



Features

- Sharing our Equity and Inclusion Journey
- Lawrence Heights Revitalization
- Building Agility into Counselling Practice
- A Good Road, Well Travelled
- Living our Values
- Expanding LGBTQ Services
- New Seminars Help Explain Family Laws
- A Seal of Approval
- FST update

Annual Report

- Our work
- How we do it
- Financial Statements
- List of Donors

Links

- Family Service Toronto website
- Catalyst Home Page
- Catalyst Winter 09
- Catalyst Summer 09
- Catalyst Fall/Winter 09

Helping revitalize Lawrence Heights

Over the next 20 years, the revitalization will transform Lawrence Heights into a mixed income community

When Lawrence Heights was built in the 1950s, urban planners imagined it would be a model community for families. Planners believed that a closed community would provide a quiet place for families to thrive, so they did not run roads through the neighbourhood. Instead of creating a utopia for families – many of whom had arrived in Canada for better opportunities – Lawrence Heights residents were isolated from the greater community and did not have access to shops and services that make good neighbourhoods. Without through traffic serving as a deterrent, criminal activity flourished at night.



Guidance of Canadian Somali Youth participants celebrate a sporting win. FST serves as trustee for this youth program.

In 2004, the City of Toronto and the United Way identified Lawrence Heights as one of the 13 priority neighbourhoods that needed additional supports and resources. After the United Way released its report, FST began working with residents in the area.

Among the initiatives, FST coordinates academic and sporting activities for children in the community. "Success at School" programs improve children's math and literacy skills and provide parents with the tools they need to help their children achieve better academic results. Guidance of Canadian Somali Youth is a community-based organization developed by Somali parents and facilitated by FST that provides sporting activities for youth-at-risk in Lawrence Heights and several other neighbourhoods. In addition, two of FST's programs – Options, a service for people labelled with intellectual disabilities, and Families in Transition, which helps separating, divorcing and remarrying families – are housed in the neighbourhood.

Acting on the City's and the United Way's recommendations, organizations serving the

Catalyst
Summer 08

Catalyst
Fall/Winter 07

Catalyst
Spring/Summer 07

Catalyst
Fall/Winter 06

represented a wide range of services – employment, education, childcare, health services, programs for youth and social services. By joining together and meeting regularly they could work more closely with each other and become familiar with each agency’s services, increasing their ability to refer residents to other programs in the community.

What Does Revitalization Mean for Residents?

In 2007, the City announced that Lawrence Heights would be the focus of a revitalization initiative. The revitalization would be similar to activities currently taking place in Regent Park in many ways except one. City planners realized that not involving residents in the planning process in Regent Park at the start created significant challenges for development, thus the Lawrence Heights plan has involved residents from the beginning.

After 50 years, the buildings in Lawrence Heights were beyond repair. However, to replace the buildings without changing the model would only serve to perpetuate the isolation and the unsafe environment. It would make better homes, but it would not make a better community.

Over a period of 20 years, the revitalization is intended to transform Lawrence Heights into a mixed-income community. All 1,208 units of social housing will be replaced with new subsidized housing and 4,300 to 4,800 market units will be added, bringing the area population from 3,500 to 16,000. The revitalization will improve transit, parks, schools and community facilities and add new retail in the area. This will provide much-needed jobs for residents and improve access to shopping, training and community services.

Existing Toronto Community Housing (TCH) units will be demolished and replaced with a mixture of townhouses, lowrise and high-rise apartments. All current Lawrence Heights residents will have the right to live in the new community. TCH will find temporary housing for displaced residents and will coordinate and pay their moving costs.

Developing a Framework to Move Forward

For the new community to work, the City of Toronto and TCH knew they would need to work with the residents and agencies that serve Lawrence Heights. Prior to the official launch of the revitalization process, TCH and the LHION developed the Lawrence Heights Community Priorities Framework to help identify issues that were important to the community and to inform and guide the process. TCH determined that Lawrence Heights residents should be recruited to play a major role in collecting information as they know the community and would be able to connect on a more personal level with other residents. Residents who knew one or more of the languages predominantly spoken in the area were hired to conduct surveys and focus groups to ensure residents who did not speak English were able to express their opinions.

