



A Community Call for Collaborative Social Action and Decision Making

First Steps: Saving the Jarvis Pool

This report documents learning from a Community Matters Toronto advocacy project in the St. James Town community of keeping the Jarvis Collegiate Institute pool open July/August 2009.

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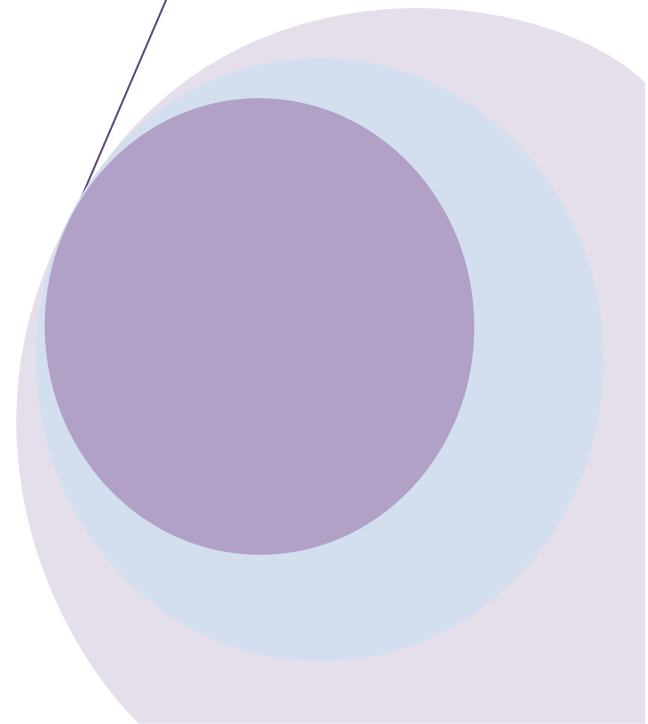


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Introduction

Residents and community organizations in St. James Town have never been consulted about resource allocation in our own neighbourhood because we have never been organized as a community to be able to have a 'voice' or say in the decision making. In July 2009 community residents and organizations decided to make a call for collaborative social action and decision making, to keep the Jarvis Collegiate Institute swimming pool open for use by students, residents in the neighbourhood, and community organizations. This project is a step towards building a coalition between organizations, social institutions and residents of St. James Town for the purpose of putting processes and structures in place for collaborative social action and decision making.

This initiative is one of four projects that community residents will be taking ownership of with financial assistance from the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Financial assistance is for training and resources to develop advocacy skills. Future projects involve ensuring equity of access to the Wellesley Community centre facilities and programs and space at Rose Avenue public school: The two other projects involve making the crosswalk between the apartments and the school safer for children, and addressing population density issues in the neighbourhood. The projects aim to change the way that decisions are made with regards to accessing resources and community space through Toronto Parks and Recreation and with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

Financial assistance for advocacy training from the Heart and Stroke Foundation was granted to Community Matters Toronto, an agency based in the St. James Town neighbourhood, which is made up of residents who are committed to helping each other with matters related to immigrant settlement, children's education, and health and social issues.

This report documents learning from the first advocacy project of keeping the Jarvis Collegiate Institute pool open. The report has been submitted to Community Matters Toronto (CMT) and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in partial fulfillment of the CIE 1002 practicum requirements. Practicum mentors were Ali Moallim and Margaret Coshan from Community Matters Toronto, and Dr. Stephen Anderson, professor at OISE, University of Toronto.

Background

St. James Town is a high population density neighbourhood located in downtown Toronto. It consists of approximately nineteen high rise apartments. This neighbourhood's residents are mostly newcomers to Canada. Toronto demographic data indicates that there are 4950 children and youth in the North St. James Town neighbourhood (Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services, 2006).

The Globe and Mail recently reported on a study that has found a 260% increase in obesity of children from 1995 to 2005 (Weeks, July 2009). Similarly, other studies have shown high rates of obesity in immigrants and low socioeconomic status families: The Canadian Association for advancement of Women and Sport (CAAWS) conducted a series of focus groups in 2008 with low socioeconomic status mothers to identify barriers that prevent participation in physical activity within their communities. One of the barriers identified was culture. One mother said:

“Some of us don't know how to swim, so we let the kids go in the pool and then watch while they are swimming.”

