



COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE
TORONTO STRONG NEIGHBOURHOODS STRATEGY 2020:
WHAT NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENT LOOKS LIKE
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RESIDENTS IN JANE-FINCH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE TORONTO STRONG NEIGHBOURHOODS STRATEGY 2020: WHAT NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENT LOOKS LIKE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RESIDENTS IN JANE FINCH" was prepared by a research team embedded within the larger Jane-Finch TSNS Task Force. The Task Force comprises representatives from a number of community organizations, social service agencies and grassroots groups in the Jane-Finch community (see full list below). The Research Team includes additional academic partners, the City Institute and the Urban Studies program at York University, as well as two independent research consultants. The Task Force first mobilized in April 2014, in response to the City of Toronto's newly devised Neighbourhood Equity Index in the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy (TSNS) 2020. It met a number of times subsequently forming into the "Jane-Finch TSNS 2020 Task Force" in November 2014. Since then the group has met regularly to address serious concerns about the TSNS strategy and how it is presently laid out and the fact that the current strategy may not enable meaningful and sufficient changes in our communities. The group has also been actively supporting the Research Team to produce this report.

This participatory action research would not have happened without the amazing commitment and dedication of many community residents and organizations. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their extensive contributions to this initiative. Professor Linda Peake was an informative and supportive partner and Loren March and Shelby Kennedy worked vigorously to seek out relevant data that provided us with deeper knowledge. Nicola Holness and Farid P. Chaharlangi worked with passionate students, Erinn Oh and Kim Radford, and Maryama Ahmad, a community member and advocate, to explore other models and experiences in cities that have been struggling to overcome systemic barriers, and Nathan Stern masterfully took on coordination and compilation of information from the 8 Community Group Interviews reaching 83 enthusiastic residents who contributed valuable information. Wanda MacNevin, on behalf of the Jane Finch Community and Family Centre, played an instrumental role coordinating the overall initiative.

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Community Organizations Involved in the Jane-Finch TSNS Task Force

Across Boundaries

Belka Enrichment Centre

Black Creek Community Health Centre

Community and Legal Air Services Programme (CLASP)

Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women

Friends in Trouble

Jamaican Canadian Association

Jane-Finch Action Against Poverty

Jane-Finch Community Legal Services

Jane-Finch Community Ministry

Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre

JVS Toronto

York U -TD Community Engagement Centre

We would like to sincerely thank the many community residents who participated on the Task Force and also the City of Toronto and United Way Toronto for their support.

Next Step

The Task Force will be developing an Action Plan to ensure implantation of the recommendations proposed in this report.

For further information about the Jane Finch TSNS Task Force, you can contact:

Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre – 416 663-2733 or

Black Creek Community Health Centre – 416 246-2388

ACRONYMS

CAMH	Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
CSP	Community Service Partnership
DWAC	Downsview Weston Action Community
GTA	Greater Toronto Area
NIA	Neighbourhood Improvement Area
OHRC	Ontario Human Rights Commission
PAR	Participatory Action Research
TCHC	Toronto Community Housing Corporation
TDHC	Toronto District Health Council
TR	Tower Renewal
TSNS	Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy
TTC	Toronto Transit Commission
Urban HEART	Urban Health Equity Assessment and Response Tool

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to produce a Jane Finch community-led response to the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 (TSNS), produced by the City of Toronto. The aim of this research-based project has been to define what “improvement” of Jane-Finch should look like, from the community residents’ point of view according to the City’s three key indicators: Healthy Lives, Economic Opportunities and Social Development.

Each neighbourhood in the TSNS study was given a potential score, based on a range from 0 to 100, with actual scores ranging from 92.0 to 21.38, and with communities with a score below 42.89 identified as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. The lowest score of 21.38 is that of the Black Creek neighbourhood, while the second lowest score of 24.39 is of the Glenfield – Jane Heights area, both of which are located within Jane Finch.

THE COMMUNITY OF JANE AND FINCH

Jane-Finch is a community with huge human assets and strong desire for positive systemic change, but there is a shortage of resources to facilitate this change. This is a community where economic opportunities and social services have not developed in pace with need, and the effects have been extremely detrimental for the people who call Jane-Finch home. Residents in Jane-Finch deal with higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of income than those in the rest of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and are faced with racism, discrimination and the stigma of being from Jane-Finch.

The persistence of lack of economic opportunities shows that poverty is tied inextricably to structural factors that result in many residents in Jane-Finch being left with few options outside of part-time work, often working more than one job, with no benefits or job security, leaving little time for any necessary skill training or upgrading.

In addition to this, the community’s large immigrant population is confronted with extreme challenges every day, experiencing difficulty with the settlement process, language barriers, and finding suitable work.

