JANE-FINCH
YOUTH SPEAK OUT
TURF
VIOLENCE
WELL-BEING
What is this project about?
The Assets Coming Together for Youth Project (ACT for Youth) is a five-year community-university research partnership that is focused on developing a comprehensive youth strategy that will outline how urban communities like the Jane-Finch community can build assets for youth.

ACT for Youth draws from the positive youth development perspective that promotes youth assets rather than focusing on youth problems. ACT for Youth integrates the positive youth development perspective with a social justice approach that recognizes that youth in ‘marginalized’ urban communities experience barriers such as racism, sexism, poverty, zero-tolerance and unemployment that are ‘toxic’ to their well-being.

How did youth speak out?
In the summer of 2010, ACT for Youth set up Mobile Speakers’ Corner stands in two malls in the Jane/Finch community. Youth who were interested in participating were asked to record their personal views about violence, turf or well-being using a tape recorder. 50 youth accepted this invitation and shared their views anonymously.

Who were these youth?
The 50 youth were between 16 and 29 years old and from diverse ethnic backgrounds. There were almost equal numbers of females and males.

How was this booklet put together?
The views that youth shared were transcribed by ACT for Youth’s 2010 youth interns. To learn more about these youth, please visit: http://www.yorku.ca/act/2010youthresearchinternbios.html

Four research assistants from a range of backgrounds (see page 10) worked together to read the transcripts and identify some of the key themes that came up in the Mobile Speakers’ Corner. The quotations used in this booklet are taken directly from the transcripts.
DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination based on racial or cultural stereotypes was seen as a form of violence by youth participants.

“There is family violence, there is gun violence, there’s stigmatization...which I also feel is a form of violence because a lot of people walk around and they are already stigmatized and there are labels that people feel have been placed on them.”

NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS

Youth discussed the impacts of negative perceptions of the Jane-Finch community. Not only do negative perceptions have consequences such as discrimination in job hiring, they also affect the way youth view themselves. This was felt to be especially true for young men.

“People automatically see you as a black young person and they feel that you being black, you would never amount to nothing. Especially coming from the Jane-Finch community, automatically number one what they think is that you being black, you’re never going to be nothing good. But that’s not always true.”

POWER

Youth stated that politicians and others in power need to spend more time engaging with the Jane-Finch community. They highlighted the importance of understanding the realities of living in the community. Participants also reframed governments and other powerful institutions as gangs.

“There are corporate gangs as well, such as the mafia, such as the police, such as the government and there’s corporate corruption and just because they don’t identify themselves with bandanas or certain things, I believe they are still gangs.”
Health and nutrition were identified as issues relating to well-being. Some thought there is a lack of variety and that too much attention has been placed on basketball programs. Others pointed to funding cuts as a problem.

“You can’t just put up flyers anywhere. You have to go into the specific communities - within the Jane-Finch community there are different communities and I feel a lot of workers don’t step into those boundaries. They just stay in their little intersection or stay in their offices and send out mass emails, because everyone in Jane and Finch checks their emails. Right? No! I don’t think so.”

Youth identified housing as playing a significant role in wellbeing. They expressed dissatisfaction with the services provided by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. They also recommended more individualized levels of support in the provision of housing services.

“I think that if housing and health were offered to me more richly...if it was a right instead of a privilege, like if it actually on the real turned out like that in everyday life, I think that would benefit me and help me reach my goals as well.”

A number of participants recommended taking a holistic approach to engaging youth. Their ideas included recreational and outdoors programs, and the creation of youth friendly spaces. These kinds of activities keep youth “out of trouble”, bring youth from different parts of Jane-Finch together, and build positive relationships.

“I would love to see more programs set up for the youth of our community. I think it’s really important that they have places to go, and things, activities to do, where they can learn and feel united with other kids.”
Youth felt that unified families were an integral part of a strong community. Single parents also expressed a need for more resources in order to balance parenting, education and employment.

Youth identified positive adult role models as something that was missing from their lives. They spoke about the importance of having someone to talk to. Youth also addressed the problems associated with younger children looking up to older youth engaged in violence.

Youth called for greater community involvement in addressing its issues. This would include a process of reflection, the community taking responsibility for children’s development and wellbeing, and setting a positive example for other communities.

“Youth are feeling a lack of motivation. They don’t have anybody to guide them because they are stranded...the social support network is missing in their lives.”

“Sometimes it’s hard to live in Jane-Finch because of the reputation, but really you get a good sense of community. I’ve met amazing people here and it gets to the point where a lot of people are so close it’s like family.”

“Diversity, particularly cultural diversity, was highlighted by many youth as a positive aspect of living in the Jane-Finch community. For others, divisions between different racial and cultural groups remain. It was also mentioned that there is a lack of acceptance and understanding of LGBT youth.

“What strengthens us is that we are all one. We don’t really discriminate each other as much. Like I said it’s a diverse place, multicultural.”

Some youth described feeling powerless when family members became involved in gangs or fights. For some, family is seen as a source of strength, and for others a weak foundation at home, including lack of parental supervision, leads to negative consequences in the community.

“We as a community should be able to take a stand and say “This is our community. We have a problem. We are going to deal with it” We shouldn’t be laying back and saying, “Okay, I’m going to let the police do it”. We have a mind. We have a voice. This is our community.”

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“I’m a single young mother, trying to raise my daughter, and you know it’s really really hard for me. Because I have to, I spend more time at work trying to make money than you know, spending time at home with my kid. And you know it’s very hard for me at times because if I’m at work, I can’t afford to live.”

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Acknowledgments
This research was conducted by the Youth Voices Working Group of ACT for Youth. The co-chairs of this committee are Byron Gray (The SPOT), Nombuso Dlamini (York University) and Ifeanyi Ezeonu (Brock University). Working Group Members include Zorana Alimpic (Oxford University), Antonius Clarke (F.I.T.), Kofi Frempong (BCCHC), Stacey Grant (TCHC), Ben Marshall (PACT), Janet Mosher (York University), Francis Ubah (YNOT) and Carol Wade (OISE).

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How to Cite This

MEET THE AUTHORS*

Annika Ollner recently graduated from the MSW program at York University. She completed her BA in International Development Studies at McGill University, and also spent three years working as an HIV Educator at a Toronto-based national AIDS Service Organization before coming to York. She has a particular interest in issues relating to harm reduction, drug user rights, and urban health and well-being.

Anita Sekharan is a fourth year student in the York/Sheridan Joint Program in Design. She is interested in using design to tell stories, educate people, and promote positive social change. Some of her interests include food security, rural education, and photojournalism.

Judy Truong is entering her second year of the Honours Science and Business Co-op Program at Waterloo. She is majoring in Biology. Judy is a resident of the Jane-Finch community and was previously a research intern with the ACT for Youth Project. She enjoys volunteering in her community and is interested in social justice issues and global health.

Varun Vig is a graduate student in York University’s Environmental Studies Program. He previously did his BA in Public Policy and Management at York University. A long-time resident of the Jane-Finch community, Varun is an Executive Committee member of the York University-TD Community Engagement Centre and a Board Member of the Jane-Finch Community and Family Centre.

*The authors worked collaboratively and are listed here in alphabetical order
The Assets Coming Together For Youth Project
York University
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3
actinfo@yorku.ca
www.yorku.ca/act