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of poverty and racism in Black Creek

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## Acknowledgements

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Finally, we'd like to give special recognition to all of the photo-researchers. This book is a reflection of their artistic visions, thoughtful analysis, and courage to expose the social impacts of poverty and racism in Black Creek. We dedicate this photobook to them.

The photo-researchers involved in this project include:

Ann Moses, Anne Marie Chow, Anthony Harvey, Brian Durson, Celena Knight, Dorigen Appiah-Kubi, Htay Win, Muzna Rehman, Rui Zhao, Safy Abouzaid, Samira Ahmed, Say Les, Sha Me Ri, and Stanley Muddah.

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**Note: All text accompanying the photos consists of words from project participants, from one-on-one interviews, group discussions or written narratives. Text attributed to “Photo-researcher” is taken from either a group discussion or an anonymous interview.**

## About ‘Exposed’ Photovoice Project

The ‘Exposed’ Photovoice project is a community-based, arts-informed research project conducted in 2008 by the Income Security, Race and Health (ISRH) research working group of Toronto. The main goal of the project was to use an arts-based research method called photovoice to ‘expose’ the social impacts of poverty on low-income families. The project was located in Black Creek – a low-income area located in the north-west inner suburb of Toronto.

The Exposed photovoice project was led by Ruth Wilson and Dr Yogendra B. Shakya from Access Alliance and Dr Sarah Flicker from York University. We recruited 14 residents of Black Creek to be ‘photo-researchers’ for the project. Each photo-researcher was provided with a digital camera and received training in photographic techniques and in photovoice method. Renowned Toronto photographer Rodrigo Moreno provided the photography training and mentoring, serving as Photographer-in-Residence for the project., Over a period of 9 weeks, the 14 photo-researchers took photos related to the research project, analyzed and discussed their photos in the weekly photovoice group discussion sessions, and wrote narratives for relevant photos. The title of project ‘exposed’ was also selected by peer researchers involved in this project.

This photobook is a compilation of some of the key photos and narratives produced by these 14 photo-researchers. The photos and narratives produced by the photo-researchers offer a nuanced, multilayered, and rich picture of the everyday realities of living in a low-income neighborhood in Toronto. For example, photo-researchers combined photos and narratives to document everyday challenges associated with safety and security issues associated with living in a low-income neighborhood. The photos and narratives highlight that increasing surveillance cameras, police presence and private security companies provide a

false sense of safety and security. Photo-researchers also captured the ‘neglect’ and disinvestment in the Black Creek area by government agencies and their failure to provide adequate garbage collection services and properly maintain public spaces and facilities in the neighborhood. The deteriorating and substandard condition of housing in the neighborhood is also highlighted through the photos and narratives. Photo-researchers also made innovative use of photos and narratives to express what certain signs in the neighborhood mean to them, capture ‘hidden borders,’ and geographical expressions of the inequalities and discriminations that they face.

This photobook captures the diverse perspectives that different residents have about important issues such as gangs and safety or different landmarks in the community. For example, several photo-researchers perceived York University as an institution that does not try to connect with the Black Creek community despite its geographical location. In contrast, another photo-researcher talked about how every time she sees York University it brings her a sense of hope and joy because her son is currently studying at the university. In fact, we found that the photovoice sessions provided a creative platform for inter-generational and inter-community dialogue on key issues that affect the community.

More importantly, as a way to challenge the negative portrayal of Black Creek by mainstream media, all the photo-researchers expressed strong interest in using photovoice to document community strengths and community knowledge in Black Creek. This photobook thus begins with the section on community strengths.

## What is Photovoice?

Photovoice is an arts-based research method that combines the visual documentation powers of photography with the explanatory insights of reflective narrative. Arts-based research methods like photovoice are gaining popularity among researchers for many reasons. First, using arts-based methods like photovoice can make research more accessible, creative and fun. Second, combining photos and narratives can help to produce high-quality findings that cannot be captured by conventional methods of research. Third, arts-based research methods like photovoice facilitate sharing findings more widely in accessible formats (such as exhibits and photobooks like this one). Also, there is a growing track record of photovoice research leading to positive service or policy change. For example, another photovoice project conducted by Dr Sarah Flicker with youth in social housing in Toronto documented how lack of good lighting in the hallways and premises of their buildings made the building unsafe; this finding led to Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) to add more lights within TCHC housing premises.

We believe that photo-researchers from this ‘Exposed’ photovoice project have managed to capture important findings about the everyday realities and challenges of what it is like to be a person of color living in a low-income neighborhood in Toronto. We will be sharing these findings widely, and using these findings to mobilize relevant service and policy improvements on issues that have been highlighted by the photo-researchers. In our evaluation of the photovoice project, photo-researchers mentioned many benefits from being involved in the project. The following are some quotes from photo-researchers regarding their experience being involved in the Exposed photovoice project.

*I would say that, my eyes have opened even more so to photo, to print, to words that I see. Like there are some things that obviously grasp you and some things you pay no attention to. But I found that I have a heightened sense now of paying attention to every advertisement. Everything that I see now I feel like I have to rethink about, wonder, you know, is that really it? It has opened my eyes and I also ask my kids as well. Before commercials was that time that you go to the washroom; now we’re discussing the commercials: what does that mean? It’s just opened our eyes to think more outside of the box of what’s going on around us our surroundings. You know what to take in, what to leave out, what’s good for us, and what’s not. So that was my enlightenment and I’ve brought that unto my kids and now they reflect it back to me that they’re aware now. Before when I was taking some photos I used to take a lot of photos of like babies or babies with their mom and stuff and then that was just it. Oh yeah, that baby looked cute in the picture and that was kind of it, but now it’s like this whole world of advertisement and things out there, messages you know and stuff so now I’m just more aware I have more of an awareness of my whole environment.*

-Photo-researcher



### My Story

I am a Karen from Burma. I was born in Burma but I was brought up in a Karen refugee camp located on the Thai-Burma border. I don’t remember my life in Burma since I was very young when we came to the camp. I spent by whole life in the camp before coming to Canada. One day a resettlement worker came and announced the opportunity for this workshop. So I joined the project. In the future, I want to be a photo journalist reporting the news about Karen people to the world. Millions of Karens are now suffering inside of Burma and not many people know about it. This project inspires me to become a photo journalist.

-Sha



## About the Income Security, Race and Health Research Working Group

Canadian census data, in addition to many other studies highlights that, compared to people from European backgrounds, ‘people of color’ (racialized communities) face higher levels of unemployment and poverty, are more likely to be concentrated in low-paying, part-time, unstable jobs, and are more likely to be living in low-income neighborhoods with sub-standard housing and inadequate service, in combination with other forms of marginalization. The Income Security, Race and Health (ISRH) research working group was established in 2006 under the leadership of Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services (AAMCHC) to investigate why racialized groups in Toronto are facing these employment and income inequalities. The ISRH working group conducts research on this important topic with the goal of mobilizing service and policy changes required to overcome the systemic barriers and factors leading to these inequalities that people of color face. The ISRH working group will also assess the health impacts of this negative trend so that we can develop and advocate for appropriate supports and services to address negative health impacts. For the first phase of the project, we are focusing on the Black Creek neighborhood.

