offered”*.

Like many service providers, P4 has expressed their frustration over the fact that youth should not be seen as a number, but as an individual that requires services and supports *“ I am tired of working from a lens of quantity over quality, I wanted to do this*

*(youth work) too because I am invested in working with, and building the capacity of young people and supporting them with whatever they may need, I did not sign up for this"* Gardner, Broth, and Gunn (2009) further speak to the landscape of funding, they explain that "programs that serve economically disadvantaged youth must rely on funds from a wide variety of public and private sources, which may limit disadvantaged youth's access to after school programs in several ways:

First, public and private funds are limited and demands for funds are great, and consequently the supply of programs funded through private and public source may not be sufficient to meet the needs of lower income youth; Secondly, funds obtained through public and private grants are often time limited. Applications for renewal- a labour intensive endeavor that diverts away from service delivery- may be denied either because of constraints stipulated by the original grant because of shifting funding priorities; And finally, constraints on the specific use of public and private after school funds (e.g. requirements that funds must be used only for programming may prohibit programs from spending on components that would increase youth access to existing after-school programs (p.11).

### ***b) Limitations of Current Roles***

Most service providers interviewed expressed frustrations with the limitations of who they can serve, how they serve them, and for how long which has made it difficult to provide the necessary services youth are seeking. P4 explains, *"These are pressing concerns as every youth is different and they all have unique needs that may or may not require long or short-term interaction or case management. But this is something that should not be determined by the funder, but rather identified by the service provider. Most service providers are very specific in the roles they play in serving the community.*

*Whether they may be employment case managers, or mental health counselors, all of our roles, their roles are very specific and limited to a particular need”.*

The limited services that service providers can offer has also been identified as a weakness to connecting to youth, as these individuals can only work within their identified roles, and anything else a client may need is referred out. Now, this may not be seen as a major concern for some, however, most youth that has formed a relationship with a mentor or service provider are not inclined to visit anyone else because of the rapport they have created and their comfort with that service provider. The consequences of these specific roles have left service providers with their hands tied. P5 stated, “ *We are incapable of going or doing anything outside of our role and funding because we cannot afford too- we need our jobs, and that means working within our roles*”. This statement represents the feelings and perspectives of many service providers. Their focus is no longer to meet the needs of the community but serve the community.

### **c) Space, Time and Accessibility**

Another challenge identified by service providers is the hours of operation of their organization and makeup of the space. Many youth service organizations operate from a traditional 9-5-work schedule, which is not an ideal time frame that will allow them to connect with youth and the community at a large. When working with youth, organizations and agencies must take into consideration the various levels of the needs of youth, and high-risk times for them. High-risk times for youth are considered to be after school and late evening. P1 explains, “*This is a time where youth are seeking somewhere to “hang out” and/ or something to do- these are high-risk times as they are more exposed to, and are more likely to participate in destructive behavior i.e. drugs, violence, gangs, etcetera*”. All service providers interviewed believe it would be more

beneficial to have alternate work hours, that include evenings and weekends, which will allow them to offer more programs, connect, reach, and work with more youth because they are available during the time's youth most need them. P2 also mentioned that “ *We need to change the climate of our space, many of the staff that do not work with youth, treat our youth clients poorly from our other clients, many of them are not comfortable with having youth in our space, and cause trouble when they are there, leaving the youth to feel unwelcomed and further disconnected from services*” P3 furthered the conversation by adding “*Youth need their own space just as the seniors do, to be themselves and seek the support they require with comfort and with ease- they have enough barriers and stigmas to fight outside of these agencies, we really need to focus on providing inclusive spaces and that includes being available at their most high-risk time, and just being available. Period.*”

## **Results and Discussion**

What are the identified challenges and barriers youth face in the community? What challenges do youth service providers face to provide quality service to youth? Are there models of engagement that works for marginalized youth? I wanted to explore these questions as they are crucial to the work that I do, but also, to others providing services to youth. The research and literature review clearly demonstrate the importance of examining youth challenges, needs, and the benefits of youth engagement from marginalized communities, not just the Jane and Finch area. Youth, community residents, and service providers have continuously voiced concerns and frustrations on the current lack/ limited funding dedicated to servicing youth. We consistently observed the changes and attempted band-aid solutions that funders hope will magically fix and or have an impact on the lives of youth, but there is a disconnect in understanding that youth need time, guidance, and adult allies to support them and help them grow.

