



Needs Assessment and Asset Mapping of Danforth-East York

FINAL REPORT



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TORONTO, A CITY WHERE THOSE WITH DIVERSE ROOTS CAN GROW AND INTERMINGLE INTO A COMPLEX AND EXCITING MULTICULTURAL TAPESTRY

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Key Messages

1 The Healthy Kids Community Challenge (HKCC) is an important initiative for Danforth-East York. The community has many strengths and assets, however there are high risk factors for poor health outcomes including not eating enough healthy food or not getting enough physical activity.



2 The community is diverse, and has a high newcomer population. Many children, especially from newcomer families, are living in poverty.



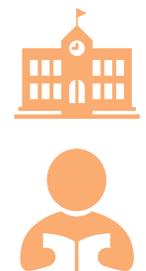
3 Assets that already exist in the community include physical infrastructure, programs, partnerships and people, For example, community and school gardens, food markets, student nutrition programs, Early Years Learning Centres, Model Schools, physical activity and healthy eating programming, as well as physical space. Incredible leadership exists among local champions and grassroots initiatives. Innovative models and partnerships have been created to meet the needs of cultural communities.



4 Although there are many assets, they are not consistent across neighbourhoods, and other barriers are standing in the way. The biggest barrier is poverty. Other challenges include a lack of awareness about the programs and services that are available, cultural barriers, lack of accessible programs and space; and lack of awareness of healthy living.



5 There many opportunities to address these barriers by expanding some of the existing assets; adapting ideas from local leaders for small-scale, low cost, community-driven activities and programs; leveraging and developing new school-based partnerships; building on successful peer and youth initiatives that hire parents and youth from the community; engaging health care organizations and champions; and creating a HKCC campaign. All opportunities should aim to integrate employment opportunities for community members.



Introduction

The Healthy Kids Community Challenge (HKCC) was created by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and is designed to improve the health of children under 12. The initiative will support community-based activities to promote healthier living and reduce obesity. The Danforth-East York Community was chosen to implement the initiative, led by the South Riverdale Community Health Centre (SRCHC), and the eight partners of the Action for Children Today and Tomorrow (ACTT) Consortium. ACTT members include: South Riverdale Community Health Centre, East End Community Health Centre, Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre, East York East Toronto Family Resources, Flemingdon Health Centre, Massey Centre, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Centre, and WoodGreen Community Services.

The Healthy Kids Community Challenge Needs Assessment and Asset Mapping Project was designed to answer three main questions:

1. To what extent are kids and families in your community experiencing healthy, active living?
2. What are the challenges and obstacles to achieving healthy active living for kids and families in your community?
3. What supports or future opportunities exist for healthy, active living for kids and families in your community, specifically in the areas of physical activity and healthy eating?

This report summarizes the findings of the project including the range of assets in the community, the barriers that are limiting access to healthy living, and opportunities to leverage and expand existing resources to improve children's health.

Seven neighbourhoods within Danforth-East York were examined: Blake-Jones, Danforth-East York (including Pape-Cosburn), Flemingdon Park, Taylor-Massey (formerly known as Crescent Town), Thorncliffe Park, Victoria Village and Woodbine-Lumsden.



METHODS

Data was collected from a total of 277 people in Danforth-East York in three ways:

- 179 Surveys were completed by community members (online and in-person)
- 78 Community members participated in a focus group
- 20 Key informants (KI) were interviewed (including school trustees and principals, City of Toronto Community Development Officers, staff of partner organizations, leaders of grassroots groups, Toronto City Councillor, staff from Toronto Foundation, community champions)

Survey participants had a total of 276 children. Almost half (44%) were aged 6-12, one quarter were 1-3 years old, 19% 4-5 years old, 11% under one year old and 1% over 12.

The survey and interview questions were designed to answer the three questions for the needs assessment and asset mapping as outlined in the introduction.

Results

Q1. To what extent are kids and families in the Danforth-East York community experiencing healthy, active living?

SOCIAL PROFILE

Within the seven neighbourhoods that were examined for the project, 56% of residents identify as a visible minority. Thorncliffe Park, Flemingdon Park, Victoria Village and Taylor-Massey had the highest numbers of visible minority populations.