A quick note about some of the terms the ISRH working group uses. First, instead of using terms like ‘visible minority,’ ‘ethno-racial groups’ or ‘ethnic minority’ to refer to people of color, we use ‘racialized groups.’ This is because we feel that the former terms such as ‘visible minority’ is more static and relates primarily to number and colour. In contrast, the latter term (racialized groups) recognizes the dynamic process by which racial categories are socially created by dominant groups in ways that worsen social inequalities and marginalization. When we use the term ‘racialized groups’ we are referring to what Dr Grace-Edward Galabuzi (one of the academic researchers involved in ISRH) calls “non-dominant ethno-racial communities who, through the process of racialization, experience race as a key factor in their

identity” and in their experiences of inequality and discrimination. Racialization is the process by which racial categories are constructed as different and unequal in ways that result in regressive social, economic and political impacts (Galabuzi, 2001).

The key goal of the ISRH working group is to conduct community-based research (CBR) to investigate and overcome the growing ‘racialization of poverty’ in Canada. The Exposed photovoice project is the first component of a two-part research project that the ISRH group is conducting. The Exposed photovoice component of the research project documents the impact of poverty on racialized families living in low-income neighborhoods. The second part of the research project involves a longitudinal ethnographic study to find out why people of color are facing difficulties in getting good, stable jobs in their fields (in spite of having necessary qualifications and in spite of using multiple strategies); this second research component is scheduled to be completed by the end of December 2009.

The ISRH research working group is made up of academics, staff from community agencies, and community members from Black Creek (we refer to them as ‘peer researchers’). The group includes: Safy Abouzaid, Peer Researcher; Michelle Ashem, Toronto Public Health; Kenza Belaid, Peer Researcher; Diane Broad, Griffin Centre; Lisa Brown, Black Creek Community Health Centre; Felix Cabrera, Peer Researcher; Sarah Flicker, York University; Grace-Edward Galabuzzi, Ryerson University; Tha Dar Hsae, Peer Researcher; Michaela Hynie, York University; Naomi Ives, Delta Family Resource Centre; Celena Knight, Peer Researcher; Patricia Landolt, University of Toronto; Darren Pham, Peer Researcher; Brenda Roche, Wellesley Institute; Carina Reider, Peer Researcher; Yogendra Shakya, Access Alliance; Zahoorunnisa, Peer Researcher; Ruth Wilson, Access Alliance.

## Why Black Creek?



The Black Creek area is a composite of four neighborhoods (Humber Summit, Humbermede, Black Creek, Glenfield-Jane Heights) located in the northwest inner suburb area of Toronto. The Black Creek community is bounded by Steeles Avenue in the north, Keele Street in the east, Humber River in the west, Wilson Avenue in the south, and includes 20, 30, and 40 Falstaff. Many people know the Black Creek area as the “Jane and Finch” area as well. We decided to base our project in the Black Creek area not just because it is a low-income neighborhood with a high proportion of racialized people, but also because of the rich history of social activism in this community. We have developed strong partnerships in the Black Creek community. The Black Creek Community Health Centre, for example, is one of the lead agencies that helped to found the ISRH research working group. Other partners include Delta Family and Resource Centre, Griffin Centre, Working Women’s Community Centre, and York University-TD Community Engagement Centre.

According to Census 2001 data, 74.8% of the population in Black Creek area identified themselves as “visible minorities.” 62.6% of residents are immigrants. The unemployment rate, average household income, and low-income rate in Black Creek area are two or three times above the average rate for the city of Toronto (Census 2001).

At the same time, the Black Creek community has a rich history of social activism. In the early 1970s, a group of residents, politicians, and community workers banded together to begin addressing community issues. Their main efforts were to improve the community’s negative image and to create a sense of community pride. The results of this dedication has led to the development of over 30 grassroots associations based on principles of mutual aid, including social and health service organizations. The organizations that exist today include the Black Creek Community Health Centre, The Spot, Driftwood Community Centre, Oakdale Community Centre, Firgrove Community Centre, Jane/Finch Community Centre, Belka Enrichment Centre, and Delta Family Resource Centre. In 1998, the Jane and Finch community won the Ontario Trillium Foundation’s Caring Community Award. Residents in the Jane and Finch community are also very active in a number of festivals and events like International Women’s Day, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Caribana, Canadian Hispanic Day Parade, and Driftwood Community Centre’s Annual Multicultural Festival.





# Community Strengths



## Community Strengths

Photo-researchers were very critical of the negative ways their communities have been and continue to be portrayed by the mainstream media and government reports. Thus all of them felt strongly that this photovoice project should also document the strengths and knowledge of their community in order to challenge the negative stereotypes attached to the Jane and Finch area. For example, photo-researchers took photos of what they perceived as positive spaces in the community. Positive spaces captured in their photos include the Black Creek Community Health Centre, The Spot, The Jane and Finch Boys and Girls Club and the Jane and Finch Mall. The narratives and discussions linked to these photos highlight the importance of the range of local services that these community agencies provide, including programs to keep young people out of trouble.

Mainstream media particularly tends to portray youth from Black Creek in a negative light (e.g. all youth are involved in gangs and violence). In direct contrast, photo-researchers from this project captured the positive roles that youth play in the community, including being involved in advocating on issues important to the whole community. The younger photo-researchers were keen on including photos of themselves (sometimes overlaid on top of their community) as a way to reassert the positive spirit that youth represent in the community.

Photo-researchers also discussed the community's capacity to effectively come together and advocate for change. In fact, participants mentioned that the community's tendency to aid each other in times of need and emergency significantly contributed to their ability to rise above the structural barriers and challenges facing many people living in poverty in Black Creek. Additionally, residents located sources of knowledge in older residents in the community, and thought that intergenerational programs that transferred this knowledge to youth would be helpful. Finally, photo-researchers captured a lot of beautiful spaces and scenery located in their community, including pictures of children, sunsets, views from their balconies, and green spaces.