Media sources have referred to the area as Toronto’s “most dangerous” place (Pagliaro, 2013), and its “least liveable” neighbourhood (McKnight, 2014). These same kinds of crisis and security narratives not only propagate fear and racism, apply broad negative stereotypes to residents, and downplay or erase all of the positive aspects of the community, but have also been used in the past to justify interventionist government policies such as revitalization initiatives and programs like TAVIS.

Since at least the 1980s there has been a significant lack of sustained funding, of tangible long-term improvement goals, of success-gauging benchmarks, and of any kind of cultural strategy or funding. From as far back as the early 1970s, countless reports have emerged on unmet community needs, on problematic development strategies, on shortage of services, and on overcrowding. There is also an equally long history of the government ignoring the recommendations of many of these reports.

While issues of poverty and racism are unquestionably a part of everyday life for members of the community, we emphasize that the community is also one characterized by a high level of civic engagement, witnessed by its numerous community organizations, high levels of activism, and arts programs.

THE TORONTO STRONG NEIGHBOURHOOD STRATEGY 2020 AND ITS POLICY CONTEXT

The Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy is a social development plan which sets a 2020 target date for “strengthening the social, economic, and physical conditions” in all of its 31 designated Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIA). Currently still in consultation stages, the strategy has City of Toronto staff working with residents, community groups, funders, and “other key stakeholders” to develop a plan of action.

The 2012 TSNS undertook new community consultation, and determined five key indicators: Economic Opportunities, Social Development, Participation in Decision Making, Healthy Lives, and Physical Surroundings (City of Toronto, January 28, 2014)

The TSNS is situated within a broader provincial, federal and international policy milieu that is characterized by austerity, unstable federal commitment to urban development, municipal restructuring and fiscal crisis (Bradford, 2007). The convergence of these macro dynamics profoundly limits the capacity of municipalities to respond to concentrated poverty and neighbourhood inequities.

The geographic patterning of the city’s investment in socially mixed redevelopment projects, which are premised upon attracting middle-class resettlement in order to restore social balance, demonstrates the complacency of those groups responsible for the building and planning of Toronto’s urban fabric in consolidating gentrification trends, rather than fostering policy responses to the issues underpinning concentrated poverty.

Toronto communities’ experiences of targeted neighbourhood policies include revitalization projects and tower renewal projects, both of which are of relevance to Jane-Finch.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

Because our study is rooted in an anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-colonial base, from a structural standpoint that values equality, equity, and dignity, it is important that our findings not be used to justify crisis-based interventions and solutions that do not take into account the security, needs, and demands of the existing community.

The research model that was applied to this project is that of community-based participatory action research, which conducts research with the community, rather than in the community. This research model also addresses and decentralizes power in the production and dissemination of knowledge by allowing community members to have ownership of the research process, from the conceptualization of the research questions to knowledge mobilization. With ownership of and authorship throughout the research process, community members can propose solutions that are responsive to their needs.

We sought to facilitate ten group interviews, and conducted eight of these, encompassing diverse cultural, ethnic and age groups in the Jane-Finch community. The group interviews consisted of conversations with approximately six to eighteen community members recruited from the community through referrals from our community partners. The Resident Facilitators engaged each community group in small group questions and activity sessions to help them identify and explore their understanding and experiences of health and wellness, social development, and economic opportunities in their local areas.

ANALYSIS

HEALTHY LIVES

- A. Health care quality and access in Jane-Finch proved to be issues that were cited at length in all eight group interviews. Many people saw the lack of doctors and the long wait times as discouraging and a deterrent to going to the doctor. A further point of contention was that of the often present language barriers between doctors and patients, which was perceived as detrimental to receiving quality health care in the community.
- B. With regard to mental health services, many participants spoke to the lack of awareness of such programs existing in the neighbourhood. When asked about positive and negative experiences many of those who engaged with mental health issues claimed that their experiences of ill health were exacerbated by the professional they consulted not being proactive or not understanding the full range of factors that could contribute to mental health.
- C. Our analysis of the responses generated by the set of questions administered in our group interviews found that accessibility to healthy food in Jane-Finch has proven to be a paramount barrier to a healthy life. Residents discussed how difficult it is to sustain healthy eating practices when healthy food is more expensive in this part of the city and is of a lower quality.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