All seven neighbourhoods have child poverty rates that exceed that of the City of Toronto where 10% of children 0-17 years old live in poverty. Thorncliffe Park has the highest child poverty rate of 53%, followed by 46% in Flemingdon Park, 45% in Blake-Jones and 44% in Taylor-Massey. In the Be Well study, 29% of respondents in Thorncliffe Park and 46% of respondents from Blake-Jones reported that they did not have enough money to buy healthy and nutritious food for their children (South Riverdale Community Health Centre, 2016). Many families live in high-rise buildings and lack opportunities for recreation.

Although there isn't any data on healthy eating or active living specific to the communities for this project, a Toronto Public Health study found that only 13% of grade 7-12 students in Toronto were eating enough vegetables and fruit, and 7% of grade 7-12 students in Toronto were meeting physical activity guidelines (Toronto Public Health, 2014).

Based on this social profile, the focus of this needs assessment and asset mapping project was low income and newcomer families.

ASSETS

Despite the limitations, there are many assets in the community that are working towards improved healthy living. The first question on the survey asked participants what their favourite thing about their neighbourhood is. Below are a few examples of the responses.

"I love this neighbourhood because everything I need is so accessible, like healthcare, grocery, transit, schools, library etc."

(FLEMINGDON PARENT OF 4 CHILDREN AGES 11-22)

"Access to Don Valley and Brickworks, mix of generations on the street."

(PAPE VILLAGE PARENT OF 2 CHILDREN AGES 2.5, 4 MONTHS)

"The people, how everything is so close, the variety in cultures."

(PAPE VILLAGE PARENT OF 3 CHILDREN AGES 7, 13, 20)

A full breakdown of all of the assets was submitted in excel format to SRCHC. The following two pages summarize the assets we found in the community.

Assets

Including 10 City of Toronto community centres and school recreation centres (4 arenas, 1 outdoor rink, 2 outdoor pools, 1 indoor pool, 4 splash pads, school recreation facilities, 2.5 km² of green space)



* City wide programs for which location and statistical information is not available on a neighbourhood specific level.

Assets



Challenges

Q2. What are the challenges and obstacles to achieving healthy active living for kids and families in your community?

Five key challenges were identified that limit people's access to opportunities that promote healthy living: 1) Low income; 2) Lack of awareness of programs and services; 3) Lack of accessible indoor and outdoor space and therefore programming; 4) Cultural barriers; and 5) Lack of awareness of healthy living.

1. LOW INCOME

Having a low income affects people's ability to:
a) buy healthy food; b) access programs; c) pay the cost of travel to get to programs; and d) spend the time cooking or travelling to programs because of a lack of time due to multiple jobs.

Children who live in poverty are more likely to be denied access to supports and opportunities, adequate nutrition, decent housing, good education and quality recreation that are key to healthy development.

(POLANYI ET AL., 2014)



Cost of Healthy Food

40% of survey respondents reported that the cost of healthy food is a barrier. Healthy food, including vegetables, is expensive even for people on moderate incomes.

"Healthy food is simply too expensive and difficult to access."

Food banks are not an effective solution to the high cost of food. Community members and key informants reported that people feel ashamed to go to the food bank. They added that it is only provided once a week and that there are not many healthy or fresh food options. Barriers to physically accessing food banks were also reported.



Cost of Programs

50% of survey respondents reported that the cost of programs is a barrier.

"One of the main obstacles is the high fees attached to some programs."



Cost of TTC

For community members who do not have programs or services nearby, the cost of TTC is a barrier.

“Many have said they have to take TTC to get to programs and that’s a barrier due to cost of TTC.”



Time

“The biggest challenge to healthy/active living is poverty. They may not have free time to bring kids out to programs if they are working multiple jobs to make ends meet.”

“Parents working two shifts don’t always have time to prepare healthy meals.”

2. LACK OF AWARENESS OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Not knowing what services or programs are available was the most reported barrier to accessing healthy eating programs (50% of survey respondents) and the 4th most reported barrier for accessing physical activity (23%).

“The problem is that I don’t know about available programs.”