(Multicultural mother, Ottawa)

(CAAWS, 2008)

Recent EDI reports have demonstrated that St. James Town children are in the 'at-risk' category specifically for their gross motor and social skills, and that these same children are the highest percentage in the riding having multiple challenges (Mothercraft, 2008). Given these findings, healthy living and physical activity has been a top priority in Community Matters Toronto programming. Several studies have shown that neighbourhood deprivation has negative health effects on poorer individuals because they are possibly more dependent on collective resources in the neighbourhood (Stafford & Rather, 2003; Sundquist et. al., 2004). Both individual and neighbourhood level approaches are important in health care policies. Community Matters Toronto with residents in the community is committed to increasing community capacity for physical activity and sport opportunities in a neighbourhood where families live in a densely populated area with little room for physical activity.

History

Community Matters Toronto (CMT) was initiated ten years ago. One of the organization's systemic goals is to learn how to set up programs by listening to the community, and co-creating and developing programs based on self-identified needs. Other features of Community Matters programs include a holistic approach to addressing children's educational needs, which involve parental involvement in tutoring programs, and parents building networks with the schools. After-school programs are designed in alignment with the school's objectives.

In the past six years the organization has developed strong partnerships with Rose Avenue Public School and the Parent Council, City of Toronto Public Health, George Brown College, Branksome Hall, Toronto Community Housing Corporation and other local businesses.

The programs over the past ten years have had a focus on literacy and health and nutrition. These programs and projects have involved kids developing a cookbook titled 'Take a Byte Cookbook', collaboration with George Brown pre-apprentice cook programs, and operating the Public Health 'Colour it Up' nutrition program. Over the years a Healthy Living working group has been formed to focus on community nutrition and exercise from which the following programs have been initiated: Walk then Run, Family Walks, Women's Exercise, Healthy Games, and cooking for Health.

Alongside the focus on literacy and health, the organization has a capacity building program that trains neighbours as 'Community Assistants' to run literacy, employment training and health programs. Some elements have included the development of advocacy skills, in which Community Matters has:

- worked as a partner to advocate and raise money for a state of the art playing field and plays cape at Rose Avenue Public School;
- advocated with the school board to ensure the facilities would be 'permitted' for use by the community;
- secured space for summer programs at the school;
- secured three times the usual allotment of nutrition training from the City of Toronto Public Health;
- been awarded the KIDFIT advocacy development grant for a Community Breakfast/Family Fitness Program.

The project to help keep the Jarvis pool open is a resident driven advocacy initiative. Over the next year the Community Assistant's training will be expanding to develop further advocacy skills.

Community Issues

In St. James Town, policies limiting access to exercise for children is a key issue. Policy decisions are made about pool closures, restrictions of the use of school and public space, and access to the community centre's programs. Furthermore, proposed new residential construction will increase the population in North America's most densely populated neighbourhood. These interrelated decisions all affect our children's health. The community 'voice' is often filtered through the eyes and cultures of outsiders and professionals. In this newcomer community, residents often do not understand advocacy and that they can speak without fear and know that change can result. In one meeting with residents a lady stated:

“Many families come from a ‘Culture of Silence’ where people have borne injustices in silence. We want to change this.” (St. James Town resident, Toronto)

The community is enthusiastic about working towards changing policy for the benefit of the community. Community issues that we would like to address immediately are described below.

Jarvis Pool: The Jarvis Collegiate Institute pool was recently given a two month reprieve. Many of the parents at Jarvis are new Canadians and have not been able to organize to arrange for swim meets and alternate forms of sponsorship, so Jarvis has one of the lowest rates of community permits. There are no other indoor pools in the immediate vicinity. High school students along with students from the local elementary schools could benefit from the pool. A strong coalition has been organized to advocate for the need for access to pools in low income neighbourhoods. The pool is a vital component of a physical activity strategy for all children, not just those who are on swim teams whose parents can afford to pay fees or organize sponsorships.

