

# The Parma Court Story

Responding to Crisis through Engagement of  
Head, Heart, Feet and Spirit



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and members of the Focus 3 communities in  
Kugluktuk (NWT), Kainai Blood Reserve (AB), Parma Court (ON).  
Design and illustrations by Todd Ward, with youth community members.

This tool was created by the Focus Three team: youth of Kugluktuk, Parma Court's Youth Vybes Crew, Kainai Youth Council and The Students Commission.





## Case Study: Parma Court, O'Connor, Toronto

### Short Profile



The O'Connor community is located in east Toronto. The neighbourhood is home to about 1200 people living in a mix of row housing and high rise apartments that surround the O'Connor Community Centre and adjacent park. The larger area of Toronto that includes O'Connor is known as O'Connor-Parkview. The population of

the area is described by Statistics Canada as being approximately two-thirds immigrant (64.6%) and two-thirds visible minorities (65.5%). This includes many recent immigrants and first-generation Canadians.

Compared to the average Toronto household annual income (\$69,125), the average family in the O'Connor-Parkview area earns (\$43,876) – less than 64 percent that of the average Toronto household.

While youth 24 years and under make up about 12 percent of the population, they suffer from a 15.3% unemployment rate – higher than the Toronto average. Combine this with the 20 percent of the population that is 14 years and under, it makes providing support and services for everyone in the community that much more difficult. There is also an above average number of households identified as lone parent homes (21.7%). Families are working hard to take things into their own hands.

The people of O'Connor are taking positive steps to encourage youth and provide the necessary supports for all in the community. The community has just opened its newly renovated O'Connor Community Centre. The facility provides youth space, community meeting rooms, a new and improved pre-school room and a renovated gymnasium. One of the groups who actively worked to get the Centre work done was Youth Vybes. It is through their local involvement and volunteer efforts of community members that they are overcoming the odds. Focus 3 began its work with a small complex inside the O'Connor community, called Parma Court.

### Approach

A woman named Debbie Parks was referred to The Students Commission by members of the Toronto Police Force who we had been working with on another project. Her son had been killed by gang related violence; he had been running a music and dance group to try to keep young men out of trouble. She wanted to do something to continue his work and prevent another life being lost. Without resources, such as connections, a computer, email service, and while experiencing considerable emotional distress, she was being referred to one organization after another without much satisfaction and concrete support for her wish. She became the impetus for the project idea, and we promised to help if and when we could find the resources to assist in a meaningful way.

## **Element 1: Invitation, Initiating**

As the project began in November – December 2007, Debbie Parks was the first person we contacted and began to meet with. In numerous discussions with her, her idea of starting her own organization began to evolve into different ideas about how to make a difference.

### **Elements 2-3: Relationship Building, Clarifying Objectives**

Initially, we provided contacts, helped do business cards and talked about ideas. She kept identifying in these meetings that the most important thing we were providing is that we had followed up and followed through on our original commitment of staying in contact and finding resources for the project she envisioned. As we met regularly, she was struggling to deal with her own trauma, the challenges of being a single mom with two daughters at home, and getting back to work. She decided she wanted to function instead as an advisor and a connection point into the community, hosting dinners and introducing us to young people who were friends of her son or younger members of the community that she thought were heading for trouble. We identified with her that there were two existing groups in the community that could be strengthened, and through her and her ongoing advisory role, the Focus 3 project would work with these groups.

In the Youth Vybes group at the O'Connor Park Community Centre were friends or young mentees of her son who was killed. Debbie Parks had also joined UMOVE (United Mothers Opposing Violence Everywhere) who are mothers of young men killed by guns in Toronto, who are trying to mobilize other parents and young people in their neighbourhoods to end the violence.

### **Elements 4, 5, 6: Building Capacity by Working Together Designing and Implementing Positive Activities**

In December of the first year, with the UMOVE and Mothers of O'Connor members in Toronto, we worked to support their execution of a Christmas event and toy drive for families affected by gun violence, beginning to identify what role Focus Three can effectively play in assisting these groups. Flyers were created working with community members for both these events and circulated throughout the community.

We reviewed with members of the community resources that were available for communities around community and youth engagement, as well as community and youth development, and pulled together a package of materials for use by the community..

During January to April 2008, a team of two young men from The Students Commission who were in transition from street/crime related life met regularly with the mothers of UMOVE and participated in their weekly meetings. The presence and opportunity to talk directly with young black men attempting to turn their lives around proved to be beneficial and important to these mothers who have lost their own sons and beneficial to the young men, who responded to being able to contribute positively to community efforts. This is one of the elements of effective programming from the research literature and tools we were providing: opportunity to contribute. The mothers were eager to ask questions of the young men and seek advice about their younger children and what to look out for. The young men, who were no longer connected to their families of origin, benefitted from the interest of the UMOVE mothers.