“It is hard to find out about programs, they are not well advertised.”

“Outreach by distribution of flyer is not good enough.”

3. LACK OF ACCESSIBLE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR SPACE

There is a lack of accessible space which means there is a lack of programming. The key issues that limit access to programs that promote active living were: a) There aren’t enough free or low cost opportunities to meet demand; b) The City’s ‘Welcome Policy’ is inaccessible for some people; c) Lack of accessible indoor spaces; and d) Lack of accessible outdoor spaces. Accessibility includes childcare and physical accessibility.

28% of survey respondents reported that there are no programs or services for healthy eating close to their home and 30% said there are no programs for physical activity close to their home. Similarly, 24% reported that it is hard to travel to healthy eating programs and 23% reported that it is hard to travel to physical activity programs.



Not Enough Opportunities to Meet Demand

Although the City of Toronto offers free and low cost programming at their recreation centres, there are not enough spaces to meet demand. Spaces fill up quickly, and the online registration process can be difficult to navigate.

“There are access barriers and the programs are in such high demand, it’s a complicated system and there are not enough spaces.”



GAPS IN PROGRAMMING

“There are more programs for youth than children ages 6-12. Funding is not supporting physical activities and there is a shortage and gap in programming for that age range.”

“In winter there is a real lack of programs to get kids physically active.”



PROGRAM TIMES

Times that programs are offered was also an issue. Almost one in five survey respondents (17%) reported that programs are not offered at times that they are free. The most suitable time differs depending on families’ schedules. Some want morning or afternoon programs, others want evening or weekend.

“How can they get access to fitness centre on weekends? After school doesn’t work.”



Welcome Policy

Community members reported that the City’s ‘Welcome Policy’ has its own barriers, and can be stigmatizing.

“Low-income families complain that the Welcome Policy requires a lot paperwork and doesn’t make them feel good.”

“The Welcome Policy is inaccessible and the registration process is too competitive and fills up too fast.”



Lack of Accessible Indoor Spaces

Key informants told us that there is not enough programming, partly as a result of a lack of space for programming. We also heard that sometimes the people that are accessing permits for community spaces are not from the neighbourhood, and when local groups want to start programming, the space is filled by non-resident groups.

“There is not enough space/programming. The community doesn’t have access to swimming and afterschool sports leagues. There’s too much of a distance to the next community centre.”

“Secord community centre has challenges with space. There are many agencies using the building so there is nowhere to run some of the programs when they have new ideas.”



Lack of Accessible Outdoor Spaces

Community members reported two issues about outdoor space: 1) Some green spaces lack anything to encourage physical activity and 2) Some aren’t physically accessible.

“Flemo ranks high in terms of green space but it’s not accessible. It’s not being used to its full potential – there’s nothing that really attracts people to the park.”

“There are only 2 parks in the area and they are not very big. More parks are needed because they are always packed. The area is considered to have lots of green space but it is NOT accessible because of the valley – you have to take a shuttle bus.”

“There’s green space but it’s not usable and has no features. They need to develop green space to make it more attractive for gatherings.”

“The ravine is green space, but there’s no accessible path or entry. It’s hard for people with strollers and mobility issues to access and DVP is unsafe.”



SECORD PARK



Lack of Childcare

Mothers reported that a lack of childcare is a barrier to accessing programs or services. Childcare onsite would make programs more accessible for moms. Having more programs for moms and kids together increases the likelihood that parents will participate in physical activity. This could result in positive role modelling for kids and longer-term increases in physical activity behaviours.

4. CULTURAL BARRIERS

There are two key aspects of cultural barriers that are making it difficult for newcomers to access healthy living programming: Language and cultural context.



Language

Language barriers affect organizations' ability to promote their programs and services, as well as community members' ability to participate in programming or attend services. Of the survey respondents, 11% reported that language was a barrier. Key informants reported that:

"Generating awareness of the club (Crescent Town Club) is difficult, especially because there are language barriers with the many newcomers."

"With the language barrier, they may know about it, but it would take them longer to feel comfortable and get involved."