Access to TDSB space: We would like to work in partnership with our local schools to expand the Joint Use of School Agreement for evening and weekend use of schools for children's programs.

Access to space/programs with Toronto Parks and Recreation: St. James Town residents have complained about many barriers to use of Parks and Recreation programs and facilities. Registration for these programs is online and many parents in the area do not have access to computers, work long hours and are not aware of programs. By the time they learn about the programs, spaces have been filled by 'out of neighbourhood' participants. The community through the advocacy project would like to propose equity of access to these facilities and

programs. Computer literacy, registration processes and other barriers need to be addressed with the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation, to ensure that local residents have equal access.

Increased Density: Increased population density is a concern for this community because of limited space for activity and access to resources. There is proposed construction of 38 story condos and townhouses between Bleeker and Sherbourne.

Crosswalk Safety: The road at Ontario and St. James Street between the apartments and the school is not well maintained, and without speed bumps. Cars often drive at an unsafe pace on this road, while children run across the road without cross guards. Installation of a crosswalk on this street is needed to ensure safety.

Objectives

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario (HSFO) has granted funding to Community Matters Toronto for Resident Driven Advocacy in St James Town. The HSFO Community Advocacy Action Grants are for projects that mobilize the community to make significant change that will have a sustainable impact in supporting increased access to healthy food and/or physical activity for children in Ontario.

This project will engage residents in St. James Town by developing an advocacy model, promoting the awareness of advocacy concepts and processes in a newcomer community, and offering the community the learning necessary to vigorously advocate now and in the future. The Community Assistant's training will be expanded to build a community infrastructure of skills, knowledge of rights and practical tools. An improved community's voice levels the playing field with more established neighbourhoods vying for limited resources, and moreover provides a channel through which community members can make decisions and take ownership of the resources in their neighbourhood. This project targets the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and Toronto Parks and Recreation decision makers, developing a collaborative approach to changing processes to access resources and, changing municipal and provincial policies. The main objectives include:

1. Local residents through their participation in these initiatives will learn advocacy skills and will lead Advocacy Training.
2. An advocacy partnership will be established with local schools, parent councils, Public Health and other community stakeholders to provide a cohesive, sustainable approach.
3. Improved access to schools for children's programs through a policy change regarding **the Joint Use of School Agreement** at Rose Ave. Public and Winchester Schools.
4. A coalition to advocate for **ACCESS TO POOLS IN LOW INCOME NEIGHBOURHOODS**, specifically at Jarvis Collegiate.
5. Removal of barriers to registration to ensure local residents' equal access to City of Toronto Parks and Recreation programs.

The current Community Assistant training contains modules dealing with child abuse, program coordination, self-help, developing working relationships and partnerships and measures commitment to ongoing learning and development. This training will be expanded to include a module on developing the following advocacy skills:

- ✓ Being alert to and able to solicit community feedback about any issue.
- ✓ Understands issues from different perspectives.
- ✓ Maps out stakeholders with a vested interest/position in the outcome.
- ✓ Defines community issues:
 - What is the nature and breadth of the community reaction?
 - Is a local response appropriate
- ✓ Aware and informed of any legal statutes and regulations involved.
- ✓ Knows the levels of government involved and how:
 - What methods have they developed to deliver and regulate these issues?
 - Policies and procedures
 - Regulations
- ✓ Knows the relevant politicians' position on the issue.
- ✓ Knows if there are other groups or coalitions involved already.
- ✓ Evaluates whether it is appropriate to develop alliances or coalitions. Can identify other community partners who may collaborate on an issue.
- ✓ Knows the CMT position.
- ✓ Is able to maintain a 'resident driven' perspective and use