Through this framework, residents provided their opinions on the community’s strengths and challenges and proposed solutions to these problems. Residents identified safety, better support systems for youth, building maintenance, food

strengths and challenges and proposed solutions to these problems. Residents identified safety, better support systems for youth, building maintenance, food security, education and a lack of unity and social cohesion in the community as major concerns.

The most important finding from this exercise was that residents want to be involved and influence the planning process. They want to have an equal voice and collaborate with agencies that provide services to find solutions that work for their community. They do not want outsiders to determine their needs and interests, as it does not work for them.

The next step is to work with residents on the planning process and to develop action plans and solutions in partnership with service providers.

Connecting Communities

Lawrence Heights is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multifaith neighbourhood. Most residents are from Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. English, Spanish, Somali, Amharic, Tigrina and Oromo are the primary languages spoken in the community. The community was divided as residents from Africa and the Caribbean had difficulty communicating with each other due to language barriers and people from Somalia were divided on their stands on the civil war at home.

FST participates in a Community Action Team working with Lawrence Heights, Neptune and Lotherton Pathway residents to strengthen the social cohesiveness of these communities through discussion and participation in the revitalization process. FST encourages residents to reach out to their neighbours so they become a community.

Sabriye Abdirahman of FST's Community and Neighbourhood Development Unit's role is to work with these residents to help break down barriers. He started working with the community to improve their confidence in relating to others and to help neighbours get to know and trust each other. He says once they are able to think of their neighbourhood as a community, residents are better equipped to make decisions and provide feedback on how they want their community to look. Through the LHION Revitalization Working Group, residents and agencies have been developing ideas together for revitalization.

FST staff help residents articulate their ideas and communicate with City planners and TCH. Just as it is important to work with residents to rebuild the community, FST realizes it is important to work with them to address their concerns about how revitalization and the move to temporary housing will affect their lives.

"Initially residents were hesitant to communicate with their neighbours from different ethnic backgrounds even though they have the same needs, such as a safe place to live, job opportunities and the need for their children to succeed in school. LHION, by connecting diverse individuals and groups, made it possible for residents to work together and get many things done in this complex neighbourhood," says Sabriye.

Developing Homes and Schools That Work for Residents

The City of Toronto, the LHION Revitalization Working Group and TCH are also working with residents to help plan homes that meet their needs. Lawrence Heights residents have taken City planners and TCH staff on tours of the neighbourhood to look at buildings, the community centre and other facilities to show what works and what does not work for them. They also looked at individual units and buildings in Don Mount, Toronto's first redevelopment project, and later met with Regent Park residents to discuss their involvement in that neighbourhood's revitalization process.

Kim Hinton, Community and Neighbourhood Development Manager at FST, explained that the priority document framework includes what is important to residents in the revitalization process. "Residents realize that not all their needs can be accommodated and they are willing to make trade-offs to get what they want."

From everyone's input, the City developed an Emerging Preferred Plan. It then consulted with the community to obtain their input to develop a Recommended Preferred Plan, which they will submit to North York Community Council in June. To help provide the facilities residents need, the Toronto District School Board, the City of Toronto, TCH and private developers are working together to develop multi-purpose facilities, such as schools with community spaces and pools that all residents – not just students – can use.

With the planned influx of residents in the new community, the neighbourhood will also need a Roman Catholic grade school and high school, as there are no separate schools in the area. The Toronto Catholic District School Board is involved in the revitalization process to acquire land to build these.

FST's Future Role

FST will continue to work with Lawrence Heights residents as the revitalization process continues over the next 20 years. During this time, residents will have continual opportunities to contribute their ideas about the design of parks, the community centre and other public areas.

Once the residents have increased capacity to become engaged and make decisions that affect their community, FST plans to become less involved in the revitalization process as residents will be making decisions independently.

FST looks forward to seeing a revitalized Lawrence Heights emerge that is home to people of all income levels and provides the services and facilities needed to become a vibrant, cooperative community