As well, during this period, staff from The Students Commission began to attend youth-oriented spaces (coffee shops, street corners, benches) in the community to build relationships with the young men that live there and build trust, in order to encourage participation in the project. Their presence was slowly generally accepted, and while the process of creating relationships and partnerships with a particularly disenfranchised population takes time, the staff have made some positive inroads to date.

An important lesson was learned here. These young staff drew up a map of the community which identified their perceptions of safe and unsafe spaces. This was useful for themselves as they planned how they would work. However, when it was later posted on the Focus 3 website by them as part of the project's resources, without consultation with the Youth Vybes youth groups' members, it caused an uproar and was immediately removed. This damaged trust for a short while in the project, as it was appropriately felt that the map perpetuated stereotypes of the community that Youth Vybes and Focus 3 were trying to change through all the positive activities that were being collaboratively executed. Trust was rebuilt fairly quickly, but it reaffirmed an important aspect of the project; community members need to be the chief decision-makers and implementers, even if it takes more time and products are slower in completion.

The needs of the community groups were identified on an on-going basis with members as we met regularly with them and new project ideas were hatched. Promotional flyers were created on an ongoing basis for events that both Youth Vybes and UMOVE wanted to have at our offices, with support of an on-site graphic designer. Youth members from the community would come to the office and work with staff to create them, and then distribute them to the Parma Court neighbourhood alerting potential participants to project events in the community.

During April-June 2008, community members identified opportunities, specifically job opportunities for young men, as one of the supports they really needed. We therefore hired young men, now a young woman, with street experience to regularly attend community meetings and hang out in the community on the "corner" and in fast food places. They were successful in connecting with several extremely disengaged youth in the community, who have been affected by violence and involved in it, allowing inroads for the project to develop with a number of young people from vastly different positions within the community. The team of young people created a vision for a "Super" Program which would offer opportunities to make videos, art, music, perhaps do some recreational activities, sharpen entrepreneurial skills. It was a big dream, perhaps not that realistic, but it had all the features that the evidence-based research has identified as the key elements of effective positive youth development programming. When shown that the program they were imagining met the standards identified by the research gathered by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, they were very pleased with themselves. Our next step was to help them achieve small pieces of the dream piece by piece, by identifying resources in the community and surrounding it, that offered these elements, rather than attempting something too big and failing. One of the young Focus 3 staff members gained the interest and support of a professional hip-hop artist in terms of helping to start some activity.

In Parma Court, as with the other communities we involved youth and adult allies in trainings and workshops. In Parma Court, our partners and the youth we have connected were given extensive training (though informal) on the research of the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement and

program design. This training supported designing and executing a neighbourhood barbeque and a recruitment plan for them to recruit youth and adults to participate in upcoming events.

During July to September 2008, members of UMOVE) and Youth Vybes led the development of the tools for their respective projects supported by this grant. These tools included an evaluation for an upcoming UMOVE event, a tool for assessing the impact of videos created for this event, a tool for measuring the impact of the youth-created videos that will be created as a result of this event and an evaluation of the strengths and opportunities for UMOVE as a group. Youth Vybes' primary concern during this time period was to find new meeting space while the community centre undergoes significant renovation.

In October, we supported UMOVE to hold an October youth symposium event, and they began the development of a video tool that will be used to further engage youth facing extreme risk in the creation of short videos that deliver positive, anti-violence messaging to their peers. Focus 3 also supported the Youth Vybes team to undertake a number of community events including a community meeting (created and distributed flyers within the neighborhood) for a vote on the mural that would be painted on the O'Connor Community Centre to represent Parma Court. The community had three different themed murals to choose from: family; the arts; and education. All three murals had the face of a young man named Kareme Parks (a.k.a. Blitz) and a street sign saying Parma Court. Kareme was a victim of a shooting and is the son of the mother who helped create the concept of the Focus 3 by requesting assistance from The Students Commission to start some positive action in the community. The community voted on the family themed mural which consisted of images of children holding hands running; young people faces; the words love, strength, family and respect, "*everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association*", "*hoping after the stress everything is alright*"; and a series of 0's representing the number of young people the community has lost over the years.



Youth Vybes was assisted to participate in a summit hosted by the O'Connor Community Centre, where young people affiliated with different community centres and organizations around the city for a day of games and capacity building activities were invited to display their program information. Another community event was the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual *Bigga Blitz Block Inferno*. Training included helping them get permits for the park, secure funding from other sources and donations (for the food, barbecue and other equipment), cook the food and support as needed. This event seemed to have had a huge impact on the

community, young and old, and brought them together to celebrate their strengths and unite in their diversity.

At the Youth Vybes weekly meetings between six and 20 youth gathered to plan community events, learn new skills like resume writing and job search skills, and share strengths and concerns about their community with one another. The adult support we have been working with for this group identified the need for us to deliver training for the youth to develop their facilitation and mediation skills in order to increase their ability to interact with their peers and adults in positive ways.