*"People think we can't build up our neighborhood but we need to prove them wrong and build up and try to be strong. We must continue to build our neighborhood."*

*"I was just walking home and then I just really took a picture because I wanted to take a picture of the community having fun, not just a negative thing to make the media talk more about our community."*

*"... we can see how the community is changing. People are going outside more and not doing bad things. Positive programs create positive people and more programs will help us get jobs. This picture teaches other people that our community is not bad"*

*"I believe our seniors and adults and our elders have a lot to offer and a lot to teach our youth and I think they're willing and they're out there but there's again there's no programs that or not enough programs that offer that or they offer it with such rigid things that don't fit into people's schedule and things like that so it's unrealistic to happen."*

*"If Jane and Finch does a good thing, media are the last to say it. When there is gun violence, they are the first to say it."*

*"[The Jane and Finch Boys and Girls Club] is my favourite place where children and youth can come and relax and get away from like, the whole drama of the outside world."*

*"... our community is never lazy and wants to do something active."*

*"I decided to focus on the positive stuff in my community because like even though we live in like these low income housing or whatever I wanted to show that just because you can't have the finer things in life doesn't mean you still can't live your life."*



## The Cornerstone



Safy

This sign tells people where they are going. The sign leads to new places. This sign represents my community. It is the entrance to my community. This sign tells people where we live. We live in a strong community, even though we don't have as much money as other neighborhoods, we are still strong. This sign is high up which means that we will rise above. The wires show that nothing can hold us down. When other people see this sign they get scared. The sign tells us where we are from – we are proud of where we are from.

-Group Discussion



Stanley

## Second Chance

“I took this photo to show that even though bad stuff happens in our community, we all still stick together... the fire occurred in my neighbourhood and it was very bad. The community band together to help the families...Gave lodging to the residents so they were able to gather themselves and move somewhere else.”

-Photo-researcher





This picture is about kids having fun on a nice sunny day. Kids always have their fun. They don't pick on their playmates. Whoever is friendly or playful will fit into their fun. Children don't know anything so they accept everything the way it is. They don't know what 'racism' is. Even though it exists everywhere. Children don't discriminate like people do. Learn from kids. Learn to live together in harmony. Just like kids, people all around the world should be able to welcome anyone to be a "part of their fun".

-Muzna



### Where Youth Wanna Be

This is a place for youth. Any student can come here after school or anytime to relax and engage in activities, rather than getting into doing any wrong things when they there's no where else to go or nothing else to do. Students get suspended, kicked out, or whatever it is they get into, they will always have 'the Spot' to rely on. This type of diversion is specially needed in poverty stricken areas, where without anything to do, students can easily get sidetracked into wrong doing.

- Muzna



"We wish there were more places like this one, a place where you can go and get help finding jobs, safe fun places to go after school"

-Photo-researcher

"I took a picture of the Spot because it is like a mini community centre in the mall and it can help people with differences during programs. It can really help people's weaknesses and it's a spot to just chill. You can go on computers have fun go video game programs. Just a spot to chill at."

-Photo-researcher





### Our Youth

This is a picture represents the humble nature of our youth. He was the first person to pose for my camera. There are good youth living in this neighborhood that are willing to learn and provide mentorship for other youth. We need to encourage them to keep mentoring.

- Ann-Marie



### Light in Dark Places

These are pictures of my friend; I took these pictures because I felt that they said a lot about what is happening in our community. They show that even in our darkest hour there is still light and if we embrace the light rather than fear it we will be able to shine as bright as we want. To me, the photos represent hope, the light is the interest and my friend represents hope. She shows that we can all shine in our own way.

There is one photo where my friend is sitting next to a wall. I took this photo to show the confusion and noise that happens in my community and that through all of it a clear path is there if you need it. To me, this photo represents a brighter tomorrow because it shows that it only takes one person to make a difference in the world. So no matter how small a difference you make, your voice can still be heard.

-Stanley







Collage by: Anthony

I Am Here

Rising Above



Collage by: Ann-Marie



Stanley





Stanley

I see a painting of a boy and his friends having fun, with kids that are telling a story. It shows that even though there are problems in the world, kids still have fun in the same way. Its here because a person got permission to paint how he feels on the wall. I can enjoy it until it goes away.

- Stanley



Safy

### A Glimmer of Hope

This is a picture of the Black Creek Community Health Centre, which is a nonprofit service agency in my neighborhood. Centre's such as BCCHC offer programs and services free of charge to a lot of marginalized residents in the neighborhood, who would not otherwise be able to access such services.

- Safy





Collage by: Brian

### My Neighborhood

This is a picture of my neighborhood. The life that is happening in my neighborhood is built up by its people. We live in it so we must try to keep it. People think we can't build up our neighborhood and we try to prove them wrong and show that we can build up and be strong. We must continue to build and try to keep our neighborhood safe.

- Brian



## Safety and Security





# Safety and Security

Safety and security was a recurring theme that came up in participants’ narratives, group discussions, interviews and photos. In general, the photos and narratives document their concerns about lack of safety in the community. Some photo-researchers took photos of basements and laundromats of public housing buildings in order to highlight the lack of safety in these otherwise public spaces; narratives mention witnessing instances of violence in these public premises. Photo-researchers, particularly those with children, were concerned about the garbage in and around schools and parks because of the risk to children’s safety and health.

The rise in gun violence within the Black Creek area was a major concern as well. Although there was some debate over the role of gangs in the community, the majority of participants identified violence resulting from gang activities as the greatest threat to their safety. All participants agreed that the persistence of gang activity is linked to experiences of isolation, poverty and racism; some pointed out how youth join gangs as an act of resistance or response to these inequalities and oppressions they face.

While lack of safety and security was a major concern, many photo-researchers highlighted their dislike of being under constant surveillance by various ‘security’ measures enforced in the area. Some expressed strong concerns that residents of Black Creek, particularly youth, were in fact over-policed and profiled and suggested that the large police presence in their neighborhood often contributed to being unsafe instead of providing them with a sense of security. Photo-researchers documented how residents were beginning to tackle these issues by taking security into their own hands - neighbors and friends watch over each other, residents limit their mobility in order to avoid unsafe spaces and some residents invest in private security measures, like security systems and guard dogs. Photo-researchers were however united in their view that these were only band-aid solutions, and highlighted the need for government to take comprehensive measures to tackle the root causes (including unemployment, discrimination, and lack of services) that undermine safety and security in the neighborhood.

“... people don’t feel safe going to the basements a lot of people are attacked in Laundromats and that goes back to safety...”

Children walk home alone while their parents are at work. Even though there is a lot of crime and violence in the impoverished areas, children still feel very safe to walk home unaccompanied by anyone. Working parents can’t always be there for their kids. We as a community can help fill the gaps where parents can’t be. It takes a whole community to raise a child.

Yeah, I think all the building people have a problem with that, with this[safety]. And I have experience with the laundry, with the safety too. You know but, they have a camera. But you know what? They have a camera but the camera still didn’t protect the people. ..

The security doesn’t stay 24 hours in the building. We call their office, we say, ‘We need security in this building.’

It is not good to be around this garbage, especially for kids. Garbage [is] like broken glass, food gone bad can harm kids.