- A. Modes of public and private transportation were raised a number of times. In the adult-aged groups, one theme that recurred throughout all the groups was the high price of car insurance for Jane-Finch residents. Residents said this deterred them from purchasing a car that would have allowed them to take employment in areas that are inaccessible by public transit.
- B. Another barrier to economic opportunities was that most of the blue-collar factory and warehouse jobs available to residents were based outside of the City of Toronto in the York and Peel regions. Accessibility to these regions was hampered in particular by inadequate public transportation, particularly at night-time, and due to the extra fare charged each way to connect to York Region Transit from the Toronto Transit Commission. Specifically in regards to transportation, research participants brought up issues with the TTC that spoke to the rising cost of public transit.
- C. A lack of economic opportunities is further exacerbated by a lack of businesses within the Jane-Finch community that are in a situation of being able to hire new employees. It also needs to be mentioned that, for women especially, the high costs of child care and the long waiting list for a subsidized child care spot were major barriers to women's gainful employment.
- D. Private temporary employment agencies have also proven to be a huge barrier to economic prosperity for many residents in Jane-Finch. Most of the jobs available to community members provided through these agencies can only offer underpaid and unstable employment to community members, with no medical benefits or paid sick days.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Questions relating to social development were mentioned the most frequently in the group interviews.

- A. The quality of education in schools in the Jane-Finch area was an issue that was discussed at length. Also of interest to the research participants were the barriers that exist to adults returning to school. These barriers included unstable finances, lack of child care, and lack of information about existing programs. In the adult-aged groups, there was a pervasive theme of a lack of programs in the community targeted at supporting adults in their educational endeavours in opposition to the many programs supporting youth.
- B. Residents were concerned about a lack of accountability on the part of landlords (both public and private) to provide high quality housing. This lack of accountability has led to issues such as rodent infestations, eroding infrastructure, and residents being exposed to other health hazards due to a backlog of work orders.
- C. Groups also expanded on security issues within the community, and how community safety impacts other aspects of life. They also spoke of over-policing in the community, and the profiling of black youth, and that the increased police presence in the area has not left them feeling more safe but more anxious.

POLICY & COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Many of the shortfalls spoken about in the research groups encompass programs at all three levels of government; government programs that poorly run and inadequately funded programs can directly affect the mandate of a municipally or provincially administered program. It follows that all levels of government are culpable and implicated; a cohesive and collaborative approach across levels of government to funding and mitigating the barriers faced by residents is needed. Hence, while the TSNS is a municipal level report, the indicators used in the report require us to be aware that sole responsibility cannot rest with the municipal government.

Following are the highlights of the demands made by residents from the group interviews for progress by 2020.

ECONOMIC DOMAINS

- Provide universal child care
- Provide free Wheel Transit for seniors and people with disabilities
- Reduce auto insurance by insurance companies for residents of Jane-Finch
- Eliminate the extra charge for transit across the GTA border
- Put restrictions on temporary employment agencies and enforce regulations and require them to offer secure employment and reduce insecure and sporadic work, with no paid benefits and low wages
- Provision of other sources of employment other than those provided by employment agencies
- Recognition of accreditation and work experience outside Canada
- Wage equity for all workers (for instance no separate minimum wage for students)

HEALTHY LIVES DOMAINS

- Remove the \$50 ambulance fee
- Reduce wait times for ambulances
- Increase the availability of free or affordable dentists.
- Creation of a publicly funded drug/alcohol rehab centre
- Improve access to health care needs in terms of the increased availability of doctors and providing translators for medical personnel
- Increase numbers of family physicians and reduce the number of walk-in clinics
- Access to better quality food in both stores and food banks
- Increase the number of food banks to serve the needs to the community

The Research Team of the Jane Finch TSNS recommendations:

ECONOMIC DOMAINS

- A. Increase minimum wage to reflect the cost of living.
- B. Create living wage and job quality standards.
- C. Temporary private employment agencies must be regulated to support local residents in securing decent jobs i.e., at minimum wage or above with some degree of permanency
- D. The City of Toronto must create and implement specific plans on job development within the NIAs.
- E. Any construction in Jane-Finch must have a Community Benefits Agreement that ensures at least 50% of those hired are local people who (if needed) receive training and are subsequently hired for the job.
- F. Increased funding for social infrastructure to be part of any new or expanding developments within the NIAs.
- G. Large stakeholders (York University, Seneca College, public library, hospitals, and City of Toronto organizations) need to enter into an agreement to increase their involvement in the Jane-Finch Community with a focus on specific social and economic targets including increased access to post-secondary education and the creation of hiring practices with specific targets whereby local residents have priority for hiring into new jobs.
- H. The City to develop and implement a city-wide universal child-care program.
- I. The City to increase access across regional transportation boundaries by eliminating double fares.
- J. Free and accessible Wheel Transit for seniors and people with disabilities.