In October, we supported the Youth Vybes group to apply for funding to Youth In Power (YIP) and they received some funding to put towards their upcoming Hood Show- a showcase of the talent and spirit of youth in the O'Connor neighbourhood. Our staff were active in supporting Youth Vybes to program and plan the community dinner and showcase which happened in January. Support included assisting with developing awards and promotional material and attending.

Our support of UMOVE (United Mothers Opposing Violence Everywhere) continued on an on-going basis and the link between Youth Vybes, UMOVE and SC staff helped build generational bridges in the community. Our staff was heavily involved in the planning and execution of the UMOVE Symposium held at Toronto's City Hall. The symposium was host to a mix of speakers, and engagement opportunities, where youth from targeted neighbourhoods in Toronto, including the O'Connor neighbourhood, attended workshops ranging from how to secure a pardon, to what rights children and youth have when engaging with the police. Guest speakers at the symposium included Toronto Police Chief William Blair, UMOVE's Executive Director Audette Sheppard, and City Councillor Pam McConnell.

In the O'Connor community a new relationship began with WoodGreen Community Services, a social services organization that provides youth and adults with training, skills development and access to health and social services. WoodGreen runs a group, called Rites of Passage, for young men and women from the neighbourhood that focuses on skills development and self esteem. Programmers and members of Rites Of Passage were provided with hands on facilitation, public speaking and presentation/engagement skills and allies training.

During January to March, we continued to meet weekly with the Youth Vybes Crew to assist in the planning and execution of their meetings and events. Respecting Debbie Parks and other mothers identified needs, we continued to look for opportunities to encourage youth to explore opportunities outside their communities. At the end of March, thirteen Youth Vybes members spent six days in Ottawa with our staff. The first three days of this retreat were spent reviewing the goals and objectives of Youth Vybes as a group, and training participants in those skills that would assist them with the running of their weekly meetings, and the community events they hope to do in the future. The nine young women (ages 12 to 15) three young men (ages 18-21) and one young adult support who attended the retreat with our staff were walked through the training in a hands-on manner, using upcoming events, and the retreat program itself as an opportunity to develop their skills.

The retreat was held in response to the beliefs of supporting parents and the young adult support that the youth would benefit from being together in a space outside of their community and comfort zone. The Students Commission has had similar experiences when taking young people outside of their communities. The potential at an event like this for learning and growth in a very short period of time is

enormous, and is particularly effective on young people from a community such as O'Connor. For many of these youth, this was the first time they had left Toronto for an extended period of time, and the newness of the experience was incentive enough for them to focus their efforts on developing both as individuals and as a group. The program was multi-layered and offered opportunities for all participants to learn and contribute something. The young adult support was given the opportunity to develop his programming skills by working with us in advance of the retreat to plan the program, and learned to support others to execute the agenda throughout those two working days. He was also supported to work with the group in a manner outside of his own comfort zone, learning how to deal with new and different group dynamics brought on by being in an unfamiliar place. He was challenged to model real leadership, by supporting the young people of Youth Vybes to develop their own leadership skills and changing some of his own behaviours. Throughout the retreat, we also worked with him to work with the group to develop some of the more tangible skills that they would need, including work planning and budgeting, understanding the need for and creating promotional materials, community mapping and program planning.

The young men of the group were invited to attend the retreat as they were identified as “emerging leaders” in the community by the younger members of Youth Vybes. These young men showed leadership throughout the six days we spent in Ottawa, and were challenged by our staff, the program, and eventually themselves, to realize the full capacity of their skills. This group of young men were clear leaders in their community, not always for the positive, and as the retreat progressed, they and the rest of the group identified that they were not utilizing these skills on a weekly basis for the benefit of Youth Vybes. In this more focused environment they were able to really step up to the level of leadership that they were capable of. Although this was not without some challenges, by the end of the retreat, these young men had honed their leadership skills into something that this group and the community as a whole could benefit from. Like the group’s young adult support, they too had been missing some of the more tangible skills that would help the group run more smoothly, so this was a focus of our training for them as well.

For the young women who attended the retreat, the primary focus of their training was to move them from planning an idea they have been discussing for some time to executing it, moving from talking into doing. Through this, we were able to help the group solidify the ideas they had for a fundraiser at the end of May. We used this opportunity to support the group to develop a work plan, which enabled them to better understand the usefulness of the work plan tool, see how much effort an event of this size would take, plan accurately how much it would all cost, and distribute the workload evenly across the group according to the strengths of the various members. Throughout the rest of the retreat, we were able to begin the development of a mission statement, create a pamphlet about staying safe in the neighbourhood, and begin to document the successes they saw around them. These drafts were then taken back to the group upon our return to Toronto, and with the support of our staff, laid out with graphics and edited.

The final three days of the retreat were spent as participants in the annual TYPS (Town Youth Participation Strategies) National Conference, which was held at the same location in Ottawa. Here,



the twelve remaining participants attended workshops, showcased a “bragging booth” about the cool things happening in their community, and met with a representative of their local MP at Parliament Hill. The young men were given the opportunity to participate in the conference as support staff, and were able to tap into some of their newly discovered leadership strengths. Back in the community we continued to attend weekly meetings, and supported the execution of another Youth Vybes newsletter, which included content and reflections from their experiences at the retreat.