To further resonate, Yosso (2003), "we need to shift our thinking" especially when it comes to youth work and youth engagement. One of the main issues that emerged and seems to be a constant hinder is the thought that youth work and youth engagement is a "one size fits all" practice. However, the reality and voiced experiences of youth and youth work in this research debunk those ideologies through conversations and current practices in the field.

My research illustrates the ongoing challenges and needs youth from marginalized communities face, and the struggles they endure to have them met. It also demonstrated that youth work or the work of youth service providers is not limited to their "professional title" but rather, it evolves depending on the youth they are serving and the circumstances. What also emerged from the results of the surveys and interviews is the

overall desire for youth to have access to services providers to provide opportunities and resources that will support the development and success of youth from this community.

Secondly, the research identified the shared understanding that the success and achievement of youth should be measured on an individual basis. All youth have the ability to achieve success, even those facing multiple barriers and struggle to achieve or foresee it. During discussions, interviewees consistently mentioned that most youth they work with are unable to look beyond their current situations and that their reality is the present. P5 explains, *"They want you to deal with their current needs, once you have helped them and made that connection, they come back for additional support. These individuals struggle with identifying their current assets, and it is up to us (youth workers) to help them see it"*. The thoughts of this youth service provider echoed the thoughts of many that work with youth. Youth workers/Service providers need to assist youth in identifying both their assets and community cultural wealth to support them with their development and transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Furthermore, youth work as identified by youth service providers, noted that we should not measure success by societal views but by the individual. As every youth has unique needs, and the ability to support their success is through youth engagement, being seen as adult allies, fosters resiliency, and believing in their future. As identified by Jones and Deutsch (2010) the Positive Youth development model, refers to efforts aimed at helping youth achieve their potential, viewing youth as having competencies to be developed rather than risk factors to be prevented.

Thirdly, an obvious ongoing challenge identified is the lack of sustainable funding to ensure the continuance of these services. There is a high turn over rate of service providers due to the precarious work in the social sector. The demands of focusing on achieving monthly "targets", highly impact the quality of work that is currently being



done. Feedback from the service providers that were interviewed all shared their passion for the work that they currently do, however, consistently go beyond their current role to support youth. Because of the ongoing “stretch” within their roles, service providers did feel a lack of support from their superior. P2 reported, *“I always feel that my boss is only concerned with how many people I’ve supported. I’ve tried to explain that sometimes working with a particular youth may take longer, but it doesn’t seem like she cares, She only focuses on the numbers, and I get that, because without the numbers, we will not receive the funding”*. Many interviewed respondents shared similar feelings towards their superior. There is a clear understanding that funding is the main priority for management and also for themselves, but it should not be leading the work that they are currently doing, as it impedes on the quality of service youth are receiving.

The high turn over of youth workers has not only been a hinder on the sector as an entirety, but it has effected the potential rapport and relationships required to service youth. P4 identified youth work as being *“developing and meeting the needs of young people and their families, attempting to work from a holistic framework, not only focusing on the current, but also working towards the future”*. P1 continues by sharing *“ youth work is about building connections, not only to your direct youth client, it is also about making a connection and building relationships to and with the community. Its important to understand where you are working, the social context, and the general perceptions, that way, you are more aware and mindful on how to approach the different situations that may come up”*.

Resiliency was also a terminology that is commonly used amongst many of the service providers during the interviews. They regularly referred to the youth that they serve as being resilient. Service providers expressed that the resiliency factors that young people had were there connections to the community providers, family and peers.

According to Jones and Deutsch (2011) and Bottrel (2009) “Social capital, constructed and maintained through adult- youth relationships, can promote youth resilience” p. 384.

Youth work is pertinent to the healthy development and resiliency of young people.

Youth service providers, for many youth, are the fine line between family and service provider. The rapport and relationships young people build support them in identifying assets, which inform the development of resilient behavior. The more young people feel that they have rapport and adult allies; there is an increase in resiliency.