“I see the greatness of poverty that allows us to be so destructive that the gangs represent the greatness of poverty”

“I have something to say. I think it is a way of crying out of the impoverished people that we have a want of a sense of belonging because when you belong to a gang you have that sense of belonging. So this is a cry out.”

“The word gang. The police is a gang, the word... so the children first of all are not being explained what the word gang means. How it is labeled different groups could be easily called a gang. The gang word has gone to a negative aspect...”

“The gangs started as a form of rebellion against the police, started as a protection program for the communities... back then you call the police or whatever they never come to the scene fast enough... for all these people in the area the gangsters or whatever are there like a form of protection.”

“Gangs are the most bad influence in our community. They are everywhere and more and more little kids are joining and spreading. People are getting hurt and killed and it is like the colours they wear, blue and red... It is a big influence in our community and is what is really happening here.



“We need safe places to live, even though there are always cameras watching us, we still don’t feel safe.”

-Photo-researcher



### Violent Laundry

This is a picture of the laundry room in my building. I hate the laundry room because it has become a very dangerous place. I've not only experienced but I've also witnessed friends get assaulted in this room, reasons tend to be as silly as a dryer. I wish I had a car so that I could avoid this room altogether by taking my clothes to a local Laundromat.

- Safy



### Barking Back

"I don't know how they're going to fix it, this area. Maybe I hope one day it's going to be safe. I hope that it's more safer. We're scared."

-Photo-researcher





Celena

### A Mother's Worst Nightmare

This is a picture of head stones as far as the eye can see. This is where our youth are ending up on a daily basis. We are losing them to guns and violence everyday. A mother's worst nightmare of a place where she may enter to spend time with her child. How sad. This is our community, our youth, our loved ones. Are the police doing the right thing profiling our youth, creating an angry society? Are parents losing control or is it being taken away by government, the over policing and the profiling of our youth? Lets band together. Results come in numbers, signatures and letters. It time to hold people accountable for improper actions.

-Celena



"People don't see the good they do, they only see the bad. I have seen some of the gangs help & protect the little kids in the neighborhood."

"Just because you are part of a gang does not mean you are bad. Gangs are for protection. When someone gets robbed or something bad happens – the police don't come. The gangs protect you."

"It happens to me all the time – I walk out of the house & people think I am in a gang. But I am not. I am a caring person."

"Jane and Finch does a good thing, media are the last to say it. When there is gun violence, media are the first to say it... [the media] says bad things like: it's not a good community, it's negative, it's gang violence, it's bad to live. I heard from somewhere that once you turn 19 it's an automatic death to die, and I say that's not true."

- Photo-researchers



Celena

One-word reactions  
to Photo:

“Resistance”  
“Division”  
“Puzzle”  
“Black and White”  
“Crying out”  
“Poverty”



I was surprised when we were talking about the gangs. I’ve never sat in a discussion in my life where gangs were viewed as positive before or spoke about with such passion as such a good thing and I’m speechless again. I was very heartbroken like I felt very hurt that I couldn’t, I felt powerless because I felt like there’s nothing you can say right now or do to these youth to open their lives because they’re at an age where you have to see it for yourself. You can only relay the message and leave it there and hope that they do something with the message, you know. And I just felt like I was in the room everybody was hearing the message but it meant nothing from the older generation. And that was hard because being a parent I felt like what if the situation happens, where my son is in that position now and I have a message that I feel is life or death that I really need him to understand what the consequences are and he just doesn’t see it because these children were not even my family and I felt like “Oh my gosh just listen to me”. And I felt so powerless and I said “Can you imagine something, you know, this could be your son, or might be your son, what are you going to do, you know and just to know that that’s the part where the parents just have to hope for the best or turn to their religion or whatever else they use for strength, you know what I mean. Their faith or something but that was my reality of truly being a parent of what I have to look forward to and what I could possibly look forward to so it was really eye opening for me but it was also almost emotional too because I have to go and look at my son and daughter and say could this be you or will this be you?

-Photo-researcher



Normal Speed Traps

The police set up speed traps where cars are most likely to be speeding. This is regular for police while crime is being committed across the next street. Real crimes go unsolved and criminals get away with crime while police idle their time trapping normal hard working people into the system. What can we do about it? Nothing!

- Ann-Marie



## Difference Maker

R: Oh, this is a photo when I went to a police barbeque. Yeah it was a police barbeque and then we went decided to went because I wanted to see how the barbeque was we just went, had food, had fun, played basketball, learned more about it. And then I decided to take this picture because we were at a barbeque and this picture was interesting because it was like a actually a talking police car.

Q: It was a talking police car? What did it say?

R: I don't even remember but it was a talking police car..Two reasons I took it because of that, because it was talking and because it was showing how police is good in our community sometimes and people always want to hate them.

Q: People want to hate the police?

R: Yeah.

Q: Why?

R: For no reason, just put them in jail. Like yeah.

Q: But you don't hate the police. Do you feel protected by the police in your neighbourhood?

R: Yeah. Yeah, I feel protected.



Are the police doing the right thing profiling our youth, creating an angry society? Are parents losing control or is it being taken away by government, the over policing and the profiling of our youth?

-Photo-researcher



# Neglect





# Neglect

The physical neglect of public spaces in the Black Creek area was the most prominent theme in participants’ narratives and photos. The project generated over 200 pictures of garbage accumulating throughout the neighborhood, pictures of dying trees, parks and schools in need of maintenance, under-utilized or abandoned green space and basketball hoops without nets. Overall, participants felt that the unreasonable build up of garbage made their neighborhood look ugly and made residents feel unimportant and undervalued. Photo-researchers documented concerns about lack of public parks as well as neglect of the few existing public parks. Parks were identified as an affordable means of entertaining children. Many participants felt that the lack of clean, safe and inviting outdoor space negatively affected their quality of life and health. Many of the young participants noted the value of having basketball courts near their homes and schools but wanted to see the courts better maintained. Although both government and residents were identified as being accountable for the “mess” in their neighborhood, the majority of participants felt that if government officials took more interest in making their neighborhood look beautiful, residents would be more motivated to keep it clean.

All of the photo-researchers agreed that government officials were responsible for initiating the first steps towards making their neighborhood cleaner and healthier. They called for more government staff assigned to the maintenance of the neighborhood, more plant life, and better parks. Photo-researchers also highlighted the need for public education campaigns on the impacts of this kind of neglect on community health and the environment. Some photo-researchers suggested that this issue presented an opportunity for the government to create employment opportunities for youth.