Cultural Context

11% of survey respondents reported that there aren't healthy eating programs that interest them or reflect their cultural background and 7% said the same about physical activity programs. 8% reported that not seeing people at healthy eating programs that reflect their culture is a barrier and 7% said the same about recreation programs. Specific issues related to cultural context from surveys and interviews are below.

- **Multicultural Food Pyramids.** Canada's food guide doesn't reflect multicultural cooking.
- **Female Specific Programming.** There are some cultural and religious practices that mean that women are not able to wear bathing suits in front of men, or remove their hijab. Drop-in times for females is important.
- **Diversify Sport Opportunities.** For example, many newcomers are interested in cricket rather than hockey or baseball.
- **Patriarchy.** Most programs are targeted at mothers and children, yet in some newcomer families, decisions are made by fathers. If fruits and vegetables are not a priority or bought by the father, the family will not be eating them. A gap exists in programming targeted at newcomers that self identify as male parents. Also, certain Muslim cultural practices require females to have male accompaniment in public spaces. The result is that drivers are hired (as the fathers are working) to take children to school. This reduces physical activity levels of children.

5. LACK OF AWARENESS OF HEALTHY LIVING

Many people think they are living healthy but they are not. There is a lack of understanding of what healthy food is, optimal amounts of physical activity and water consumption, and the impact of sleep deprivation.

"I don't know what healthy food is. People want to learn about healthy eating but need to know how to make it affordable."

"At one of the programs they ask parents to bring kids' lunch and many are bringing Lunchables, donuts, chips, zoodles - all processed foods."

"In our culture we don't eat a lot of raw vegetables and we don't understand the importance of fruit."

Another issue related to awareness is that in order for there to be an impact on children's healthy living behaviours, they need to be seeing healthy living practices modelled in their families. Parents can be unaware that their children are not eating healthy or being active because they themselves are not. The HKCC initiative needs to ensure that there are opportunities for whole families to participate in healthy active living.

"Their parents are not active so its not good role modelling. Sustainability of healthy living will require changing behaviours."

"Children watch what adults do, if we are caught up on devices, they will think that it's ok for them."

"Children from all social groups are exposed to a greater intensity and frequency of unhealthy food marketing than ever before. Many young people, and adults for that matter, lack basic food skills and information...Newcomers also face challenges in adapting to new ways to access, prepare, and eat food in Canada, while attempting to preserve their healthful food knowledge and practices."

(TORONTO PUBLIC HEALTH, 2010)

Opportunities

Q3. What supports or future opportunities exist for healthy, active living for kids and families in Danforth-East York, specifically in the areas of physical activity and healthy eating?

There are six main opportunities. Each of the opportunities needs to integrate ways to address the main barrier of poverty, including employing community members.



1. Expand Community Kitchens, School and Community Gardens and Food Markets

“Many of the ingredients to produce health, environmental, economic and social benefits through food are already in place, available to be leveraged by a strategy and connected through a common vision”.

(TORONTO PUBLIC HEALTH, 2010)

More community and school gardens, community kitchens and food markets are needed to increase the community’s access to affordable, healthy food. Partnerships with Toronto Community Housing (TCH) buildings and places of worship offer opportunities to leverage physical space assets that may be provided at no cost, to create an abundance of community gardens. It is recommended that certain gardens be designed and designated for use by children (e.g. Children’s Community Garden, 1081 ½ Pape Ave).

“Our vision is to have community gardens in every community so everyone has the opportunity to grow clean food.”

There is a range of programs already operating in the community (see assets). Examples and other ideas include:

- The community garden at Pape Cosburn Community Centre led by East York Neighbourhoods Initiative had classes for kids. There is also a weekly drop-in to allow people to help with gardening. People are allowed to take vegetables from the garden during the summer.
- The Mobile Good Food Market
- Work with local cultural grocery stores to create a healthy food aisle (e.g. Iqbal’s grocery store in Thorncliffe Park).
- Encourage community members living in high-rise buildings to create balcony or rooftop gardens.