The findings also demonstrated a need to work from a strength based or asset based approach with young people. Youth that are connected to services have a better chance of identifying and understanding the assets that they currently have, but also, are supported in understanding how to leverage their assets. P3 shared *“many youth that I’ve been in contact with, only see their current situation, they can never see the “things” that they currently have that can help them move forward. It is always a struggle to show the positive, when they are caught up on the negative/ risk factors”*. Service providers believe that reinforcing young people with their “assets” and helping them to acquire more assets strengthens their resiliency, and decreases their likelihood of becoming involved in risk behavior.

The findings from this study demonstrate that the services in the community and the relationships with positive adult allies are a clear beneficial asset to young people. Although there is a greater need for service providers to increase their presence in the Jane and Finch area, service providers have taken the time to understand the depth and needs of the community. I argue that it is inherently important to continue the investment in these services as a means to invest in young people. These services are crucial to not only support youth with their current needs, challenges, and barriers, but it also helps with building and identifying the assets of young people need in order to

navigate various social and systemic barriers they face daily. Providing ongoing funding not only demonstrates systemic investment, it also positions young people as a priority, which is a growing need of our society. Today's young people are facing more struggles and are experiencing multiple barriers at an alarming level. The availability of resources, adult allies and role models, and a caring and supportive network, alleviates the daily reminders of social and economic destitution young people are currently exposed to and experiencing. We need to continue to demonstrate the commitment to our youth by continuing the conversation of the welfare of our young people through the opportunities, connections, and resources to social services and resources.

### **Research Limitations**

While my study addressed the proposed research question, there were some evident limitations to the study. First, the generated participant pool provided diverse feedback from the youth of various age and backgrounds. However, most individuals who participated in the surveys were connected to a resource and/ or program in the community. The perspectives of disconnected youth and youth who are incarcerated or in conflict with the law were not present in this study, which limits the holistic understanding of all youth needs from the Jane and Finch community,

Secondly, if this research were conducted again in the future, I would expand the sample size for surveys completed. As it will provide more information on youth needs from across the community. The current study, obtained does not reflect youth that resides outside of the immediate area. It is important to have a larger sample size as it will generate and reflect a larger youth population. Also, I would have held focus groups so that I could have had a more in-depth conversation with youth to really understand their current needs and perspectives. Although the surveys were able to highlight the current needs of youth, it did not provide a space to divulge anything beyond the questions at hand, and it would have been impactful to capture the essence of the voices of youth beyond the intentional questions of the survey.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Although my research explored the needs of youth from the Jane and Finch community and strategies for future youth engagement, future research needs to explore more in depth strategies for engaging youth that face multiple barriers due to their social/ geographic location within a Canadian context, specifically, research that explores how race, racism, and geographic racialization and the implications of barriers have on the "success" of youth from the Jane and Finch community. Key stakeholders, including but not limited to- Government officials at the Municipal, Provincial, and Federal level need to make better efforts in working towards creating a youth strategy that highlights solutions to better engage young people. In addition, strategies need to be tailored made for individual communities that have been identified as having a large youth population that is at risk of facing multiple barriers, and that these strategies need to be inclusive to the ideas of these youth from their communities.

In addition, it is important to include all youth in the processes of development and to have individuals working with youth trained and/ or orientated to the community they are working in. From my research findings, the respect and acknowledgment of community cultural wealth are key principles when working with youth from marginalized communities. Recognizing individual challenges/ struggles, and how they potentially lead to biases will help with individual personal development when working in marginalized communities. Lastly, a comparative analysis of youth needs and youth engagement from marginalized communities in Canada, and/ or Canada and the United States would have added more value in understanding the needs and experiences of youth and the importance of youth engagement. As the research illustrates how socio-economic and

geographic location impacts their needs and affects their level of engagement in community programs and services.

## Conclusion

What does it take to provide programming that encompasses the various elements listed above? What does it take to provide a safe space for young people to feel comfortable and access resources and supports that are beneficial to their overall development and success? The research and literature review illustrates the importance of understanding youth needs to better engage them in accessing services and programs geared towards their population. Service Providers and youth that have consistently raised their concerns on the lack of commitment from public and private sources to invest in the longevity of youth services and programs are demanding increase in action and investment into young people. These questions have important answers at the program level. Not for profits- community agencies consistently endure challenges of ensuring consistent financial supports, quality programming, and activities, the opportunity of building staff and organizational capacity, securing adequate and sustainable funding, and maintaining the support of the community which has been detrimental to the services being offered.

