



Creating communities we want
youth engagement in civics



Creating safe and healthy communities

Trinity Theatre has worked since 1999 in Toronto and Ontario communities to help create safe schools and safe communities. We designed a program, *Creating Communities We Want*, that contributes to this goal by using art and theatre integrated with social development practices.

Creating Communities is a unique way to enhance community development by getting more youth aware and engaged. Participants in the program learn about the civics of their schools and communities, develop their literacy in social issues—including citizenship, social inclusion, crime prevention and advocacy—and build the capacity to create prevention strategies for these issues.

Youth also interact with each other through peer education and information sharing. And they have an opportunity to get more involved with adults, working alongside community members to diagnose issues and create strategies in the neighbourhoods they share.

A final outcome of *Creating Communities* is that youth voices are formalized into local decision-making processes. There is a mutual benefit that results: municipalities learn new methods to hear and involve youth, and youth gain a new appreciation for the democratic process by seeing the impact of their involvement.

The program was developed with the support of the National Crime Prevention Centre, Partners Against Crime (Ontario Solicitor General), Toronto District School Board, Ontario Trillium Foundation, and other foundations.

Pilot project to launch in Toronto this fall

Trinity Theatre is set to launch *Creating Communities We Want* across the Greater Toronto Area this fall, implementing the innovative program in six demonstration school sites spread among the four quadrants of the Toronto District School Board.

The program will run the length of the school year, from September 2003 to June 2004, and will include an official launch day in December and a culminating advocacy day in May.

Creating Communities will give youth the opportunity to create their own community assessments, lead their own public meetings and peer education activities, and problem solve with adults, while meeting Ontario Curriculum guidelines.

Trinity will also train youth to deliver presentations and hold forums with their communities to raise the program's profile in the city. The advocacy day will be hosted by the youth, the Toronto Youth Cabinet and Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services, and is intended for youth who participated in the project to share information, discuss concerns, network, build advocacy skills and design further strategies.

Project Partners

- Department of Justice, National Crime Prevention Centre
- Ontario Solicitor General, Partners Against Crime
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services
- Toronto District School Board, Safe School Committee
- Toronto Youth Cabinet
- Toronto Police Service
- Toronto Public Health Department
- Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo
- Halton Region Public Health Department

With the help of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Trinity will be identifying municipalities across Ontario and Canada who will observe our work in the GTA. In the second phase of *Creating Communities We Want* we will replicate the program by establishing demonstration sites in their municipalities.

Creating Communities We Want has already been a success in communities throughout the Greater Toronto Area. In the east downtown area, youth in grades seven and eight lobbied Police Chief Julian Fantino at a Regent Park public meeting, presenting a case for changes in 51 Division's perception of youth in the community. They also pointed out a need for an ongoing connection with the police youth bureau.



Innovative program aimed at grades seven to eleven

Creating Communities We Want is a learning program intended for youth in grades seven and eight and grades nine through eleven. Trinity has designed the program to align with school curricula in social studies, language, health, civics, guidance, leadership and careers.

During the three-week process the participants learn how to be engaged by understanding the makeup of their communities, how they fit in, and what they can do to become active members. Engagement leads to safer schools and communities.

Youth complete theatre and art-based exercises that develop an under-

standing of the civics of their schools and neighbourhoods, the skills to articulate concerns and the ability to facilitate public meetings to exchange ideas and strategies with their peers.

The program gives youth the tools to develop their social literacy, leaving them with the vocabulary to develop prevention practices that address their particular school and community needs.

Halton adapts program, attracts 60 students to workshop

Halton Region Public Health Department successfully adapted *Creating Communities We Want* to create an interactive one-day workshop for local students in November 2002. Trinity-trained students from the Halton Region Youth Advisory Council (HRYAC) facilitated the workshop for the over 60 participants who attended.

Now HRYAC is preparing to facilitate a reworked version of the workshop this November, again in Halton Region. The group plans to lead participants through exercises addressing the value of youth councils, the structure and workings of municipal and regional government, successful advocacy, how to "plug in" to city hall, media savvy, lobbying and presentations, and social inclusion. There

will also be meetings and discussions with regional government leaders.

A video of the 2002 workshop is available on request.

Key steps of the program

- Classroom group work where youth come to understand themselves as "individuals in a field of connections"
- Field trips to explore the civics of their neighbourhood by connecting with the social, economic and environmental stakeholders in the community
- Diagnosis by youth of the issues in their community and the development of their own prevention strategies
- Group examination of inclusion / exclusion experiences and the broader ideas of social inclusion
- Skills building exercises in advocacy, media savvy and city hall literacy
- Series of youth-led peer workshops with the school staff and parents, at which youth present their perspective on school and community issues and facilitate audience interaction. Can be extended to present at other area schools.
- Youth-led community forum with the adult stakeholders of their neighbourhood. At this forum youth present their versions of community and prevention strategies and facilitate an exchange of ideas while promoting inclusion of their viewpoint
- Youth pursue further volunteer outreach work with (i) local agencies involved in their identified issues (ii) ongoing advocacy relationships with local municipal councillors, neighbourhood associations, etc. (iii) municipal youth councils, such as the Toronto Youth Cabinet, to advocate for their identified issues on a larger platform, or (iv) create their own group to address their identified issues

Contact Us

Alan Richardson and Sandra Crockard
Phone: 416.421.4888
Fax: 416.406.2011
www.trinitytheatrestudio.com
1503 Danforth Avenue, Toronto Ontario, Canada M4J 5C3