ASSETS LEVERAGED

Community gardens, community kitchens, school gardens, food markets, Flemingdon Park Community Grown Project, Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee, Real Food for Real Kids, Breakfast for Learning programs, Foodshare, schools, Neighbourhood Action Teams, TCH facilities, places of worship, local grocery stores, Building Roots TO (Moss Park), Flemingdon and Thorncliffe Food Security Network, East York Neighbourhoods Initiative

BARRIERS ADDRESSED

Low income, cultural barriers, lack of awareness of healthy eating



2. Expand Physical Activity and Healthy Eating Programs in Schools, Partner Programs and Community Agencies

Children need as many opportunities for healthy living as possible. Leverage opportunities in spaces that children are already going (schools), or are easy to access (community organizations). Partnerships with schools will be crucial to reach as many children as possible on a regular basis.

"Kids need messages around healthy nutritious foods and to be taught how to make better choices. A primary medium should be through the schools and HKCC needs to develop better partnerships with schools as that is the way to reach the most kids."

"Universal snack programs don't have learning attached in terms of nutritious foods... There could be an opportunity for that learning in schools."

Refer to the assets section for programs and initiatives that could be expanded. In terms of community programs, community members reported that longer programs don't always meet childrens' needs. More drop-ins or 1-2 day events are required to reach children. Other opportunities include:

- Fill gaps in programming for children aged 6-12 by partnering between schools and Parks and Recreation to provide afternoon healthy living initiatives at summer school to children in grades 1-8. In the morning they would attend regular classes and stay for the afternoon to make a healthy lunch and participate in recreation.
- Increase physical activity in schools outside of recess by creating a toolkit where teachers can implement creative ways to increase daily physical activity in classrooms, outside of just recess, or if recess is cancelled due to bad weather.
- Increase active transport by finding adults to volunteer as a walking school bus to pick kids up.



VICTORIA VILLAGE PUBLIC SCHOOL

- Expand programs that incorporate whole families so that children see healthy behaviours modelled.
- An after-school program with FoodShare where pre-bagged groceries that come with a healthy recipe are sold for a low cost.
- “Develop space-programming partnerships so as to maximize resources and offer accessible programming for residents in their community.” (Lamanna, 2012)

ASSETS LEVERAGED

Toronto Public Health, schools, Right to Play, Playing for Keeps, Toronto Foundation, JumpStart, MLSE, Toronto Food Policy Council – Community Animators, Local sports clubs/associations, Consortium partner program platforms, ethno-cultural organizations, locally trained community residents / leaders (existing leaders trained by ACCT Consortium partners), Early Years Centres

BARRIERS ADDRESSED

Low income (the cost of food), cultural barriers, lack of awareness of healthy living



3. Promote Outdoor Activity Programming and Make Green Spaces More Accessible and Inviting

Community members need to be able to take advantage of free outdoor space, but need engaging opportunities and spaces for activities. Examples and ideas include:

- Bike lending, walking e.g. Flemingdon Urban Fair Committee hold ravines walks and festivals during spring, summer, winter and autumn.
- Build/expand on public-private partnerships with sporting businesses to donate equipment and sports leagues/organizations to donate or provide reduced cost access.
- Create more access and enhancements to green spaces. E.g. partner with urban planning experts, Home Depot to provide supplies, Hammerheads or Build Up Program to provide employment to provide more play equipment and places for families to gather.
- Provide equitable and culturally appropriate opportunities to bring people to the spaces.

ASSETS LEVERAGED

Flemingdon Urban Fair Committee, local sporting businesses/ leagues/associations, City of Toronto Parks and Recreation, urban planners, SRCHC and CultureLink’s ‘Bike Host’ bike-lending program

BARRIERS ADDRESSED

Lack of accessible outdoor spaces, cultural barriers, low income



4. Community Fairs and Events

Community fairs and events provide opportunities to raise awareness about programs and services and to participate in healthy living activities, and to build and expand on public-private partnerships. Examples include:

- There are three main food festivals in the neighbourhood whose models could be adapted or expanded to create additional festivals.
- Small events that are targeted at community members of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures, e.g. “melas” happening in South Asian communities. They feature cultural foods, cultural dance (by children, youth and adults), walking programs/races, and other activities to balance healthy eating and physical activity opportunities.
- Adding physical activity to a bazaar selling food and wares.
- Go Green Cricket field at Valley Park Middle School that intersperses physical activity (cricket), and healthy eating (herb and vegetable garden). Food harvested in local gardens could be used to prepare food and children in garden programs could help harvest food.