Elsewhere in the O’Connor community, we continued to support the Rites of Passage group from Woodgreen Community Services and supported a fundraiser they planned and held during the month of February for Black History Month. The funds raised were sent to help children in Africa attend school by allowing them to purchase basic necessities such as clothes and shoes.

During April to June, 2009 In the O’Connor neighbourhood, we began alternating with another community group, called Action for Change in supporting Youth Vybes, a movement towards helping sustain them after Focus 3 funding ended. Another indicator of Youth Vybes coming of age was the opening a bank account in its own name.

## Element 7 : Celebrating Results

Through out the project, youth and members of UMOVE created flyers, pamphlets and photo stories of the events and successes, which were circulated in the neighbourhood and posted on the Focus Three website (<http://www.tgmag.ca/focus3/index.html>)

When we first met with Youth Vybes, an identified need was for them to build their sense of legitimacy as a credible youth organization, which would in turn, help them attract funders, and more youth. Successful grant applications were an indicator of success in meeting this need. As part of this process, members had asked for our support in developing their brand as an organization including business cards, cleaning up their logo, and creating letterhead. They felt that having a package of communication



materials would go a long way to developing their brand, and solidifying themselves as a legitimate organization within their community, and the city of Toronto. Youth members also expressed the desire to publish a newsletter, showcasing their accomplishments, and the successes in their community, and we began to support them to do this.

We had success in resolving some of our difficulties in working with youth from the communities by relying on our methodologies and resources. In the O’Connor community, we were able to gain the trust



of not only Youth Vybes, but many of those young people and adults who not directly involved with Youth Vybes. As a result, those youth who were on the fringes of Youth Vybes earlier in the project took an active interest in participating in the training and events that they organized. Adults in the community as well, were continuously more open to our presence within the community, and became much more openly supportive of our initiatives in the community.



### **Report by Youth on Symposium for Website**

At the beginning of the UMOVE Youth Symposium Audette Sheppard Executive Director, made a speech, she thanked everyone for having attended the event. There were speakers from the city council Pam McConnell, spoke about the great importance of youth voice and its connection to the future of the city and how nice it was to see the council chambers and seats filled with young people. Councilor Michael Thompson and the

police spoke mostly to the same effect with the Chief Bill Blair speaking some around the struggles and victories that the TPS have had with working with, and for young people. Then I shared my life story with the group talking about things that I have learned through my own struggles of being a young person involved with the law and with a hard life, making a point of expressing the importance of staying positive and always trying to move forward.

Then we had a snack break and started back up with a presentation from Mary Birdsel from Justice for Children and Youth who is a lawyer and community development worker. Many questions were asked about what is legal and not concerning our rights and the breaching of them; many youth told stories of police brutality and breach of conduct and asked questions that all in all are very hard to answer. After this there was a presentation from the Director of Pardons and Clemency National Parole Board Corita Harty, this was pretty straightforward and not a lot of questions were asked; some around timelines and what to do if you have been turned down for a pardon. These were answered directly and clearly, the young people seemed to be satisfied with what they heard. Lunch was after this; we had pizza from the City Hall cafeteria. It was pretty good. Then a Dr. Peter K. B. St. Jean on his film “Lessons from Homicides a Buffalo story”, this is a documentary about the senseless murders that are constantly happening in Buffalo and also the importance of looking into why we have such a lack of respect for life these days. At the end of the day we had discussion around ways to intervene in situations that could turn very volatile but this ended up to be more of a venting session which I think was also needed so that the participants could feel listened to.



## How To: Parma Court Tools

The following are samples of some of the communication tools produced by the youth of Parma Court.

### TOOLS AND RESOURCES BY PARMA COURT YOUTH

- Connecting Youth Dads with Their Children— a two-page tip sheet.
- Youth Vybes Newsletter — a newsletter describing their successes.
- Bringing Positivity Back to My Community — a two-page tip sheet.
- Be Safe in Your Community — a pamphlet created by youth for youth.



# Connecting Youth Dads With Their Children

Parma Ct

## Creating an action plan to have fathers in their children's lives – and building healthier communities

In many communities there are strong young leaders who are getting involved and helping make their communities healthier. There is no coincidence that for many of these young people, having a strong relationship with their fathers or father figures (uncles, stepfathers etc) helped them become the people who they are. It can better prepare them to resist negative temptations and to make safe and healthy choices.



