

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES:
A MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE
Report from the
Community Knowledge Forum
June 6, 2012



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Overview of the Foundation

The Community Foundation of Mississauga is part of one of the fastest growing charitable movements in Canada. The Foundation is a registered charitable public foundation that was launched in spring 2001. Since that time, it has grown rapidly and has over \$17 million in endowed assets (at June 2011) and cumulative grants of over \$3 million. Community foundations across Canada share three fundamental roles:

One: endowment building/personalized service. The Foundation builds endowed and other funds to provide lasting support for local priorities. It makes giving easy and effective, accepting a wide variety of gifts and providing donors with a number of charitable options. Donors can contribute cash, stocks, property and other assets. Donors may establish a fund in their name or in the name of a loved one. In most cases, a gift qualifies for maximum tax advantage under federal law.

Two: local grantmaking expertise. The Foundation's staff and volunteers have an in-depth understanding of the issues, opportunities, and resources that shape our community. It evaluates all aspects of community well being — including social services, education, the environment, health care, youth, seniors and the arts and make grants to support the broadest range of community needs. It can help donors learn more about local organizations and programs that make a difference in areas they care about most.

Three: community leadership. Because community foundations support all kinds of charities, it is well positioned to bring people and organizations together, convening diverse voices to address local issues and opportunities. The Foundation's business is building community.

Capturing Community Knowledge

Creating effective connections between the needs of the community and the powerful impact of philanthropy is at the heart of the work of the Community Foundation of Mississauga.

Part of how we achieve that connection means learning about the issues affecting the community, bringing together the people who live and work in the city to hear what they have to say, sharing information and becoming part of the solution. Collaborating on issues is one of the ways a community foundation stays connected to the purpose we serve. It helps keep vital knowledge and communication flowing.

Trends and Statistics

The relationship between investment in arts and culture and the resulting social and economic benefits is well understood. In Mississauga, our arts, culture and heritage industries help to attract and retain skilled labour, as well as tourists, creating jobs which in turn positively impacts local businesses and residents. We know from the Mississauga's Vital Signs report that a thriving arts, culture and heritage community is essential to the health and vibrancy of our city. Cultural industries in Mississauga employed 8,805 people in 2006, an increase of 17.7% from 2001. Further, Carassauga is the largest multicultural festival in Ontario and the second largest in Canada.

Another promising aspect of diverse arts, culture and heritage activities is how connecting people from diverse backgrounds to a rich array of arts, culture and heritage helps to create meaningful community dialogue. It can also help marginalized groups to overcome isolation and provides opportunities for positive social interaction. Encouraging cultural exploration, positive identity formation and inter-cultural dialogue is a key factor in social inclusion for a city of immigrants with an increasingly diverse population such as Mississauga.

Sharing Knowledge and Expertise

The Community Foundation of Mississauga conducted interviews with community leaders and stakeholders from March to May of 2012 in preparation for this three hour forum held on June 6th, 2012. Our distinguished panel included **Linda Thomas**, Executive Director of the Mississauga Arts Council, **Susan Burt**, Director of City of Mississauga's Culture Division, **Stuart Keeler**, Curator and Director of Programmes at the Art Gallery of Mississauga, **Jayme Gaspar**, Executive Director of Heritage Mississauga and **Meena Chopra**, an internationally acclaimed Mississauga based visual artist and poet. The Community Foundation of Mississauga is grateful for the generous contribution of these participants. Their valuable input has provided the basis of this report.

Key Findings

Industry and Audience Development

This forum provided an opportunity to focus on how Mississauga could become a cultural destination for both artists and patrons. How to get the message out to each corner of the city about events where people of all backgrounds are welcome and can benefit was explored and discussed. We learned how important community support is to artists, cultural organizations and heritage preservation efforts.

Shaping the future of our city as an artistic and cultural destination may depend on developing inventive ways of getting the word out about all our arts scene has to offer.

Mississauga is home to talented artists and rich heritage but there is a need for widespread marketing and media coverage of local talent and events, particularly given Mississauga's close proximity to the large scale productions taking place in Toronto. Mississauga has the benefit of several large venues, such as Celebration Square and The Living Arts Centre, which can be used to showcase many different artistic and cultural programs. Since there are costs associated with the use of these facilities, we heard from participants that funding is an issue for artists and production companies alike.