Projected results/Evaluation

Process Measures	Advocacy Skills	Participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project management – timely meeting of objectives through Working Group minutes. ▪ Project reports on CMT website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engaging the community ▪ Advocacy skills ▪ Communications ▪ Training modules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At least 4 residents trained in advocacy skills. ▪ Volunteer time from time sheets. ▪ Number of residents involved. ▪ Signatures on petitions. ▪ Attendance at public meetings.
Project Outcomes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More school space for children’s programs through expansion of Joint Use of Schools Agreement • Registration policies allow greater access to Parks and Recreation Children’s programs • Changes in TDSB policy re access to pools in low income areas • Viable community working group that continues to monitor progress and safeguard gains 		

Jarvis Pool Advocacy Project

Background

The city of Toronto commissioned a report in April 2004 on how to improve use and accessibility to the city of Toronto’s 71 indoor pools, 40 of which are in TDSB schools. The report found that barriers to use of indoor pools do not include the cultural background of people; pools are widely used by new immigrant families. However, use of the pool depends on the size of the pool and on maintenance of the facility though quality and size are not enough in themselves. Other areas of operation that affect use include operating procedures, increased water temperatures, improved maintenance, increased coordination of schedules, improved program registration procedures, better alignment of user fee policies and clearer delineation between non-profit and private agencies using pools (City of Toronto, 2004).

The Toronto Lands Corporation (TLC) is a group working on a long-term strategy to maintain the 39 TDSB pools. TLC is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the TDSB and is responsible for managing TDSB’s non-operating school sites. The Aquatics Working Group (AWG), which is made up of members of the Toronto community and aquatics stakeholders, is working together with TLC for long-term sustainable funding for TDSB pools.

The AWG assessed data collected on pool conditions to develop pool specific and system wide strategies. In April 2009 the Ontario Government through the Ministry of Infrastructure gave a generous commitment for capital funding to renovate the pools to the AWG. While the ongoing operation of 13 pools is secure, AWG continues to work to the create strategies to keep another 19 open past June 2009. In May 2009, AWG advanced a new, uniform policy on TDSB community pool permits: \$50/hour for any pool, by any type of group in the community. This policy will contribute to increasing permits for use of the pools.

In an update in June 2009 TLC reported work that had been accomplished since March 2009:

June 2009 TLC Update – Long-term Pool Strategy

- Strategy: Pool revenues through permit hours have to cover the incremental operating costs in order for the pools to remain open.
- Secured provincial funding for maintaining pools for a year.
- Increased revenues through permitting for programs (Not individual permits).
- Continued growth of community recognition and support for school pools.
- Community partnerships with the Aquatic Working Group.
- Decreased permit fees to increase permitting.
- Exploring funding opportunities:
 - Community Use of Schools (Ontario Ministry of Education)
 - Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion
- Marketing plan developed.

In St. James Town proper there are two outdoor apartment pools that are open to residents during the summer months. These outdoor pools were originally operated by the YMCA but the community suffered when the YMCA decided to withdraw from operating the pools in the past. Through this advocacy initiative, the aim is to set up a structure in which many stakeholders and community groups permit the Jarvis pool in order to cover incremental costs. In this way keeping the Jarvis pool open will be more sustainable, and is not dependent on a single organization.

The benefit of keeping the pool open is that it will address the issue that the media reports of St. James Town having low physical activity and motor skills. Access to an indoor pool will allow students to learn to swim as early as elementary school. Lifeguard training can provide job opportunities in life saving, and it will teach essential skills that will promote water safety.

Coalition and Networks

One of things that is being explored through this advocacy work is how we can build networking relationships with other groups in order to gain the benefit of networking to move a shared goal ahead. Currently there are five groups that have formed a network:

Aquatics Working Group (AWG)

The Aquatics Working Group (AWG), as discussed above, which is made up of members of the Toronto community and aquatics stakeholders has been working closely with Community Matters Toronto in this initiative to keep the Jarvis pool open. This group, previously known as Let's Make Waves, has used the media strategically, has a passion for this issue, and values sport for child development. They have links to political action and are partnered with Toronto Lands Corporation, for which David Crombie, former Toronto mayor is a strong figurehead. He has a reputation for brokering and has experience at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. This group also works closely with the Toronto Sports Council. The Toronto Sports Council provides a strong background in strategic planning and project management of sports projects.