*“If you look at me and my little brother you can tell. I was really connected to my dad’s family and supported by them. My brother who has a different father, he never had him or anyone from that family involved. He used to get into lots of trouble and made bad choices. If he had someone like I did, maybe it would be different.”*

– Focus 3 Youth Participant

## Here’s what you can do to help get fathers in their children’s lives...

1. Help the community recognize that this is an issue:
  - a. Recruit others in the community who want to help dads get connected : fathers, mothers, grandparents, community workers and other young people
  - b. Start talking about it in the community
  - c. Create a poster geared to fathers that advertises the idea of getting involved in their child’s life
  - d. Create material that is raw and honest: make it real to get people to understand how serious this issue is
  - e. Be assertive with fathers about what they need to do, but be open minded to their situations
  - f. Recruit family support of fathers, including their children’s mothers (having a process that allows the children to see their fathers)

2. Create a program for dads to get connected – to each other and their kids:
  - a. Create a work plan to use to guide the creation of a program
  - b. Consult with and talk to dads about what they are wanting
  - c. Find an agency or organization to support the program
  - d. Research grants that support this issue
  - e. Secure a space where fathers and their children can meet together
  - f. Identify a facilitator who actually knows how to connect with today's youth who are fathers
  - g. Create opportunities for recreation – getting dads and their kids together for recreation activities will help generate things to do
  - h. Create a support system for dads to connect with if your program / activities can't help them
  - i. Connect with existing parenting programs and see how their work can be delivered to fathers to help build skills (changing diapers, connecting with children, discipline etc)
3. Organize activities and events that celebrate and recognize fathers:
  - a. Host Fathers Day activities in your communities
  - b. Acknowledge the positive things being done by fathers in their children's lives
  - c. Have recognition dinners or similar things to show community support to young dads

If you can create a program for young dads you need to remember that many youth don't want to be a part of something like this because it's not cool and they don't think they have a problem. You will need to have a strategy that captivates the youth as well as helps them realize that they need this for their children's future. Don't let red tape and being afraid of offending people stop you from being honest – otherwise it might be a just another program that goes nowhere.

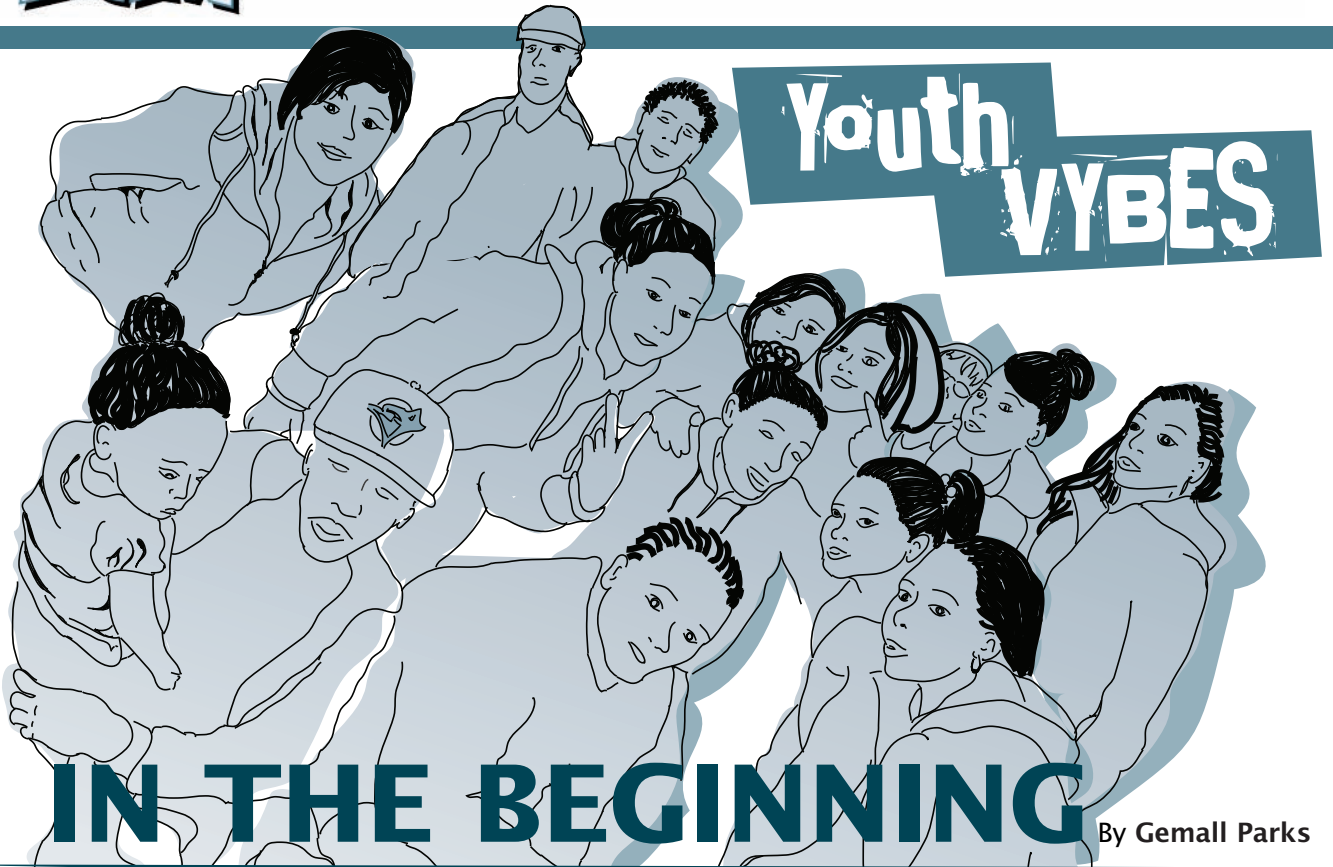
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This toolkit was created by the FocusThree team: youth of Kugluktuk, Parma Court's Youth Vybes Crew, Kainai Youth Council and The Students Commission.