On a micro-level, understanding the program level view is crucial in understanding the frustrations of individuals who have invested their time and efforts into offering services that they view as pertinent to the development of self-esteem of young people. But, it also forces us to look at how youth programming on a macro level. The success of youth programs is not only dependent of those who are facilitating these activities, it is highly dependent on funding dollars allocated to run these programs and the government. Youth funding is comparable to a rollercoaster; it has its highs and lows, and contingent on being reactive to social problems, especially in the Jane and Finch community.

This work also suggests that there are multiple avenues to address youth needs from the Jane and Finch community. As youth from this neighborhood and other neighborhoods alike continuously seek to debunk the negative ideas of their community, they are still seeking to address their needs and challenges growing up in their neighborhoods. Creative practices of youth engagement are a necessity to reach and engage young people in services and activities offered to them. Furthermore, programs, activities, and services need to be inclusive to the ideas of young people that they are geared towards and therefore require as much involvement from the population as possible. These services serve as another "step on the ladder" to assist young people in identifying developmental assets/ protective factors and cultural wealth that will allow them to further understand their strengths and how to utilize them to navigate the system to achieve success.

The intention of this study was to shed light on the fact that not all Toronto youth live in the same context of opportunity and support, and the importance and benefit of addressing youth needs. All too often, in our society, we stress the risks and dangers of youth and those perceptions are stretched across the different mainstream areas of society- community, media, government, etc. Many times we embrace this thinking as it is the driving force of the ideology that youth from racialized communities should be "feared" and that they are "deficit group". As many can attest, the adolescence/ youth years are a time of many struggles. Trying to fit in, developing into your individuality, gaining independence is a great challenge for all youth. However, challenges for those living in marginalized communities, that face multiple barriers and stereotypes, these are heightened based on their social and economic location.

Assessing and understanding youth needs should be an ongoing practice. It allows us to see beyond the common themes of youth needs and divulge into situational



and personal challenges that may have a negative impact on the individual youth itself. As a society, we choose to track and speak on the negative behaviors of youth as opposed to looking at the measures of programs and resources that seek to identify protective factors/ assets of youth and work to build and/or change the negative factors. As noted by Catalano, Berglund, Ryanm, Lonczak, and Hawkins (1999) “ currently, problem behaviors are tracked more often than positive ones and, while increasing number of positive youth development interventions are choosing to measure both, this is still far from being the standard in the field” (p.vi). In short, the ongoing characterization of young people from marginalized communities as the “problems” reflects the deficit thinking of wider society. In order to debunk this thinking, we need committed people and programs and services that aim to support and empower these young people through skill development and resources that will not only support their growth but also change the deficit thinking mindset of this population.

Furthermore, the idea of deficit thinking also works conducive with the theoretical elements of the Critical Race Theory. As previously mentioned, we need to shift our thinking away from the idea of “deficit” and push forward the idea of community cultural wealth as it acknowledges the lived experiences, challenges, barriers, but more importantly the “assets” of youth from marginalized communities.

The 40 developmental Assets Framework, created by the Search Institute (1990), encourages individuals working with youth to work from an asset-based lens. It focuses on measuring both the protective and risk factors to understand what youth need, but also how to support their development. This is a practice that should not only be supported by service providers but as a national priority. As a society, when we begin to look at youth challenges/ needs, it is important to view the situation from an objective lens. If we take the time to understand their experiences, challenges, and needs, we are

in a better position to be proactive in the services, resources, and spaces offered that can support their social development, but also to foster future achievement and success.