*People area always piling up garbage in almost the middle of the road for display, around my building. It’s not a pleasant sight because anybody who would see this would probably get the idea that nobody around here cares to keep this area clean and free of garbage on roads. The garbage is almost sliding down towards the roads, the could pose a threat of an accident for any care driving by closely. People should clean up and get garbage piles off the roads.*

*“There are not many trees around because people don’t care about how our environment looks. They don’t plant trees, we should cut down all dying trees, plant more trees and take care of them.”*

*“You can see the garbage every where on the road and school yard. It is not very good and they [children] go outside and play and breathe and smell. Another corner there is a lot of papers. Luckily, we have a person there that collect these things and hope to have more people to do his job to improve the health in the community”*

*The winter has ended and the mall neglects the garbage that accumulates along the walls, making our communities look filthy. We have young people that are willing to clean up messes but no one will hire them. Therefore they get the bad name of a dirty community. There is a lack of caring for the well-being or health of impoverished communities. There should be a program that can employ youth to clean and maintain the streets. After all, the youth get blamed for the mess anyway.*

*Most of the [basketball] courts don’t have proper nets. Some are either broken or the net is torn which makes it hard for kids to have a good game. When things get broken, nothing is done about it.*

*I would like the government to provide the local schools with more funding to properly maintain the school’s property. Children should not have to go to school in such a disgusting environment. I feel that such surroundings are determined to their learning, because without pride in their schools, kids are not as eager to learn.*

*It’s an irony seeing three neat trash bins next to a pile of garbage. This shows how the government is irresponsible to take care of the sanitation.*



A girl poses in an area full of garbage to display how unsanitary our communities are. We see garbage all around our community and garbage is unsafe, can produce diseases, and it is not clean. More funding is needed in our community. Lack of funding is the cause of this problem. We can try to clean our community as well instead of depending on the government and other people to clean it.

- Dorigen



The No Fun Park



Brian

"You can see the garbage everywhere on the road and school yard. Is not very good and they go outside and play that breathe and smell. Another corner there is a lot of papers. Luckily we have a person there that collect these things and hope to have more people do his job to improve the health in the community."

- Photo-researcher



Stanley

No Where

This is a picture of trash. I took this picture because it shows all of the mess and build-up happening in Black Creek, and if we as a community do not stop adding to it rather than shrinking it, we have no where to call home. To me, this picture means the outcome of what could happen if we don't start taking care of our community.

- Stanley





Muzna



Safy



Safy



Dorigen



Stanley



Celena

Basketball is a very common sport. Many kids need basketball courts to do some physical activity afterschool. To do that you need a proper court to play in with all the proper facilities. Most of the courts don't have proper nets. Some are either broken or the net is torn which makes it hard for kids to have a good game. When things get broken, nothing is done about it.

- Muzna



Brian





Looking for Hoopz



My Children

These kids are enjoying a good time – inexpensively. Because of my low income it's important and vital to find inexpensive ways to entertain our children. We need to advocate governments and funders to invest in our communities. They should invest in more accessible activities.

-Safy





### Mini Garden

People feel great about summer and they feel great about their environment. This is a mini garden where people are planting their seeds for new plants and flowers to grow and fill the environment with happiness. This is to show that there are still people who care about our community and want it to look great.

-Muzna



## Income Security





## Income Security

In general, capturing intangible social issues like employment and income security through photographs is a challenging task. Nonetheless, photo-researchers from this project, particularly older participants, managed to use photovoice in innovative ways to highlight employment and income security issues that they face. A photo of bags of rice accompanied by a powerful narrative speaks volumes about the impact of rising food prices in the midst of growing unemployment. Another photo-researcher provided an insightful narrative about the cycle of unemployment to accompany her photo of two young mothers with their babies in strollers in front of a mobile job recruitment van. Another photo-researcher simply took a photo of a clothes donation box located in the neighborhood, noting the photo said a lot on its own. One photo-researcher pointed out that having to work two or three jobs leaves little time to advocate on issues important to them. These stories are captured in this section.

*“It’s getting so much worse. It’s where youth right now have to work in order to help their family out rather than working to get experience. It’s where you are giving your extra dollar to the daycares because you have to stay that extra hour at work. You know, in every which way people are suffering even the meals that you used to eat in the culture are minimizing now. You can’t eat the way you used to you can’t feed your kids the way they used to.”*

*I know in my neighborhood they don’t have [time to do activism] when they are working 2 to 3 jobs and weird hours and because of their lifestyle of having to work all these times to pay the bills and city counselors aren’t accessible.*

*“You know what I think that the government should have more of a backbone to cap things. I think they sit back and just let things happen, happen, happen...And just watch and watch because they know that their cupboards and pantries are full so they don’t have to worry. And again it becomes a “Who feels it knows it”. If the head, and the decision makers are all not knowing where their next meal is coming from I would definitely be the first to be signing some things to make sure we can all eat that next meal. But because we don’t feel it, we don’t know, you know, so I truly believe the government is just they’re just sitting back because they can. This is a part of the world that we live in and it’s sad, but you know, this is how easy it is to just get away with doing things the wrong way and continually continue to do things the wrong way.”*



my responsibility, can you truly have this amount and you know your friend didn’t get any as well? So I just felt like what is my role as well. So when I was leaving I saw that and my place and I said I have to take a picture because to me that’s my mother I’m sure would say when you look at that, that’s a blessing, right. To look at that and see that abundance in the household. That’s a blessing, right. So I took that picture. It was for myself more of my faith that I made it and got the last of what’s there. So that picture reflected was what was the last thing at the shelf at the store and I happened to be the one and just got it. It was kind of emotional. It had me thinking about my mom and she’s always giving food away, you know and stuff and always making sure people are fed and stuff in the community so it really reflected, you know.

I got a phone call of “Oh my gosh, do you know rice is going up and there’s no rice anywhere.” That scared me so much because, my culture, we eat a lot of rice and we use a lot of flour. I immediately freaked out and I went out and drove all night. By the time, when I got this message it was 9 o’ clock in the evening and I’m like “Where is really open? Where can I, you know, get rice and flour?” And I did find a store, like a 24 hour store that didn’t raise their price yet, right. I was not aware; I’m a person that doesn’t really like to watch the news. So I wasn’t aware of what was going on in the week. So when I found this 24 hour store, I felt like I had to get everything there that was left, you know, just in case you never know and I started to get all this anxiety and just feel like “Oh my gosh” and “My kids!” and just seeing the worst out of it. You know so that’s why I had so much. Being in that store and looking at the shelf and the shelves were all empty I also was sad because then I said what if there is not enough? And what about the families that didn’t get to go and do it and stuff and then I felt like as

-Celena





Dorigen



Sha

### English Class

This is part of the daily life of a newcomer like me. They've come here for different purposes like to get higher education, to get a job, or to get government assistance. I came here because of the lack of freedom back home. I feel like I could have freedom here but the language barrier limits my freedom here.

-Sha





Celena

### Searching

“It takes a village to raise a child”, and seeing two mothers supporting each other and just being out on a stroll it was just like a nice day. You know, but also having the truck there brought to my attention the reality falls back on providing for our children and stuff. If they’re walking to the van for employment it goes back to our revolving circle as well. There’s not jobs are not being given there’s no jobs, you know, lack of education and stuff as well so I wonder if they went to the van, if they are successful. Are these mothers working right now? Are they employed? Are these kids ok?

