

**THINKING  
ABOUT  
TOMORROW'S  
SPACE  
TODAY:**

**Youth  
Recreational  
Programming  
In  
The  
Former  
City of  
York**

For Youth Initiative

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**THINKING ABOUT TOMORROW'S  
SPACE TODAY:  
Youth Recreational Programming  
In The Former City of York**

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# Thinking About Tomorrow's Space Today: Youth Recreational Programming In the Former City of York

*"If we mobilize the people in our community, we can raise the voices loud enough to say you know what, we pay tax dollars like everyone else. We're not begging. We're asking for what is rightfully ours"*  
(Youth Voice, FYI).

## Executive Summary

This report demonstrates the overwhelming and long-standing need for a community recreation centre, where youth in the former City of York can access a safe and inclusive space to participate in and develop youth-driven empowering programming.

This report was written under the direction of For Youth Initiative (FYI), a Toronto-based youth organization, in partnership with urbanArts. The funding for this research was obtained through the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

This report seeks to build on the *Recreation Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study* conducted in 1999 by the City of Toronto Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Department. This report prioritized the former City of York as being second highest in priority for a recreation centre, after St. Jamestown. The need was subsequently met in St. Jamestown, and the emphasis must now be placed on York.

This report was also inspired by *Meeting the Challenge: A Framework for Addressing Social-Recreation Issues for Ethno-Cultural Youth in the City of York*, a report produced in 1997 by For Youth Initiative (FYI), which stated: '[recreation] should not be viewed as a luxury, rather as an investment in the community and in the future of youth.' In consideration of the many stakeholders that share this view, the recommendations in this report were generated as a result of multiple meetings between service providers, youth, and stakeholders in the form of a community committee. This collaborative approach was considered to be the most effective means to achieving the goals of investigation of space and asset mapping.

Often neglected, youth tend to be placed in the spotlight only when regarded as a problem. Positive outcomes will only be achieved when youth are regarded as equal members of the community with a voice that needs to be heard in creating and implementing solutions. Therefore, a major objective of this report was to

work with youth to identify and examine the issue of space availability and the type of programs that are engaging for youth in the former City of York, Wards 11 and 12. As such, while it is important to acknowledge the benefits that a community recreation centre can provide to residents, there are two interrelated issues that need to be addressed and that form the basis of this report:

- 1) The development of a community centre is a long-term investment and vital resource for the community. However, in light of the City of Toronto's uncertain and unfulfilled promise for a new centre, sustainable short-term solutions addressing the immediate needs of youth should be implemented.
- 2) It is necessary to investigate existing social and physical infrastructure in this community in an effort to develop enhanced partnerships, strategies and recommendations to more effectively utilize existing facilities. It is essential for decision-makers to support existing facilities and agencies serving youth in Wards 11 and 12 with reliable financial support and with adequate space in which to offer activities. As well, it is critical that they support the interested youth who engage and carry out the activities.

The second major aim of this research was to work with youth to assess recreational needs in hopes of supporting and encouraging youth engagement and satisfaction with recreation opportunities, programs, facilities and staff.

This report begins with the methodology of the study, followed by the literature review, which involves a holistic view of the term "recreation." The review considers the plethora of evidence pointing to a positive relationship between the provision of recreational facilities and the overall well-being of youth. Lastly, recent information on the socio-economic conditions of Wards 11 and 12 and the recreational needs of the youth population in these Wards are discussed.

This research consists of two major methods of analysis that work to support and strengthen each other; qualitative analysis (interviews and focus groups) and quantitative analysis (surveys). Youth from the community identified a number of major barriers in the way of accessing adequate space to engage in structured and unstructured community activities. The key issues identified by participants can be categorized in three major themes:

1. **Space Issues:**
  - The need for opening up school space
  - Inadequacies of existing space
  - Limited time availabilities and location of space
  - The monopolization of space by longstanding permit-holders
  - The lack of space specific for youth that is "youth-friendly"

2. **Programming Issues:**

- Offering structured versus unstructured programming
- Views and perspectives on uses of current facilities
- Program accessibility and equality issues
- Examining what services youth currently need
- Adequate supervision for activities
- Discussing the new community centre

3. **Financial Issues:**

- A lack of accessible space due to high permit fees introduced in recent years by schools and the City of Toronto, making any available space unaffordable
- The cost of user-fees and transportation are too expensive for youth and their families to afford

Data from the key informant interviews with service providers, local government representatives and community members identified similar concerns and provided the basis to submit two more barriers addressing: the “political minefield” behind advocating for and securing community space, and the sub-standard conditions of current facilities.

The community’s drive to establish adequate infrastructure in their neighbourhoods was clearly demonstrated through the creation of a grassroots community-based group. The community committee participated in the planning, implementation and evaluation of this initiative. The researcher/facilitator for this project worked with the committee to gain insight into the history of the area, prominent youth issues, gaps in service provision, lack of facilities, needs, exploration of existing facilities or surplus space. This process was important in building support and fostering a sense of ownership among the community members and stakeholders.

The final section of this paper includes a conclusion and recommendations for short and long-term solutions that include:

Short-term Solutions:

1. Access space immediately in public schools
2. Organize a community conference involving youth
3. Build partnerships
4. Increase program funding and eliminate user fees
5. Establish community based program space in multiple locations
6. Develop inclusive programming that meets the needs of female and racialized youth

Long-term Solutions:

1. Accelerate the building of a community recreation centre in York South-Weston now!
2. Consult with community to inform the planning, development and Implementation phases of the recreation centre's construction
3. Involve youth in decision-making and community development processes
4. Engage in community advocacy through yearly deputations at City Hall and other opportunities to impact policy
5. Establish core funding for youth-driven initiatives

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