# VYBENEWS



By Gemall Parks

The O'Connor Community Centre has been known to put on many neighbourhood events throughout the year. I was always offering to help, as well as volunteering, but to me it just was not enough.

I felt like there was still an empty void missing but between work, school and dance practice there wasn't enough time for anything else. I still tried to make the time to help out during the events happening. As time passed and as I got older I started to hear of youth groups that would gather to do positive things for our school. I was immediately interested but could not find one close by or one that affected my community. I started to ask around my school, little did I know my school had already started a youth group called E.S.P. (Empowered Student Partnership) which I was asked to join. After graduating I was again left with that empty void.

I remember hearing about the first group for Youth VYBES from Bryan but I was not invited to be apart of it, so I continued with my everyday life. Work, homework, work and again I was starting to feel unfulfilled.

So after I got my own place with a member of the original group he told me that he was taking it upon himself to start Youth VYBES up again but change a couple of things. He invited me to join with him and become a valued member too.

This past year Youth VYBES held a number of events such as Sex Awareness Talk, a Mother's Day Dinner, and The 2nd Annual Bigga Blits Block Inferno, which was very difficult but extremely rewarding. I felt like I had to put in 150% because the concert was partly in memory of my cousin who was murdered Oct. 9, 2006.

The day of the event we all pulled together and made sure that everyone had a good time. It was worth all the hard work and time we put into the Block Inferno. Youth Vybes events are always live.



# Our Trip To Ottawa

March 24 Youth Vybes left for Ottawa for their first group retreat and participated in the national TYPS (Town Youth Participation Strategy) Conference and met youth from across the country who were trying to make a positive change in their own communities.

## A Word From the Prez...

Fynch

The whole concept of taking youth out of our community and bringing them to a totally different environment was a great achievement and idea. It gave me a chance to get to know who the youth really are. Some would say I live in the neighborhood so I see them everyday but how you act in your community and out is quite different. I realized that when we are in the community because of certain situations, people, and money we don't get to be ourselves. We are somehow forced by unwritten rules to behave and act a certain way because its what we see around us and what we were brought up in. The trip to Ottawa was very different, it took all the negative environmental elements away from the youth so they were stuck in a total different place far away from home away from negative role models. With no one that could judge them for the rest of there lives, they really started to open up. It was an experience I don't think any of us will forget not only because it was the first but it was a great lifetime bonding tool for the youth that went. They were exposed to things they wouldn't do in a regular day of their lives testing their social skills and team work skills and put in some strange situations at least to them and came out on top. I was very proud of my youth and community and hope there are many more experiences like this in the future because I would do it again any day !



## Experience in Ottawa By Oshain



Overall Ottawa was FUN. But let me just break it down for you.

Planning the trip to Ottawa was no easy task. We had to plan and plot. It may have taken a couple a weeks or more but it was all worth it.

The YOUTH VYBES had took a 4-hour train ride from Toronto to Ottawa, along

with many other youth groups from across Canada. The trip to Ottawa was to make connections and to gain opportunities to better our communities. The YOUTH VYBES group learned a lot from the workshops provided. Over the couple of days we spent with the other youth groups we met a lot of new people and learned a lot of new lessons.



## Bragging Booth By Tracy

**"It was an experience I don't think any of us will forget..."**



Bragging booth were presentations done by all of the groups at the TYPS Conference, each organization or group made a performance to brag to the audience about what they do, how they do what they do, and what they're about.

Youth VYBES bragging booth was the best. Our bragging booth consisted of a poem, a dance, and chants. We were nothing like the other groups. We worked hard for our performance. We stayed up late and woke up early every morning debating on what moves to use and what to do. All in all, the hard work paid off.



## Workshops By Kayla

During our retreat I got to be apart of lots of different workshops. The most interesting workshop was the stress free one, because they taught us that when your stressed just clear your mind and relax.

I learned that when you have a lot of stuff on your mind or your stressing, there is a 95% chance that you can faint or have a stroke.

Even though during the workshop half of the time we were sleeping because the lady wanted us to clear our mind of all the negative stuff that goes on in our life. So that we won't be one of the people fainting or having strokes. Overall everything was terrific.