HEALTHY LIVES DOMAINS

- A. Funds relating to Section 37 of the Ontario's Planning Act, which guarantees the right to a healthy environment to the people of Ontario, must be equitably distributed across all neighbourhoods, with special considerations given to the NIAs.
- B. All health care providers present within the local area (including Local Health Integrated Network (LHIN), hospitals, CAMH, and private practitioners) must coordinate planning and policy objectives to ensure increased availability of:
 - (i) family doctors (and not walk in clinics)
 - (ii) nurses
 - (iii) accessible mental health service providers and facilities
 - (iv) The expansion of free dental services to low income adults

- C. The LHIN must play a more central and inclusive role in health planning in Jane-Finch.
- D. An emergency mental health centre (such as that of CAMH) and a rehabilitation centre both be established within the area.
- E. Increased enforcement of public health and safety bylaws to protect tenants of both social and private housing in the community.
- F. Create a network of community-based food bank distributors to coordinate, monitor and implement distribution of quality, healthy, accessible and culturally appropriate food.
- G. Walk-in clinics to provide free translation services to ensure accessibility.
- H. Establish a working group consisting of Toronto Public Health, the Humber River Regional Hospital and Black Creek Community Health Centre and other community based service providers to review the above health recommendations and to establish a work plan to implement the relevant recommendations.
- I. Meet with the Central Local Health Integrated Network to share the report and prioritize the feasibility of our recommendations.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DOMAINS

HOUSING

- A. The City to provide information to community residents, organizations and city services providers about its policies related to the “Sanctuary City” in order to proactively allow undocumented migrants in Toronto to access services regardless of immigration status without fearing any consequences.
- B. The Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC):
 - (i)Develop a transparent social housing waiting list and make this accessible to applicants and advocates.
 - (ii)Ensure that 100% of its housing and subsidized units in Jane-Finch are in a state of full repair,
and are ready for habitation by 2020.
 - (iii)Make accessible a tracking system for repairs, whereby tenants and TCHC management can check the status of their TCHC work orders.

EDUCATION

- A. An equitable allocation of services and resources to schools in Jane-Finch, which would include more teachers, special education classes, and smaller classes, in order to improve graduation rates.
- B. Develop and support projects that aim at increasing awareness within the community about educational opportunities.
- C. Maximize local enrolments and improve graduation rates of local residents in secondary schools and post-secondary institutions in the area (such as York University and Seneca College).
- D. Develop free College and University bridging programs for residents of Jane-Finch, both youth and adults.
- E. Increase the number of scholarships offered to residents in the community.
- F. Provide additional financial support to students that live in TCH.
- G. Enhance transitional programs for internationally trained professionals and tradespeople to facilitate the recognition of international accreditation within the shortest period and increased employment opportunities in their related fields.

GOVERNMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

- A. Politicians from the three levels of government - municipal, provincial and federal - must work collaboratively with the community to ensure improvement in the three equity domains: Economic Opportunities, Social Development and Healthy Lives.
- B. Institutions and community agencies develop a more transparent and creative accountability systems and framework to allow for stories and indicators of success to be disseminated on an ongoing basis.
- C. Establish a Working Group to explore the feasibility of a central Community Hub, School Hubs, and other information or service centre opportunities that provides access to information in the community.
- D. Task Force members will meet with relevant government officials from the CHLIN, Ministry of Children and Youth, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and Ministry of Labour to share the research and to determine how their ministries will support the recommendations
- E. Distribute this report to relevant governments, social service agencies and community organizations so that it may be utilized for action and social change initiatives.
- F. Establish Working Groups on Economic Opportunity, Social Development and Healthy Lives to ensure implementation of the above recommendations. Each Working Group must have a minimum of two residents participating and funding will be secured to ensure they are appropriately reimbursed for their participation and associated costs (childcare, TTC).

CONCLUSION

What we can gather from our data is that community residents in Jane-Finch have very clear goals and specific concerns in mind when it comes to neighbourhood improvement in their area. However, there is a critical disjuncture between the TSNS priority indicators, the specific needs identified by the community, and the ability of the City to address those needs. A major flaw within the TSNS itself is that the domains it seeks to improve frequently fall outside the sphere of municipal control. There promises to be a great deal of difficulty in actually implementing any kind of meaningful long-term intervention plans unless these disparities are addressed early on.

Our idea is that with a strong power-base and plan within the community, with the help of community leaders and organizations, and with sustained financial resource allotment, the community can gain considerable power and influence over the outcomes of decisions concerning their futures. Our report's final recommendations are based on what local stakeholders are concerned about and what they want to see in Jane-Finch by the TSNS 2020 target.

This report was funded by the York University TD Community Engagement Centre Catalyst Grant as well as funding from the Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre.