ASSETS LEVERAGED

Existing community fairs, events and large-scale food festivals, community gardens and good food markets, ethno-cultural organizations

BARRIERS ADDRESSED

Cultural barriers, lack of awareness of healthy eating, lack of access to physical activity



5. Create a HKCC Campaign and Community Engagement Strategy

“All factors that make it hard/create barriers for kids getting involved in healthy active living (cost, timing, transport, language) are overcome and outweighed when people are excited about being involved in something. Maybe it’s by athletes or celebrities talking about physical activity and wellness. People need to be having fun. HKCC needs to develop an effective school engagement strategy... There needs to be a solid framework and structure as well as incentives for the school to get on board. Maybe the project can hire cool animators to work with the community to do outreach and facilitate programs. Create a package that looks professional with healthy active programs.”



HKCC Campaign

An important part of HKCC needs to be raising awareness about the initiative and opportunities for healthy living in the community. Suggestions include:

- Create a branded partnership program. Individuals, organizations, businesses and communities create their own HKCC initiative to increase awareness of existing initiatives through an association with HKCC.
- Build partnerships to incentivize program to encourage matching resources (e.g. funder matches a business contribution).
- Create toolkit and branded assets to share with partners to promote the program.
- Create inclusive and accessible assemblies and events using popular culture to promote healthy living (healthy eating, sleep behaviours, physical activity and water consumption).
- Deliver messaging through locally trained youth and community members that are reflective of the communities served.
- Encourage schools, health, social and employment services, and sporting businesses /leagues/associations to get behind the HKCC campaign.



Community Engagement

- Produce engaging resources, communication tools, videos, social media and media campaigns in multiple languages.
- Distribute information through schools and primary care settings.
- Engage with newcomer parents and get them out and get excited. Partner with small ethno-cultural/community services to find out what activities would get them excited.
- Engage with community members in primary care settings.
- Deliver awareness and training initiatives for multi-sector partners.

“Community engagement is effective when you incorporate the residents and participants into planning process.”

ASSETS LEVERAGED

Local champions, Schools, Toronto Food Policy Council Community Animators

BARRIERS ADDRESSED

Lack of awareness of programs and services, Low income (employing community members), cultural barriers



6. Expand Peer and Youth Leadership Initiatives

Peer-to-peer learning is an effective way of gaining knowledge and building on local leadership and skills. There are several existing examples of parent peer leadership food skills and nutrition education in early years centres, childcare centres, and other community settings that could be expanded.

Although HKCC is geared towards 0-12 year olds, there is a need for communities to support youth's personal development to help them make positive choices. Young people need engaging opportunities for learning, employment and physical and mental health. Communities need to ensure that there are youth-friendly spaces. (Lamanna, 2012).

Examples include:

- Sustaining Health Advantages for Immigrants (SHAI, a program of SRCHC), program for newcomers that focuses on improving health and social outcomes by providing health and wellness workshops and activities. Peers and parents from the community are employed as peer leaders.
- Train peer leaders (adults and youth) who reflect the community socially, culturally or economically and who may have background in health from their country to develop/deliver healthy eating workshops that are developed within a cultural context.
- Provide employment opportunities for Peer Health Ambassadors that have already been trained by community health centres.
- Create and strengthen connections to cultural and ethno-specific groups.
- Toronto Employment & Social Services and Toronto community food animators are collaborating to train social assistance recipients in food and animation skills with a view to job creation and expanding food access, funded by Investing in Neighbourhoods.

“They (Crescent Town Club) have a new kitchen but no sign ups for cooking programs. There’s potential for ethno-cultural partnerships.”

ASSETS LEVERAGED

SHAI program, Community Health Centres, Toronto Food Policy Council, partner programs, ethno-cultural organizations, Peer Health Ambassadors, local youth, Investing in Neighbourhoods, Toronto Employment and Social Services

BARRIERS ADDRESSED

Lack of awareness of healthy eating, cultural barriers, low income



CRESCENT TOWN

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