Janet Dabrus, a representative from the AWG has been at all of the St. James Town working group meetings. She is a strong knowledgeable parent, who has been able to share invaluable insight and information from her participation in advocating for keeping the Queen Alexandra pool open.

Jarvis Collegiate Institute

The principal of Jarvis Collegiate Institute has been a strong supporter in this initiative. In an initial meeting with the school principal Ms. Elizabeth Addo, she was in agreement with the community advocacy project to keep the pool open as long as the focus was on swimming for learning and gave preference for children and dependable groups to permit the pool. Since, she has referred us to the Jarvis Parent council, the Physical Education teacher and the Alumni Association.

Neighbours in St. James Town (Community Matters)

A working group of St. James Town residents and supporting community members was formed in early July. Participants include residents, Parent council chairs from Rose Avenue public school and Jarvis Collegiate Institute, students from Jarvis, children from the neighbourhood day camps, and staff from agencies in the neighbourhood.

Politicians George Smitherman and Pam McConnell

A meeting was held with the Executive Assistant to Pam McConnell who saw potential for a partnership on this. They suggested that we work with Kyle Rae and George Smitherman so the three ridings can be seen as being supportive of this project.

Canadian Tire Foundation

CMT has submitted an application to Canadian Tire Jumpstart for the cost of the swimming programs which is presently being considered.

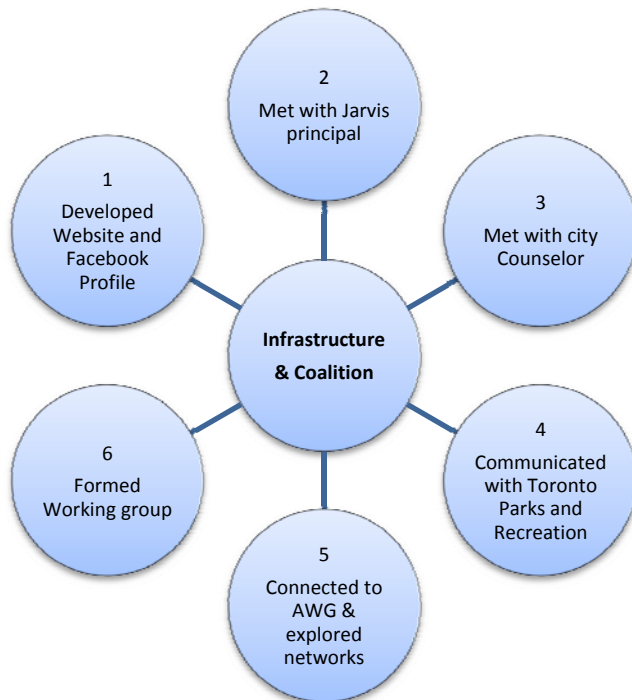
Community Action

When a dialogue was first started in the community around advocacy for keeping the Jarvis pool open, it was observed that the majority of residents as well as community groups were unaware of the existence of the pool in their neighbourhood. The short-term goals of this project are to access local pools and community space in schools, to try a pilot program with classes from Rose/Winchester for swimming lessons and to establish a viable community working group that continues to monitor progress of use and sustainability of the pool.

The community actions reported below occurred within the span of seven weeks. The community action can be grouped into the following themes:

- Developing infrastructure - Forming Coalitions
- Community Communication
- TDSB Proposal

Developing infrastructure - Forming a Coalition



1	Developed website and Facebook profile, which contains information on the issue and how people can participate.
2	Met with the Jarvis Principal to gain support.
3	Met city Councillor Pam McConnell who is coordinating her activities with Counselor Kyle Rae as the location of this pools spans across two ridings.
4	Communication with Toronto Parks and Recreation regarding the possibility that Parks and Recreation would permit Jarvis as a pilot program.
5	Connected with representatives from the AWG. Explored network/partnership with other groups (People for Education, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, Toronto Swim Club, YMCA)
6	Established community working group which has held four meetings to raise awareness of the issue.