-Celena



Samira

### The Price of Gas is High





# Hidden Borders and Discrimination

## Hidden Borders and Discrimination

Over the course of data collection, photo-researchers shared with each other their thoughts on discrimination. Although photo-researchers did not share many personal experiences of racism, they did agree that racism exists and described how it affects people of colour, particularly racialized newcomers. More specifically, they expressed concern that white privilege and the negatives stereotypes associated with skin colour were barriers that made it difficult for racialized people to get good jobs and secure decent housing. Participants also agreed that people living outside of their neighborhood have very negative perceptions of residents in Black Creek. Photo-researchers noted how they feel ‘demoralized’ and misunderstood by the media and other outsiders.

Using photos and narratives, photo-researchers documented hidden boundaries in the Black Creek neighborhood that spatially organize residents according to income and education. Photo-researchers felt that they are unwelcome in areas within their neighborhood where upper-middle class residents lived; it was their impression that these areas are better maintained and well-protected. More importantly, they felt that the residents in these areas are not a part of their community and often were not involved in advocating for change in their community. Photo-researchers’ discussions of hidden boundaries also included reference to York University. Many of the photo-researchers felt that members of York University isolated themselves from the rest of Black Creek. In fact, they described the boundary between York University and the rest of Black Creek as the line between the rich and poor. Although, most photo-researchers noted that York University was not a place they visited very often, one of the photo-researchers – whose son was a student at York University – listed York University as one of her favorite places in Black Creek. She viewed the university as “the road that will lead [her] son out of Black Creek and into a better neighborhood.” This quote also echoes the mixed feelings that many Black Creek residents feel in being proud of their community but at the same time wanting to move out of Black Creek to escape the marginalization and discrimination.

*“We are so demoralized living in these areas and have no way to move out nor do we want to move, cause some have lived all their lives here and are terrified to live anywhere else.”*

*“Racism is all around, who can stop it? Who can stop it? Who can stop racists? Especially when you colour is like ours.”*

*“I think the basis of racism is anger.”*

*We are diverse because of Canada’s immigration policies but we need to promote cultural sensitivity and racial tolerance.*

*“Yeah, its racist... when the people look me up and down when I wear like that. But I don’t care, I’m proud for my religion. I’m proud the way I look and I don’t care about the people. And I tell my kids, be proud of your name. Don’t you dare change your name...”*

*They [children] don’t know what ‘racism’ is. Even though it exists every where. Children don’t discriminate like people do. Learn from kids. Learn to live together in harmony.*

*We need more people of colour working in corporations.*

*Most people label you and give you different kinds of description based on how you look and they don’t know the full story of what you are all about.*





### Driftwood & York

This is the border between Driftwood & York University. It is also the border between rich and poor. Houses on one side of the fence are far less valuable. I wish we could get rid of the fences so that Driftwood is not so isolated. Lets make a more integrated community.

- Rui



### Do Not Enter

There are signs like these around all private property to protect the place from trespassers. Places like these are heavily guarded. But some Government owned townhouses don't have much security. That's why crimes are easy to take place here. I think we need more security near our townhouses to prevent anything bad from happening, because there was a shooting near one of the townhouses near my building, and it was so easy for the criminals to escape through the lanes through townhouses with not much security.

-Muzna



### The Canadian Dream

To me this picture represents the Canadian dream because of how high the flag is reaching, and the scenery is like something out of an immigration poster. The Canadian dream is thought of as being accessible to everybody but in actuality, like the flag in the picture, the Canadian dream is too high to reach.

-Safy



Safy



Ann-Marie

### View from the Back

“Yeah, people that born here and live here they always get the first option when there is something, always. With less qualifications.”

-Photo-researcher





“The picture with the hands here was not one of the most positive but I see it in both...white power and the people of colour being suppressed in society. But also the coming together of the hands on top of hands that any hands, any work, anybody can do we’re all equal as well.”

“... the hands explain the oppression, the colour speaks for itself.”

- Photo-researcher



## Housing





## Housing

Inadequate and sub-standard housing was a common theme that was discussed within all of the broader themes identified earlier. Photo-researchers took numerous photos that highlighted the neglect and deteriorated conditions of public housing. Pictures included holes in the walls, water damage, boarded windows, and excessive garbage in and around their apartment buildings. The discussions and narratives that accompanied these photos pointed to the need for more maintenance staff invested in regular upkeep of the buildings and premises. Photo-researchers residing in public housing also highlighted the need to have their complaints genuinely heard and responded to by Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) staff. The majority of photo-researchers felt uncomfortable and even ashamed of living in public housing and were hesitant to view their space as their “home.” Overall, participants felt that if their building was clean and well-maintained, then residents would feel more at ease and comfortable in their homes and would treat their space more respectfully. A few participants suggested that the sub-standard state of public housing in the area contributed to an overall feeling of hopelessness in the community. One photo-researcher noted that while public housing buildings were overcrowded, private apartment buildings were struggling to find tenants. It was her view that residents want to leave public housing because “people don’t want to call this [area] their home.” Some photo-researchers took photos of homeless people in downtown Toronto. These photos generated very sympathetic responses from participants about the lack of affordable housing in Toronto in general which force many people “to sacrifice a home for food.”

*I focused my pictures on the buildings because I was trying to make a statement just trying to show a statement saying like we need proper cleaners, cleaners that take care of the building. And it should be clean every day. And people even should help like the adults they help to clean up the building fix broken walls because its it’s like every day people don’t want to clean it up.*

*So these pictures describe the apartment. As you can see none of them look clean except for this one. Those are the places where we live, it is not clean, not well sanitized and only like a little part to clean. Like the main part of Jane and Finch does not look clean.*

*“Poor maintenance, it’s tattered, you know it looks run down, you know some of the balconies look like they’re ready to drop any moment, you know and stuff it just looks really really awful.”*

*“We call the office, like the manager. The manager she used to meet with us every month. But keeps saying, “Oh, just give me time, give me time”, you know, “I just started”, until she left. I don’t know when we’re going to give her time. And the other one came, for few months now he didn’t want to come to meet us. And we don’t know what to do.”*

*“I think it has to come from whoever’s in charge of the maintenance, whoever’s the top person for maintenance of the Toronto housing buildings... I don’t think these guys that come and do the half part of the job is the ones to blame because they’re only doing half part of what their boss has given them. So you know what I mean when we complain ... the staff will tell you that you know what I mean like “Oh I can only do this for you because we don’t do these parts”, or whatever, you know. That would be your boss. So I think you the community really needs to go to the higher end of the maintenance, who’s in charge, who has the say, who makes the decisions not the front line workers...”*

*Also like the problem is because the places we live in are supposed to be clean and if they are not we, the community would say that it is not taking care of it and stuff. The neighborhood would be given a bad name and stuff. We should do something about it like complain to City Counsel and the places that we live in should be clean.*

*Poverty is bad for Toronto because people can be left homeless and often many people have to sacrifice a home for food. There should be no excuse for people not having a home in a country as rich as Canada.*



### Nobody Cares, Nobody Listens

Buildings like this reflect our community in a bad way. There is no funding for repairs. Nobody cares and nobody listens.