## **Recommendations: Plan of Action Moving Forward**

### ***a) The reduction and lack of sustainable financial support for youth funding***

Moving forward, the investment in youth needs to be a long-term effort. There is a great need to support the healthy development of adolescence into adulthood, as it is a direct impact on the future of our society. We need to move past the idea that youth work and youth service providers no longer require secure funds to operate at maximum capacity or the idea that reaching a few youth is "enough" to say a difference has been made. Providing youth programs require more than temporary solutions and financial support to have a long-term impact, it requires a commitment that requires resources both human and financial. It needs to be a proactive investment from stakeholders and government, as it will have greater outcomes on a long-term agenda.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that although we speak of the importance of programs and spaces, we rarely expand the conversation to include the importance and benefit of investing in the "human resources", when it comes to youth work. The idea of youth work is always perceived to be on an "as needed" basis, which speaks to the increase in temporary contract work. Youth today, are in dire need of mentors and positive adult role models, and with the revolving door of dedicated individuals to youth, it has been impossible to completely and adequately provide services and mentorship to young people. Youth need stability, and if they consistently have people coming in and out of their lives they will no longer invest in the human relationships with staff of youth serving organizations as they will not see the benefit of investing their time and trust in someone they are unsure that they will be seeing tomorrow. If the government continues to preach the importance of youth then they will need to see the importance of financially contributing to sustain "employable positions". As individuals, we need to continue to

push the idea of financially investing in youth as the helm for action and accountability for government officials.

Many interview participants voiced concerns over the lack of sustained funding for youth programs and services. Service providers believe in embedding PYD principles into their youth initiatives, but deem it to be challenging due to the lack of time they have to achieve all requirements outlined in their contract agreement with funders. Survey participants also shared their frustrations with spaces not being available to be accessed by youth. When asked, “what is an important factor for you on how agencies help you” 78% of participants responded, “time”. To be more specific, accessible times to access and receive fruitful service, but also times that are “friendly” to youth that are in school or work. There is a nuance of being treated as a target number rather than someone that is seeking or requires help.

***b) Placing youth as a priority at all levels of government, regardless of current governing parties***

The priority of youth has always been an ever-changing ideal, which is a direct reflection of the government in power. It has always been an ongoing conversation amongst politicians, but mostly when it has been in favor to push their personal and political agenda. As a collective, we need to ensure that youth are always at the forefront and a priority for government officials. The voices of youth need to not only be heard, but also acknowledged, and taken into real account when decisions are being made about the population. Moving forward, it is important to be inclusive of youth voices in decision making at all government levels regarding programs, services, and policy development. This representation of youth needs to be reflective of the diversity of all youth, including but not limited to racialized minorities, disabled, newcomer, youth in conflict with the law, and disconnected/ disengaged youth. It is important to reach the mass of all youth since

each youth are afforded different opportunities, and we need to ensure that we are inclusive of everyone perspectives and experiences.

Although this was not directly asked in the survey, 81% of youth participants thought it was a good idea to have a youth council that represents the Jane and Finch community. Many participants reported that having a youth council will allow youth voices to be heard in the community, which is important to them because they would like to have a place to discuss youth needs, struggles, and wants. They feel a council will allow them to make a change in their community. The idea of a Jane and Finch council speaks to the interests of becoming civically engaged in their community. Youth are becoming more aware that their voices are an asset in mobilizing change, and they are seeing the broader impact if more people become involved in voicing their opinions.

However, It is important to move away from the idea of "tokenism" as it jades the commitment of youth. Youth are well aware when they are being "used". They understand that at times their ideas and input can be taken out of context or worst not even incorporated into the larger planning areas, as they are perceived as not being experts, for example, those that are offering funds and/ or developing programs because of their experience working with the population or studies that have been done.

During the interviews, interview participants reported the importance of having youth voices during the decision-making process. Interview participants communicated the importance of and identifying the role young people play when making decisions. P3 interviewee reported "youth are more willing when they know "why". Why they are participating and how they will be used" (interviewee, 2015).

***c) Amend systemic policies that discriminate against those from urban neighborhoods***

Too often, the "unwritten rules" that govern our marginalized communities is what harnesses the upward mobility of young people from these communities. Whether it is geographic racialization or discrimination by postal code, these are a few barriers that impact youth facing multiple barriers to make an avid change in their lives. It is important that stakeholders and government take into account the various barriers young people face, especially those from marginalized communities and address the challenges at a higher policy level to ensure these policies are visible and understood by every employing organization/ business. P5 explains, "Young people have it hard enough in their adolescent years, having systemic "unwritten" rules is just another challenge they should never have to experience".

