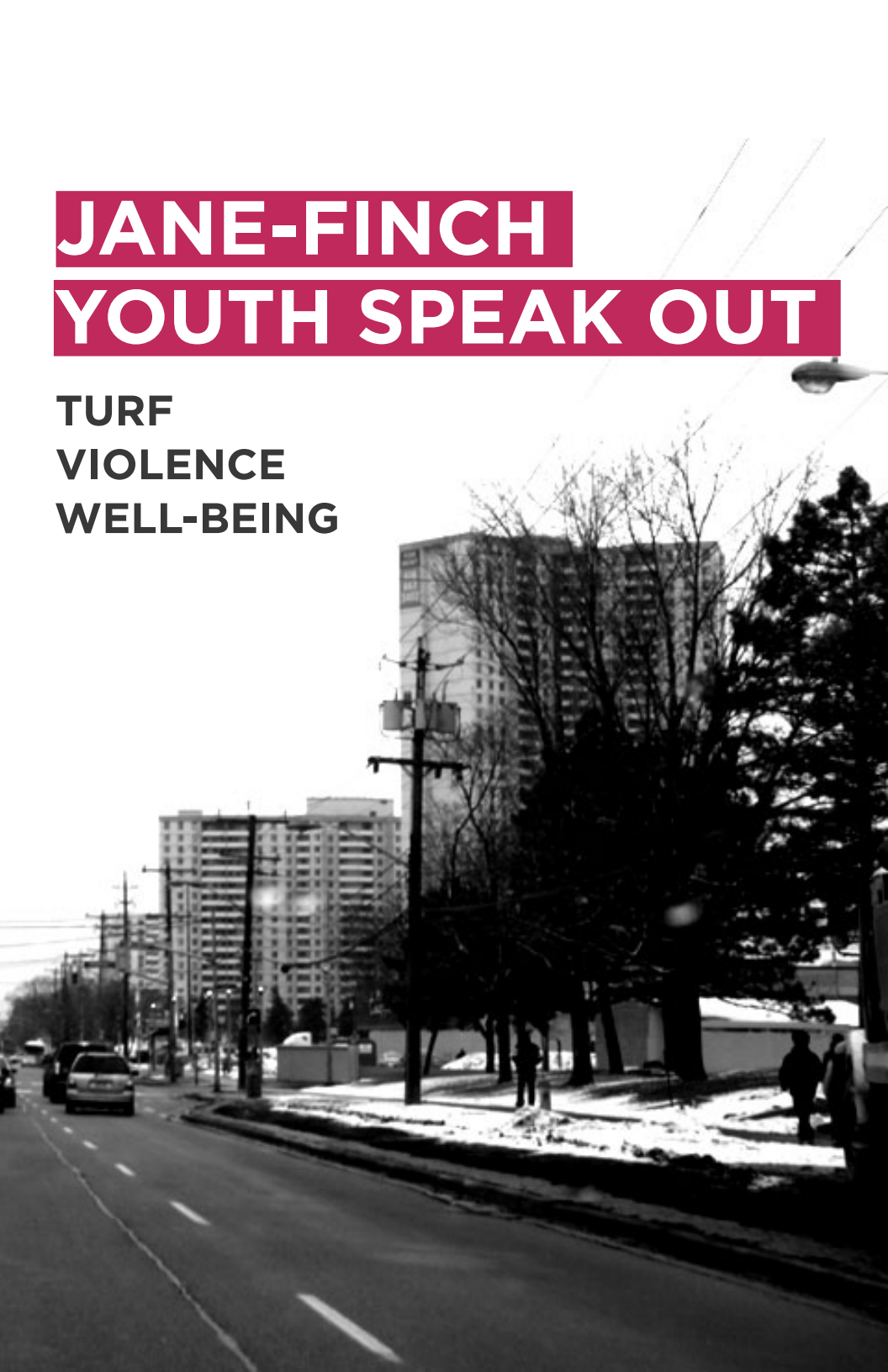


JANE-FINCH

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.