-Photo-researcher



## Life

I took that picture because it reminds me of the first place I lived on Bleecker Street. Actually it kind of looks identical to that. And all of the awful memories of how the state of the apartment and the inside and the elevator's dropping floors and you know how many times people's jumped off the balcony and things like that and when I parked I saw that building immediately you know my reality is that I'm sure people are going through the exact same thing in that building as well. The picture there actually makes the building look much better than it really does. I took it to get the really awful sight of how it looked but it kind of...Really nice. Yeah, cause when I saw it I'm like "Wow, uh uh" that was like, really awful, you know so that camera did not capture the true ugliness...Yeah. Poor maintenance, it's tattered, you know it looks run down, you know some of the balconies look like they're ready to drop any moment, you know and stuff it just looks really really awful. And then it was facing a school I believe it was facing a school and a community. So it's kind of like everybody looks out their window and sees this big kind of ugly place, you know and stuff so I wasn't impressed when I saw it as to why I took that picture.

- Photo-researcher



Celena



Safy



Safy



We are so demoralized living in these areas and have no money to move out nor do we want to move 'cause some have lived here all their lives.

-Photo-researcher

Ann-Marie





Safy

### Metro Housing

This is the basement of my apartment building and the wall is damaged with water leaking on the floor. No one cares about it because it is a metro housing building. It is not safe and I wish I can move out from this apartment, so that I can live with my kids in a more safe place. We need to keep complaining about it by putting our strengths together.

- Safy



Dorigen

### Ethnicity in Harmony

The paintings basically represent all the different types of people who live in that building and neighborhood. People who are from different ethnic backgrounds, living together in one loving neighborhood. Basically someone saw the multiculturalism in the neighborhood and decided to gather a group of people to make the painting and make it visible for everyone.

- Dorigen

“So many TCHC buildings have these paintings on it. It think it labels us so people know that we are poor.”

-Photo-researcher

“When I see the painting I think that a lot of people of colour live there. It makes me proud.”

-Photo-researcher

“I like that the paintings show fathers playing with their children. There are not enough fathers in our neighborhood.”

-Photo-researcher



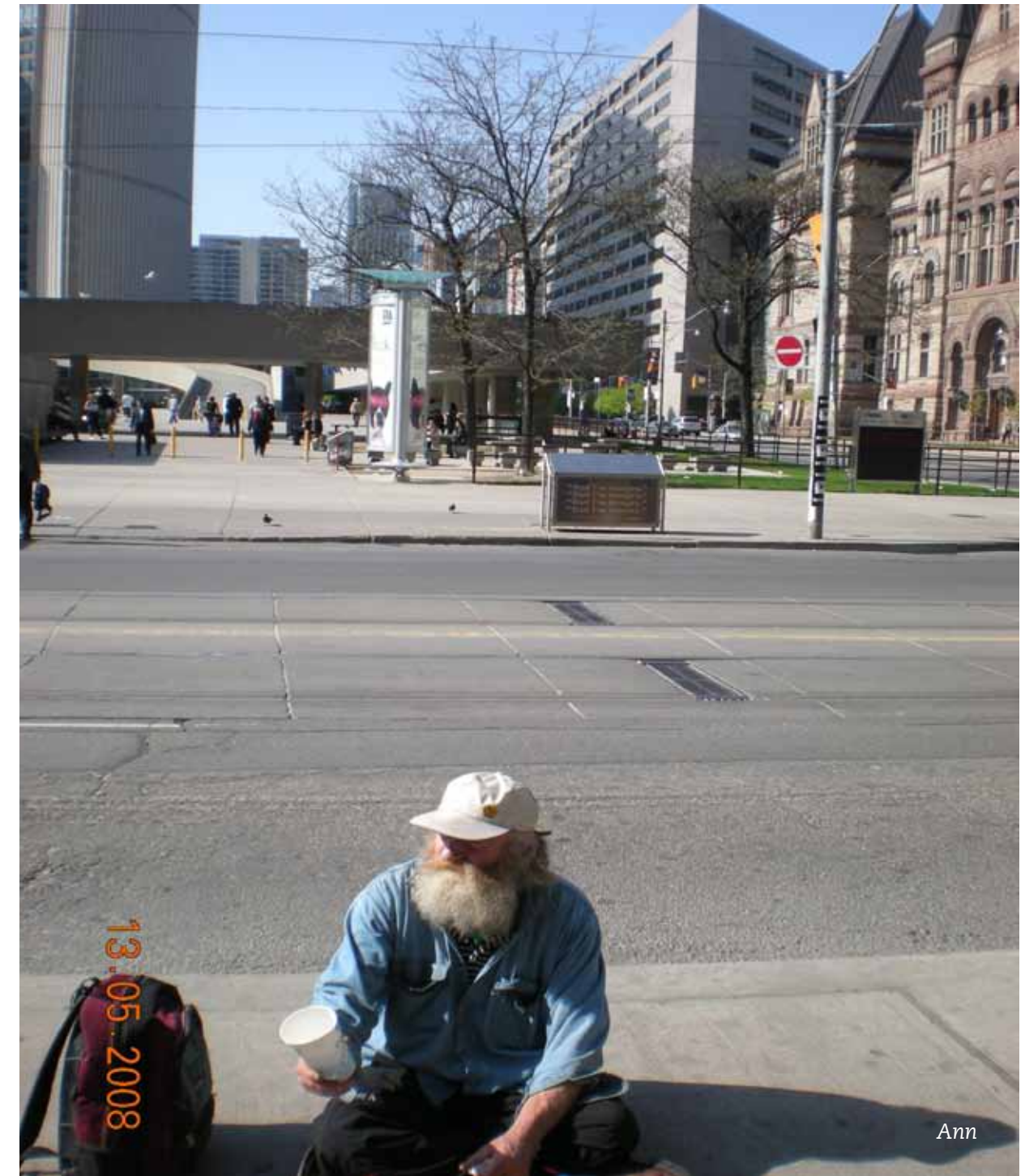


Muzna

### Nobody's Home

This picture was taken within the Black Creek area. This is a private building. Most of the government buildings are full with people on assistance here. But you don't often see private buildings overflowing. Private buildings, in fact, are quite empty. Everyone's leaving these places because of the poverty stricken area and because of the violence that's forcing them to be concerned about their wellbeing. Nobody sees a progressive, successful future for themselves when they're residing here. People who aren't on social assistance are moving out for a new, fresher start. People don't want to call this their home.