Community Communication

- Community survey and pledge: A campaign page with survey was set up to gauge interest in saving the pool and secure registration for swimming lessons. (Appendix I for survey)
- Information and Email Campaign: Emails of concern are being sent to the city Councillor's office.
- Worked with these groups in the neighbourhood to raise awareness about the issue and to explore possibilities of permitting the pool to fill the hours required to cover incremental costs.

TCHC	Coops	Parent Councils	Tamil Seniors
Hugh Garner Coop	LINC classes	CYC	St. James Town Service Group
Old Cabbagetown BIA	Condo Associations	Jarvis students	Cabbagetown Festival booth

- Jarvis students participated in working group meetings and presented their strategies for reaching out to students and informing them about the pool closure. Jarvis CI Students have been actively involved in increasing awareness of the survey.
- Presentation by the children in the day camps about the importance of having a neighbourhood pool.
- Jarvis School principal sent out a voice mail to every student informing them about the pool closure and requesting their support in survey pledges.
- Article published in community newspaper The Toronto Bulletin to raise awareness.

TDSB Proposal

On August 24th, 2009 representatives from the working group will be meeting with the TDSB to present our community action to date including a proposal for 'Equity of Access' to the pool for St. James Town residents. As mentioned above, there are several policy and process barriers that St. James Town residents face when trying to access neighbourhood resources (i.e. Programs and space through Toronto Parks and Recreation and the TDSB). Barriers include the way in which permitting and registration takes place online which is not accessible to the majority of the residents. The working group consulted on three ways in which we thought 'Equity of Access' to the pool could be achieved: through a **quota system**, under the administration of a **neighbourhood permit group** and **right of first refusal** by the neighbourhood permit group.

Quota System	Permit Group	Right of first Refusal
Permitting groups can ensure that a proportion of their program spaces are for residents in St. James Town. (i.e. Toronto Swim Club offers a proportion of their spaces to kids in St. James Town.)	A 'Pool Committee' of residents could be formed to administer the permit applications. (There are challenges to implanting this including composition of the group, how it will be administered fairly, and the process of decision making.)	The 'Pool Committee' could give go ahead for use of the pool, pending it won't be used by St. James Town residents.

What we have learned...

In July and August 2009 over a period of five weeks, a survey was conducted of St. James Town residents to determine if swim programs would be utilized should the pool remain open. The survey can be found in Appendix I of this report. Approximately 450 people responded to this survey. Members of the working group shared information and access to the survey with their family, friends and neighbours. Respondents to the survey were primarily newcomers to the community. As a working group we had to spent time with most respondents explaining the issue and answering questions. Most of the surveys were completed on paper rather than online. The results as of August 21st, 2009 are presented below:

Survey Highlights

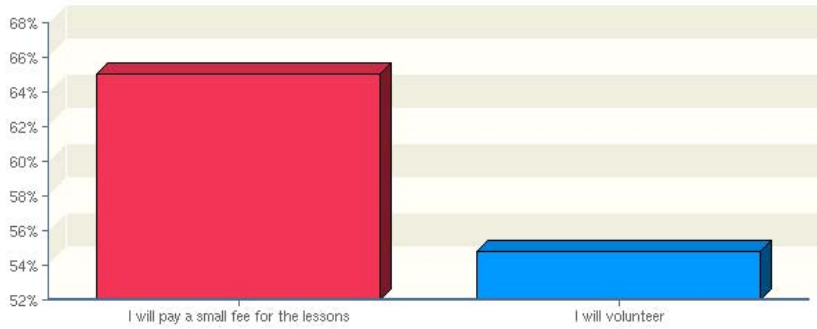
- The majority of respondents would register for children’s swimming lessons. The program least registered for was Aquafit.
- 65% of respondents said that they would pay a small fee for use of the pool, and 54% said they would volunteer.
- With regards to advocacy, 58% of respondents were happy to help volunteer to save the pool but only 13% responded that they would contact their Councillor.