**"During our retreat i got to be apart of a lot of different Workshops."**



# BIGGA BLITS BLOCK INFERNO



## Block Party

Kayla

During the block party I experienced different things that I haven't seen in other communities, like little kids running around happy because they got to have their faces painted or because they smelled the food cooking on the grill. I think the block party was a good event to have in the neighborhood because we all got together and there were no arguments or fights. Next time I think there should be more food because not everyone got to eat so they were a little disappointed but they still went on with their day and managed to have a good time. I thought the performances were good, the best was the group of dancers and rappers because they made the crowd go wild.

## RESOURCES

### O'Connor Community Centre

1386 Victoria Park Ave.  
Toronto, Ontario M4A 2L8

### Woodgreen Community Services

1450 O'Connor Drive  
Building 1, Unit 4 Toronto,  
Ontario M4B 2T8  
(416) 462-3110  
www.woodgreen.org

### East Metro Youth Services

1200 Markham Road, Suite  
200 (Ellesmere & Markham),  
(416) 438-3697,  
www.emys.on.ca

### The Students Commission

23 Isabella St. (Yonge &  
Bloor),  
(416) 597-8297, www.tgmag.ca

### Tropicana Community Services

670 Progress Ave, Unit 14-16  
Toronto, ON M1H 3A4  
416-439-9009  
www.tropicanacommunity.org

### Victoria Village Action For Neighbourhood Change

1738A Victoria Park Avenue,  
Unit 1  
Toronto, ON M1R 1R4



## Youth VYBES Meetings

Chelsea

Youth VYBES meetings are every Wednesday at the O'Connor Community Centre, with staff and youth of the O'Connor Community. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss a change in our community.

The youth in Youth VYBES plan a lot of fun things like Christmas dinners, Black History Month celebrations, the Blitz Block Infernos and more. These assemblies are always a great success! If you really enjoyed them and would like to make a change in our community come to our Youth VYBES meetings.







# Bringing Positivity Back To My Community

## People leave the community and feel guilty

*This is a way to get people back to our communities*

*Increasing the number of positive adults coming and going into the community will increase the number of positive youth, and positively impact the adults in the community*



### My community

I grew up in three different communities but for the reasons listed below I identified myself with one.

Of all the things I learned from my community growing up, the two that stand out the most are strong family values as well as the importance of the value of money.

I am extremely proud of my community because of the togetherness that we display at the times of crisis; for instance when my cousin died the whole community showed the utmost support by providing food and a shoulder to cry on. My family did not know how to bury my cousin due to him being the only Muslim in the family, but there was a mother in the community who knew how to get in contact with a Muslim mosque to make burial arrangements with the Imam.

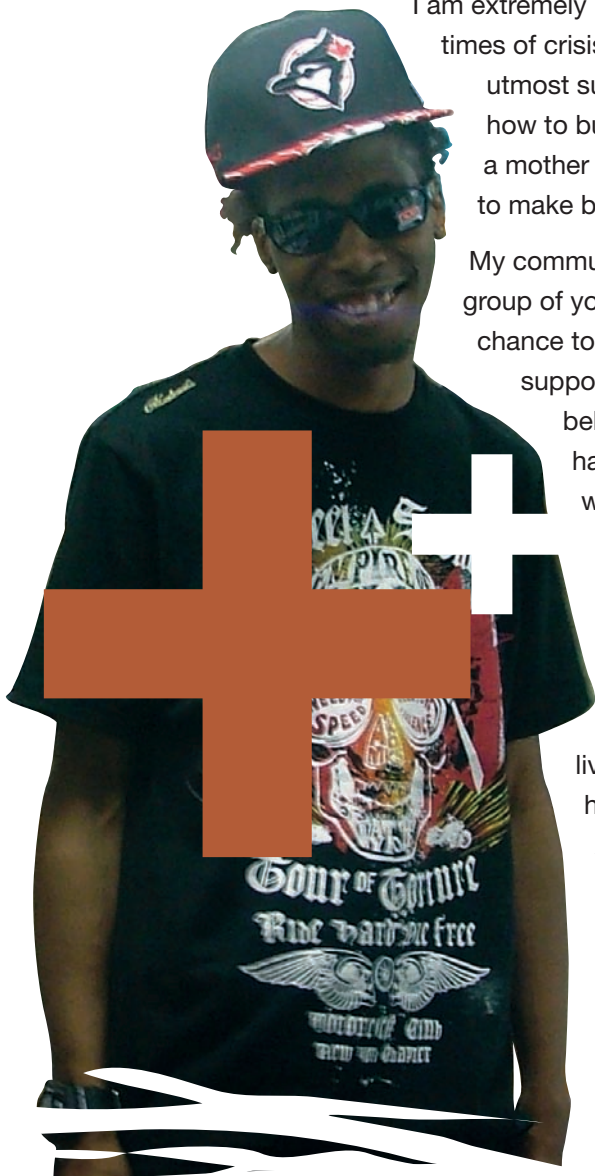
My community is very rich with talent and, when I used to dance hip-hop with a group of youth from the community, we won a lot of awards and a few of us got a chance to dance for videos and perform live at concerts. My community also supports anything that I have passion for. When I wanted to rap, everyone was behind me encouraging me. Now that I want to take on directing as a hobby, I have one of the older heads supporting me and actually taking me under his wing and teach me the profession.