-Muzna



Ann





# Resiliency and Resistance



## Resiliency and Resistance

The photo-researchers wanted to document how they cope and respond to inequalities and injustices they face, and highlighted things that give them strength and resiliency on an everyday level. For example, several photo-researchers took photos of their religious institutions to highlight the positive role their faith and religious community play in their lives. Similarly, others noted the role that their families, particularly their children, play in bringing a sense of hope and joy in spite of all odds. Many photo-researchers talked about the importance of community and collective advocacy as a way of coping and mobilizing positive change. These and the other ways Black Creek residents cope, respond and resist are captured in the photos in this section.

*“...I strongly believe in my God, and this is where these people sit to communicate or commune with God. This place here. They sit here and do their puja, their offering whatever. The priest, the head priest sit there, with her, what she’s going to read from the holy book or hymn, whatever. But then because I feel like people up here can’t help you nothing and I got a strong belief there’s a greater being than we human being. And I believe strongly in that super being. And I always sit and I always like to be among people who sit to do these kind of work. Because it’s quiet and it’s peaceful and you can sit and you can meditate and without no noise or anything.”*

*“Yeah, and I found this good because it’s good to have a friendship in our community like Jane and Finch right.”*

*I see myself enjoying nice spring weather. I’m getting away from all the stress in life, and I’m simply enjoying myself. We all need to get away from the daily stress and worries in our lives.*

*We need to keep complaining about it by putting our strengths together so that they fix it immediately.*

*Family bonding and family values are important to us. Our culture is family oriented. We need to make sure we keep doing family activities together*

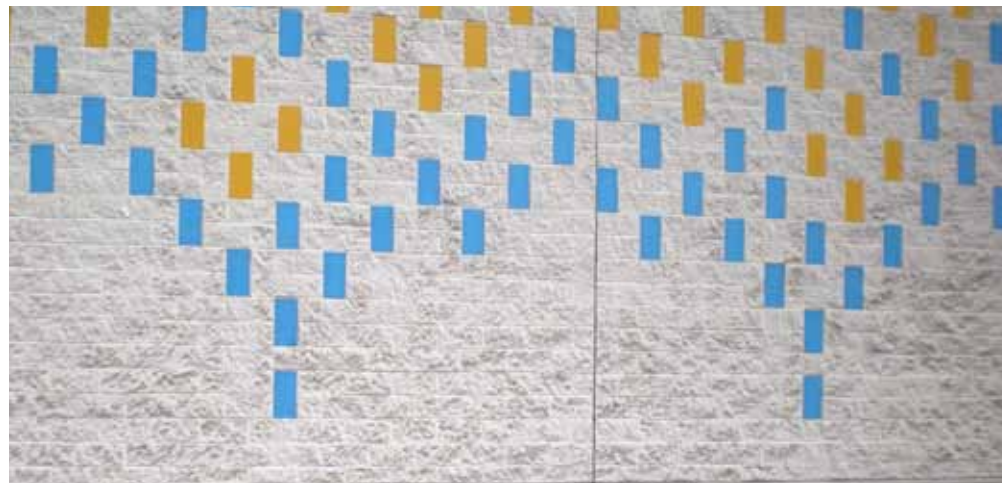
*“I’m happy because I have a friend, I feel I’m popular at the community. Everybody knows me. Me and my kids because I help this community maybe around 17-18 years or more. I help volunteering I help with food bank, I help out abused women, I help the woman take the welfare take disability. Even I go with them to court to translate. I’m not translator by, legally, but I go like that. Even I advise the people, I advise if I see abused child abused woman I advise them I said no, you don’t have to take that. You have to go to the community.”*

*“Oh, it helps them a lot, because... they [Seniors in Black Creek] don’t have no where much to go, right, so within their self they come, get together and they do these things and they feel good within their self and feel good. Just going, sit there, sing a few songs, the priest read some nice thing about God and they feel happy and they come good.”*



## Faith

“Like you know anybody, the Christian they’re proud of the church, I’m proud of my mosque.”



“When the people look at me especially at the summer I always get at the mall lots of people come to me. Some people come with good intentions, “Oh well, you’re not hot?”. Some people came, “Are you crazy?”. Some people, “Are you stupid to wear this?”. That, you know. This is not right either, this is racist.”

-Photo-researcher



Safy



Ann

“They come, get together and they do these things and they feel good within their self and feel good. Just going, sit there, sing a few songs, the priest read some nice thing about God and they feel happy.”

-Photo-researcher





**Guarded Sunset**

The light is returning from the dark. Everyday the sun setting brings new hope for tomorrow. We just try to capture it.

-Ann-Marie





Samira

My kids

These are my 3 kids sitting on the steps of a playground. The siblings are bonding. Family bonding and family values are important to us. Our culture is family oriented. We need to make sure we keep doing family activities together.

- Samira



Collage by: Rui



Rui

“Lets band together. Results come in numbers, signatures and letters. It time to hold people accountable for improper actions.”

-Photo-researcher



## Last Words



*“We should do something about it like complain to City Council...”*

*“We can advocate for positive policy change so that the Canadian dream can be realized for everybody.”*

*“We need to advocate for policy change.”*

*“We need to promote cultural sensitivity and racial tolerance.”*

*We need to keep complaining about it by putting our strengths together so that they fix it immediately.*

*We need to advocate governments and funders to invest money in our communities.*

*More private buildings should be built in Jane and Finch, and there should be more job opportunities. So the people can become more independent and start to live in nice, tall, private buildings rather than living in the government housing and living on welfare.*

*Lets make a more integrated community.*

*We need to advocate governments and funders to invest in our communities. They should invest in more accessible activities.*

*“Different levels of government. Signatures, then phone calls. Their emails should be over-flooded with us complaining.”*

*“Children don’t discriminate like people do. Learn from kids. Learn to live together in harmony. Just like kids, people all around the world should be able to welcome anyone to be a ‘part of their fun’.”*

*“Because of my low income it’s important and vital to find inexpensive ways to entertain our children. We need to advocate governments and funders to invest in our communities. They should invest in more accessible activities.”*

*“I would like to see more intergenerational programs... I believe our seniors and adults and our elders have a lot to offer and a lot to teach our youth and I think they’re willing and they’re out there but there’s again there’s no programs that or not enough programs that offer that or they offer it with such rigid things that don’t fit into people’s schedule and things like that so it’s unrealistic to happen.”*

*“You need the person to finish the job but if your boss isn’t giving you the paint, that part of the building will never look fixed, you know (in reference to TCHC buildings).”*

*“A skills based school and stuff like that. This is perfect for those students to gain those skills and, you know, be in the apprenticeship program and fix their own community.”*