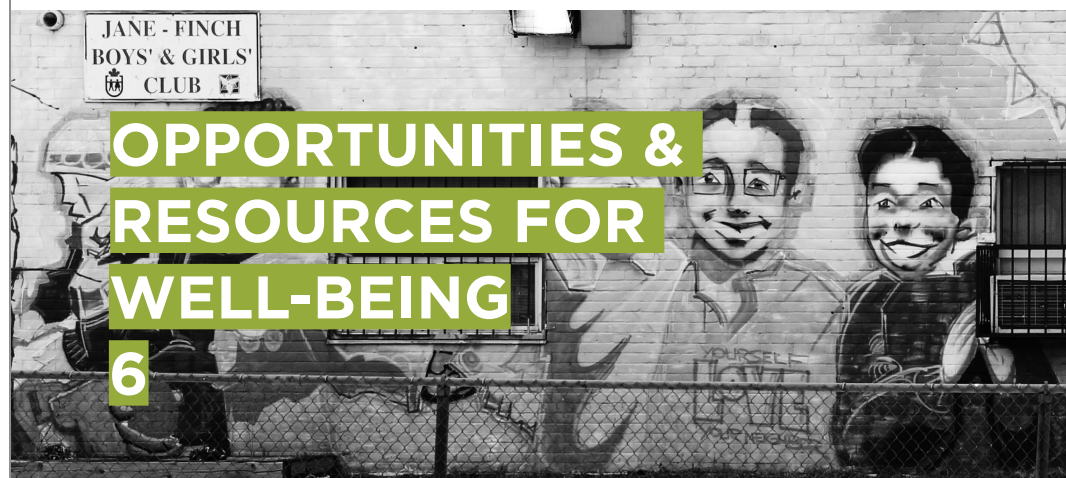
Who were these youth?

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.





REDEFINING VIOLENCE

TURF

Youth had mixed views on the significance of turf issues in Jane-Finch. For some, divisions in the neighbourhood based on turf are relatively new, and did not exist in the past. Some also reframed turf in positive terms.

“...the turf I believe is community, it’s what section you’re from and where you love and where you grew up, so things such as your elementary school, or friends and family that you’ve had around or your memories. That’s how you could define turf: your upbringing, your surroundings.”

POLICE

When speaking about police, most youth were critical. Youth spoke from personal experience or what they heard from peers. They felt that rather than being helpful, police sometimes make things worse by interrogating people, invading their privacy and not treating community residents with dignity. In contrast, a few youth identified the police as a resource.

“I want to start by saying that my best friend was killed by police brutality...the police thought he was a bad guy, it was a routine traffic stop and he made a little run...The cops called for back up and ended up brutally beating him and when the reporters arrived they happened to change the story on him conflicting with everything and there’s just no justice in this, this hood that we live in.”

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.”

OPPORTUNITIES & RESOURCES FOR WELL-BEING

EMPLOYMENT

Youth spoke about both youth and adult employment issues. It was felt that a greater availability of job opportunities would decrease youth involvement in violence. The lack of recognition of foreign education credentials was also criticized.

“A lot of people from Third World countries, their education is actually higher than the that of the Canadian education system, and when they come here they’re set back...all back in the poverty line.”

HOUSING

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.”

COMMUNITY SERVICES

While some youth were appreciative of existing community services and felt there is an abundance of resources available, others were critical of their effectiveness. 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.”

HEALTH

Health and nutrition were identified as issues relating to well-being.

“...there is no healthy eating being promoted in this area. Even healthy foods are way more expensive than non-healthy foods. So that’s a theory that they are trying to keep all the underserved communities or priority neighbourhoods away from the healthy stuff.”

ENGAGING YOUTH

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.”



FAMILY & COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY PRIDE

While a of minority youth believe that Jane-Finch needs to be entirely “revamped”, most expressed a strong sense of love for their community. For some youth, their feelings of being cared for by the community surpassed the negative aspect of violence.

“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

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.”

FAMILY

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.

“It all begins at home. Charity begins at home, your love begins at home, the way you treat other people begins at home because it’s like how are you being treated at home you know. If you are an angry person at home, then you are going to be an angry person in public.”

SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

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.

“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.”

ROLE MODELS

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 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.”

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

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.

“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.”

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*

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