### Why have I left?

Due to the fact that there were shady people that could not be trusted I decided to move to an area that I was not known in.

Another reason for leaving was that I knew that if I were to choose to live in my community, all of my "boys" (friends) would be in and out of my house constantly and there is the possibility that my things could get stolen. Also my friends might influence me to stay up late which can lead to trouble at work.

I also wanted to branch out and separate myself from my community to expand my horizon and learn new things.



VALUES  
SUPPORT

## How do I still stay connected / support my community?

Not only do I still work in my community, I volunteer every week as a part of my youth group, and hold various events throughout the year.

I also volunteer every weekend to teach the kids how to dance hip-hop.

Unknowingly I also provide my community with a positive role model for the young kids to look up to.

I try to provide direction for the youths to follow in order to become someone the community would be proud of.

## Contacting Former Community Members

Those that have left come around every once in a while to visit family members and when they do we can get in contact with that person.

OR

They often have friends from the community still and you can approach the friends for a way to get in contact with the person that left.

## What we would do when we find them?

Invite them out to a barbeque and show them the positive aspect of the “block” (community), but more importantly show them the young faces of the community and explain how desperately these kids are in need of a positive role model. They need people to model after and a guide to the “better side” of life.

## What they can do / offer?

Community members that have left often can provide other resources that some (or most) of us don't have access to.

The “successful” community members that have left often have “links” (networks) that are usually very useful.

They also provide the youth a direction in which they can take steer their life.



1. Get a group together in your community who will try to locate former community members who can be an asset to your community.
2. Locate the people who have left the community: connecting to family members and friends still in the community; use Facebook or other internet programs to start a social network group or advertise using radio, TV or newspapers.
3. Contact the people you have found using phone, internet or mail.
4. Invite them out to a volunteer and/or community meeting(s).
5. Have the mothers and the people affected by the negativity speak about how much a positive role model would do for the “block”.
6. Introduce them to youths of the area and show them how influential they can be to the youth. Invite them to tell their story to tell that just might change someone's outlook on life.
7. Show them a good time, and bring them to the barbeque in the community.
8. Let them get a glimpse of the negativity the “older heads” (older members of the community) provide.
9. Confirm that they are willing to help out.
10. Introduce them to the group that they will be helping out with. Introduce them to the youth.
11. Establish what kind of support they can or are interested in providing.
12. Continue to keep them informed of activities and positive outcomes.
13. Recognize their contributions to the community.
14. Continue to expand the network of role models and community supporters.

**Various**

**Youth**

**Bringing**

**Everyone**

**Success**

## O'Connor Youth YVBES Crew

Youth YVBES is a group of youth that are bringing a positive change to our community by producing publications like this and hosting various community events.

We believe "it's never too late for youth to be great." You can join the movement and create your own youth group to benefit your community just like we did!

### O'CONNOR YOUTH YVBES CREW

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#### The Students Commission

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416.597.8297

[www.tgmag.ca](http://www.tgmag.ca)

[www.tgmag.ca/focus3/index.html](http://www.tgmag.ca/focus3/index.html)

## Need help?

### Mental Health

[www.canmat.org/resources/depression](http://www.canmat.org/resources/depression)

### Drugs and Alcohol

[www.aadac4kids.com/thefacts/drugfacts/index.asp](http://www.aadac4kids.com/thefacts/drugfacts/index.asp)

### Dealing with death

[www.griefworksbc.com/About.asp](http://www.griefworksbc.com/About.asp)

### Healthy Relationships

[www.mwaves.org](http://www.mwaves.org)

### Kids Help Phone

1-800-668-686

[www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

In an emergency call 911

# BE SAFE In Your Community



## How to Say NO!

- Be cautious and aware of your surroundings
- If someone's bothering you walk away
- Ask them politely to leave you alone
- Let the person know if you are not interested in what they are trying to get you to do
- Be assertive
- If someone tells you to get in their car and you don't know them be assertive, say NO!



## Being Safe Means...

- You don't have to worry about being hurt
- Nothing bad will happen to you
- You can walk around without being harmed
- You feel emotionally and physically comfortable
- You are protected from violence and crime



## How to Stay Safe in Your Community

- Use your head and be smart
- Have positive role models
- Pick positive friends so you don't do anything you regret and if you know something bad is going to happen, stay home.
- Always let someone know where you are even if people don't ask you where you are going, make sure you still tell somebody
- Joining extra-curricular activities so that you can stay out of trouble and at the same time, be safe.
- Don't Jaywalk
- Don't drink open, unattended drinks
- Always wear a bike helmet
- Be a leader and practice right from wrong

