

# The Artisan Training and Employment Project



**Panel Presentation for**  
Art Work- Work in Art:  
Immigrants and the Arts  
**CERIS Seminar**

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Any form of art is a form of power; it has impact, it can affect change – it can not only move us, it makes us move.

-Ossie Davis

# ArtHeart Community Art Centre

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- ▣ Founded in 1991 by Seanna Connell with support and help from the residents of Regent Park as well as street involved adults who believed that an inner-city arts centre could be an oasis for learning and creativity for downtown Toronto's economically disadvantaged children, youth and adults.

# ArtHeart's Philosophy

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- By offering creative materials, art education, unique and innovative projects and marketing opportunities in a supportive and creative environment, participants can express their own creativity, develop skills (educational and life-skills), find mental stimulation and put their hands and imaginations to work! Through this process, participants are empowered to make some improvement to their quality of life (enhancement of self-esteem and ability) and greater participation in their community can be made.

# Challenges in Regent Park

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- ❑ **Regent Park is located within the Downtown East of Toronto- one of the most culturally diverse areas in North America. Over 40 languages are spoken in Regent Park and about 70% of the population are families that have immigrated to Canada within the last 15 years**
- ❑ **There is a high rate of unemployment in Regent Park- residents face multiple barriers to finding employment**

# The Faces of the Challenges

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- ❑ **ArtHeart ED, Seanna Connell, recognized that the staff of ArtHeart didn't accurately reflect the cultures and languages of the children who were using the program**
- ❑ **She had also encountered many parents who mentioned that they had done different kinds of art and handicrafts in their home countries**
- ❑ **Many of these parents asked ArtHeart staff if they had employment or knew of any employment**

# Strategically Meeting Challenges

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- ▣ **Seanna Connell partnered with the Arts and Culture Committee in Regent Park to submit a proposal for Social Investment Fund (SIF) monies from Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) to fund a employment program for Artisans living in the Regent Park Community**

# The Artisan Training and Employment Program

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- ❑ The term 'artisan' was used because of the different way that artists are viewed outside of a North American/ Western world context. Art is often woven together with culture and there isn't such a distinction between those who are artists and those who aren't
- ❑ This project sought to address issue of unemployment, social isolation, poverty and difficulty of making connections that recent (within the last 10 years) immigrants to Canada
- ❑ The target group was women who lived in Regent Park who were artisans or art teachers in their country of origin who are unable to find employment and connections to the arts and cultural communities in Toronto (due to language barriers, lack of resources and networking opportunities, lack of Canadian experience and credentials as well as social and economic isolation)
- ❑ The recruitment specifically targeted different cultural groups- the initial goal was to have women from 5 different cultural groups

# The Artisan Training and Employment Program

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- ❑ **Women were asked for teaching experience as well as to bring samples of their artwork or handicrafts**
- ❑ **Participants were selected based on their experience (both in teaching and art work), as well as for their cultural/language background (particular attention was focused on finding and supporting women who were trying to support themselves as artists)**

# The Program

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**The first year, 5 women were selected from over 40 applications:**

- **2 women from Bangladesh, 1 woman from Somalia, 1 woman from East India and 1 woman from Sri Lanka**

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- **2 women from Bangladesh, 1 woman from Poland, 1 woman from Grenada and 1 woman from Somalia**

# The Program Components

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- **The women were paid to work 12 hours a week with both the children and adult art program- this included teaching art classes, cooking and preparing food and assisting children with their projects**
- **Women received training and support to develop portfolios and to find employment**

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# At the end of the program....

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## **All the women found employment in the community work field:**

- ❑ Women's Program Worker, Central Neighbourhood House (specializing in Arts Based Engagement)
- ❑ Camp Counsellor
- ❑ Community Cooks
- ❑ Independent Artisan (Handicraft Production)
- ❑ Assistant Child Care worker

# Benefits to the Artisans

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- ❑ Gained confidence
- ❑ Learned soft skills such as promptness, social and work etiquette, customer relations and group dynamics
- ❑ Gained experience working with diverse people
- ❑ Gained Work experience in the following areas:
  - working with children, cooking for large numbers (through the adult program), working in an office environment, management skills, administrative skills, curriculum planning skills, communication skills.
- ❑ Gained English language experience
- ❑ Gained small business knowledge
- ❑ Gained valuable Canadian Work Experience
- ❑ Gained Job Readiness Skills (resumes, interview skills)
- ❑ Gained Artist/ Studio Space
- ❑ Developed Art portfolios

# Benefits to the community

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- ❑ Children were able to work with instructors that reflected their communities
- ❑ Children and adults learned art forms traditional to the countries of their teachers
- ❑ Art Heart gained new ideas and greater cultural understanding of cultural backgrounds of many of their participants

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The real voyage of discovery  
consists not in seeking new  
lands, but in seeing with new  
eyes.

- Marcel Proust