***d) Put in place a youth strategy for youth living in priority areas***

Recently, our government began to make commitments to put in motion a youth strategy. Although, there have been multiple drafts of youth strategies for different areas-employment, engagement, etc. In my experience, there needs to be greater effort to ensure all identified "priority" areas have their own youth strategy, as it will be tailored to the direct needs/challenges/ and barriers the youth face in their community. There is a definite need to invest both financially at all funding levels in creating youth community strategies. Interviewed participants, also raised interests in having a collaborative system that all service providers agree to adhere to, when working with young people. The interviewed service providers expressed that a youth strategy, will not only demonstrate a transparent and collaborative interest in providing services, it will strengthen the services being offered. P5 reports "*it would be great to have something similar to the positive space sticker that some organizations have to show their support of the LGBTQ community, a strategy can show the alliance and commitment we have to*

*serving youth in the community". P1 also explains, "having a youth strategy will also give us a framework to work within, most of us in the industry come with different training and expertise, which influences the way we serve young people. By having this "strategy", it will provide us with a "framework" to guide our practice, and also give the young people an expectation of service to receive".*

The responses received, also clearly demonstrate that there is a great interest and need to ensure the process in developing a youth community strategy is collaborative and inclusive of the agencies and grass-root groups in the community. P2 shares, *"I think I having a youth community youth strategy will be ideal for our community, for the betterment of our services, but it needs to be a collaborative process. To often, we have people come into our community and do things for us, rather than we doing things together. I think a youth strategy, is a great first step in putting our ideas to practice in working together. Making this a collaborative process will not only increase by in from service providers, it will also build and strengthen networks".* A youth community strategy will also compliment all of the federal and provincial level strategies and will ensure that there is representation from each prioritized community at government and stakeholder tables to inform and share information of success and challenges.

Inclusive to the community youth strategy, I would also like to transcend the idea of Lerner et al (2006) of creating a youth charter. Lerner (2006) explains that it will also be beneficial to include a youth charter of rights as it will focus and strengthen the practices of youth work across the city. An implementation of a youth charter will outline the principles and framework that service provider will be working from across the city. According to Damon (1997) as cited in Lerner et al (2006) "a youth charter should consist of rules, guidelines, and plans of actions that each community can adopt to provide its youth with a framework for development in a healthy manner" By tailoring a

youth charter to its respective communities, and by making it a collective partnership of service providers, youth, and stakeholders, this initiative will solidify a common practice to community youth work/ community youth development; and provide guidance in working with youth and the barriers they face living within marginalized communities.

Furthermore, the implementation of a community youth charter, will also aim to reduce risk behavior among youth, and promote engaged youth citizens (Damon, 1997; Damon & Gregory, 2003). As Damon, states, as cited in Learner et al (2006) “ the creation of community- specific youth charters can enable adolescents and adults together systematically promote positive youth development”.



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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions for Youth Workers

- 1) Why did you initially want to work with young people in urban communities?
- 2) What types of services does your organization offer to youth?
- 3) What are some of the limitations you face in offering programs, services, and etcetera to youth in the Jane Finch Community? (Politics, government agenda, lack of skilled workers, etc.).
- 4) What are your views on youth needs in the Jane Finch Community?
- 5) If you were able to take part in developing a youth strategy, what would be some of your recommendations based on your experiences?
- 6) What have you found successful as a strategy to stay aware of current youth culture and trends?
- 7) What services do you find most successful whether your organization offers it or not?
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to add? Any final words?



## Appendix B

Hear My Voice- A Research Project on the Youth Needs of the Jane and Finch Community  
 Information gathered from this survey will be used as part of a major research project to fulfill the requirements of the Master of Education degree in Language, Culture, and Teaching from York University. For more information of this research please contact Krystle Skeete at Krystle\_skeete@edu.yorku.ca

1. What are some of the community services you have accessed over the last year? Please check all that apply	<div> <input type="checkbox"/>Employment and Training           <input type="checkbox"/>Leadership programs         </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Counseling           <input type="checkbox"/>Social programs         </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Drop in           <input type="checkbox"/>Sports and recreation         </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Sexual Health           <input type="checkbox"/>Other _____         </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Academic support (tutoring/ homework)         </div>
2.How do you think these issues should be addressed?	
3. Which youth service providers or organizations in the Jane Finch Community are you aware of:	<div> <input type="checkbox"/>The Spot Centre           <input type="checkbox"/>Black Creek Community Health         </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>JVS           <input type="checkbox"/>Success Beyond Limits         </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>PEACH           <input type="checkbox"/>COSTI         </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Community Centre           <input type="checkbox"/>YMCA         </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Friends in Trouble (FIT)           <input type="checkbox"/>Y-Connect         </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Other_____         </div>