1. I would register for these programs to start in January 2010

ITEM	Please check as many as you like	Total
After School Swim	100.0% 282	282
Summer Camp Learn to Swim	100.0% 209	209
Children's Swimming Lessons	100.0% 296	296
Youth Swimming Lessons	100.0% 118	118
Adult Swimming Lessons	100.0% 219	219
Aquafit	100.0% 89	89
Lifeguard Training	100.0% 93	93
	1,306	

Total Responses: 419

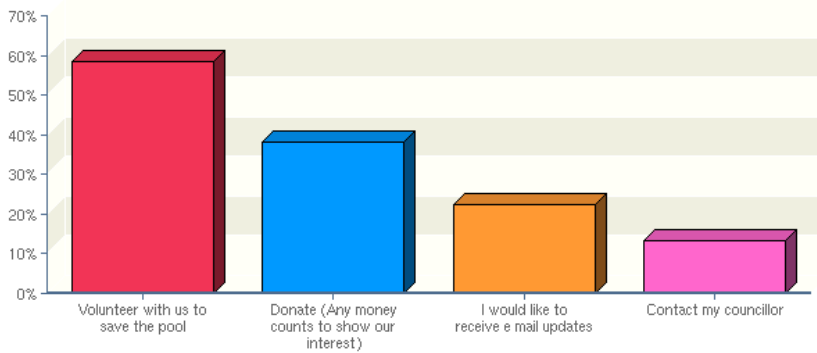
2. I will contribute to these programs:



STATISTICS	
Choices Selected:	383
Total Responses:	383

SUMMARY		
VALUE	COUNT	PERCENT %
I will pay a small fee for the lessons	249	65.01%
I will volunteer	210	54.83%

3. I want to work with to save the Jarvis Collegiate Pool. I will



STATISTICS	
Choices Selected:	300
Total Responses:	300

SUMMARY		
VALUE	COUNT	PERCENT %
Volunteer with us to save the pool	175	58.33%
Donate (Any money counts to show our interest)	114	38.00%
I would like to receive e mail updates	67	22.33%
Contact my councillor	40	13.33%



Revenues and Operations

A financial model has been developed setting budget targets to meet operating costs including:

1. Permit fees
2. Lifeguard costs
3. Swimming Lessons
4. Administration Appendix

In order to cover the incremental costs to keep the pool open, the community needs to fill 1400 permit hours which is \$70 000 in operating costs, of which \$20 100 has been raised. CMT has 160 Permit hours covered to date. To reach the targeted permit hours CMT is working with the YMCA, Toronto Swim Club, Cabbagetown Youth Centre, St. James Town Youth Initiative, and the Wellesley Community Centre. An unofficial pledge from an, at present, anonymous donor was received for \$35 000.

An additional source of income being explored is through TDSB's Community Use of Schools funding which now totals approximately \$9.8M including funding for Community Outreach Coordinators. Within the Community Use of Schools funding there is a Priority Schools Initiative which provides funding to community groups for use of TDSB facilities in priority schools of which both Rose Ave and Winchester Public schools are on the list.

Next Steps

Beyond these initial first steps, the advocacy projects will continue with the working group continuing to meet weekly.

As shown in the survey results few residents are willing to or are comfortable with contacting their Councillor on community issues. Immediate next step for the advocacy training is for the working group and interested residents to participate in a workshop to understand how to work with the political system.

The next project offshoots from the pool project, in which the working group will continue to find ways to secure more community access to TDSB space.

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Appendix I

Survey: I want to help save the Jarvis Collegiate Pool

1.

First Name:
Last Name:
Phone Number:
Email Address:

2. I would register for these programs to start in January 2010

	Please check as many as you like
After School Swim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summer Camp Learn to Swim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's Swimming Lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth Swimming Lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adult Swimming Lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aquafit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lifeguard Training	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. I will contribute to these programs:

- I will volunteer
- I will pay a small fee for the lessons

4. I want to work with to save the Jarvis Collegiate Pool. I will

- Contact my councillor
- Donate (Any money counts to show our interest)
- Volunteer with us to save the pool
- I would like to receive e mail updates