In order to provide audiences with an enjoyable experience and create sustainable interest, it was determined that artists along with art organizations should share the responsibility of promoting their work to a wide spectrum of audiences. Capitalizing on opportunities to create points of access in diverse cultural communities to exhibits, shows, festivals and events can be an effective way to increase audience engagement and help to strengthen our arts and culture sector. The use of electronic and social media was highlighted as an effective method of promotion. For some, this is the predominant format of media relations in Mississauga and it has the capacity to reach a wide demographic of people. Interestingly, roadside signage was also identified as very efficient means of engaging with the community to promote events and exhibits. Displays of artwork in public spaces such as libraries, parks, heritage buildings, religious centers, temples and churches, was another suggestion for showcasing local talent and developing interest from diverse audiences.

Artists and Patrons: Cross Cultural Interaction

We discussed how, as a community, we might integrate our cultural and artistic programs to provide a sense of belonging and inclusion for all. What we learned is that the cultural differences in our community are one of its greatest assets.

Because of our rich cultural mosaic, we have the opportunity to help our city become a place where all residents feel safe, comfortable and accepted and further, a city which values diversity by demonstrating respect for others and a commitment to establishing caring communities. Multicultural festivals can help create relationships when people have the opportunity to explore both their heritage as well as others different from their own. These events can be one way to bridge the gaps which may exist between people from various backgrounds, helping to integrate and educate audiences.

Panelists noted there is no single venue in Mississauga large enough to include every ethnicity represented in the city in one multicultural event, but the shared judgment at this forum was a richer variety of participants could be reached with effective event planning and outreach efforts. For example, culturally sensitive communiqués highlighting events via ethnic media might be effective in bringing people of different backgrounds together. It was felt that festivals held in proximity to other similar events and marketed as such, with information produced in multiple languages to reduce communication barriers, may result in beneficial cross cultural interaction.

What became clear is the need for Mississauga to continue to evolve as a fully integrated multicultural society; one which encourages people to retain their language and culture while identifying with the broader community in which they live. Cultural festivals and arts events can provide a platform for inter-cultural exchange and education as a means to achieve this goal. Ideas came forth such as the potential for stationary venues with dedicated time frames for cultural exhibits which would encompass a multitude of heritages, each showcased for one week over the period of one year. Ideas such as these might help to brand Mississauga as a multicultural arts destination.

Strength in Diversity

Through the course of this forum we were made aware of the importance of looking to Mississauga's youth as a good example of a naturally occurring cohesive integration of culture. It was explained how youth identify with their distinct backgrounds but function with ease in a multicultural context in a variety of settings. The collective outlook at the forum was excellent for a similar effect in the overall population of Mississauga. The seamless blending of cultures was seen as a natural evolution of social life, one which cannot be forced but which can be encouraged and fostered. Engaging youth and supporting their development and expression through arts and culture initiatives was noted as imperative to the vital role they play in our communities and in the future of Mississauga.

Many on our panel and in the audience at this forum felt Mississauga's leaders clearly understand the value of strong arts and culture and this will help to maximize and secure the sector. The point was made that artists and leaders of different communities working together can help drive the agenda of our city's arts, culture and heritage initiatives. It was concluded that relationship building and promoting the best of what is happening in Mississauga could help create fusions of culture.

.Conclusion

The shared judgment of participants at this forum was there are tremendous benefits to living in a society which is inclusive of everyone, celebrating differences in culture rather than emphasizing what separates us. Investment in arts, culture and heritage keeps communities dynamic and vibrant. It was determined that there is real value in cultural exchange within the community and the beneficial effects can be felt both in our neighbourhoods and in our economy. The responsibility for Mississauga's future is shared by all of us and we can look to many of our young people as a fine example of those who feel a sense of inclusion regardless of their backgrounds. What has been made clear is that when we work together and celebrate the diversity of our cultural mosaic, we help to create a vibrant and healthy community. We can become a society which values diversity and demonstrates respect for others. Building community and celebrating diversity through arts, heritage and culture is the way forward.

References

Graham, K. (2007) Introduction: Our Diverse Cities: Ontario. *Ontario: Our Diverse Cities*. Department of Canadian Heritage. No.4, fall 2007. pp.1-7

Canada Council for the Arts (n.d.) Cultural diversity—the cornerstone of Canadian society. Webpage. Retrieved from www.canadacouncil.ca

Community Foundation of Mississauga. Mississauga's Vital Signs. October 2011 p.14

Cultural Planning Section, Culture Division, City of Mississauga. 2011 Culture Report Card.

Please note: Mississauga's Cultural Map can be accessed at mississauga.ca/culture - it is a comprehensive resource for information regarding arts, culture and heritage initiatives in Mississauga.