<p>3. How would you rate their services? 1- not helpful - 10- extremely helpful. Please place a number beside the listed organizations.</p>	<div> <input type="checkbox"/>The Spot         <input type="checkbox"/>Black Creek Community Health Centre       </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>JVS         <input type="checkbox"/>Success Beyond Limits       </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>PEACH         <input type="checkbox"/>COSTI       </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Community Centre         <input type="checkbox"/>YMCA       </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Friends in Trouble (FIT)         <input type="checkbox"/>Y-Connect       </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Other _____       </div>
<p>4. Have you visited or received any services from the above-mentioned agencies in the last year? If yes, please write the name</p>	<p>Yes/ No</p>
<p>5.What would enable you from accessing services from these agencies?</p>	
<p>6.What would prevent you from accessing services from these agencies?</p>	
<p>7. Have you attended any events, workshops, or programs that any of these agencies have offered over the last year? if yes, please list or name, and the reasons why did you or didn't you attend?</p>	
<p>8. What do you think are the biggest concerns youth are facing in the Jane Finch Community?</p>	<div> <input type="checkbox"/>Employment and Training         <input type="checkbox"/>Leadership programs       </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Counseling         <input type="checkbox"/>Social programs       </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/>Drop in         <input type="checkbox"/>Sports and recreation       </div>

	<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Health <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____  <input type="checkbox"/> Academic support (tutoring/ homework)
9. What is an important factor for you on how agencies help youth?	
10. If you could have your own youth agency that could really support youth, what services would you provide?	
11. Do you think it would be good idea to have a youth council that represents the Jane Finch Community?	Yes/ No. Why?



## Appendix C:

### Consent Form

Date: August, 2013

Study Title: Hear My Voice- A Community Action Research Project on Youth Needs in the Jane Finch Community

Researcher: Krystle Skeete, krystle\_skeete@edu.yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research: To conduct a case study that focuses on youth needs in the Jane Finch Community.

Why research is being undertaken: The data I collect from this project for a major research project as part of the requirements of the Masters of Education degree in Language, Culture, and Teaching from York University.)

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: Participate in brief 20-35 minute one-on-one interview.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: To take part in this research it is with hope that the information obtained will be used as a resource to put a youth strategy as a priority. As well, it will be used as a tool to address service gaps for youth, evaluate current youth services, and develop a greater understanding of youth needs and challenges/ barriers youth are facing in the Jane Finch Community.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of our professional working relationship, either now or in future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. If you decide to stop participating, your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: Your interview data will not be associated with any identifying information. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your interview will be audiotaped and fully transcribed. Your data will be safely stored in password-protected computer and only the student will have access to this information. Data will be stored for no longer than 6 months. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Uses for the Data: I may quote some of your responses to the interview questions in the final paper that is a required part of my research project. As well, I may present part of the findings in other papers and/or publications in classes at York or in other academic and research contexts. No information that identifies you personally will appear in any papers or publications resulting from this study. To keep your identity confidential, I will use pseudonyms to refer to you, your agency or any associated programs, you may facilitate, and any person to whom you may refer.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Don Dipppo either by telephone at (416) 736-2100 extension 20748 or by e-mail ([ddippo@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:ddippo@edu.yorku.ca)) or Krystle Skeete either by telephone at (416) 712-2658 or by email ([krystle\\_skeete@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:krystle_skeete@edu.yorku.ca)). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board for compliance on research ethics within the context of the York Senate Policy on research ethics. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Graduate Program in Education Human Participants Review Committee at the following: 416-736-5018.

#### Legal Rights and Signatures:

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participate in an exploration of a youth needs assessment in the Jane and Finch community, participating as a community service provider in the community and acknowledge that the study is conducted by Krystle Skeete, MEd Candidate. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_