

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY:

COMMUNITY BELONGING IN MISSISSAUGA



A Report from Vital Conversation
December 1, 2017

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Overview of the Community Foundation of Mississauga

The Community Foundation of Mississauga is part of one of the fastest growing charitable movements in Canada. The Foundation is a registered charitable public foundation that was launched in spring 2001. Since that time, it has grown rapidly and has \$21 million in endowed assets and cumulative grants of over \$10 million. Community foundations across Canada share three fundamental roles:

One: endowment building/personalized service. The Foundation builds endowed and other funds to provide lasting support for local priorities. It makes giving easy and effective, accepting a wide variety of gifts and providing donors with a number of charitable options. Donors can contribute cash, stocks, property and other assets. Donors may establish a fund in their name or in the name of a loved one. In most cases, a gift qualifies for maximum tax advantage under federal law.

Two: local grant making expertise. The Foundation's staff and volunteers have an in-depth understanding of the issues, opportunities, and resources that shape our community. It evaluates all aspects of community well-being – including social services, education, the environment, health care, youth, seniors and the arts and makes grants to support the broadest range of community needs. It can help donors learn more about local organizations and programs that make a difference in areas they care about most.

Three: community leadership. Because community foundations support all kinds of charities. It is well positioned to bring people and organizations together, convening diverse voices to address local issues and opportunities. The Foundation's business is building community.

Capturing Community Knowledge

Bridging the needs of the community with philanthropy is at the heart of the Community Foundation of Mississauga. Part of that means building a base of knowledge about the issues affecting the community, bringing together the people who live and work in the city to hear what they have to say, connecting organizations serving the community, sharing information, identifying gaps and opportunities and considering innovative ideas that can be

part of the solution to addressing community needs. Collaborating is one of the ways a community foundation stays connected to the purpose we serve. It helps keep vital knowledge and communication flowing.

Community Foundation of Mississauga Report from the Vital Conversation Community Belonging in Mississauga

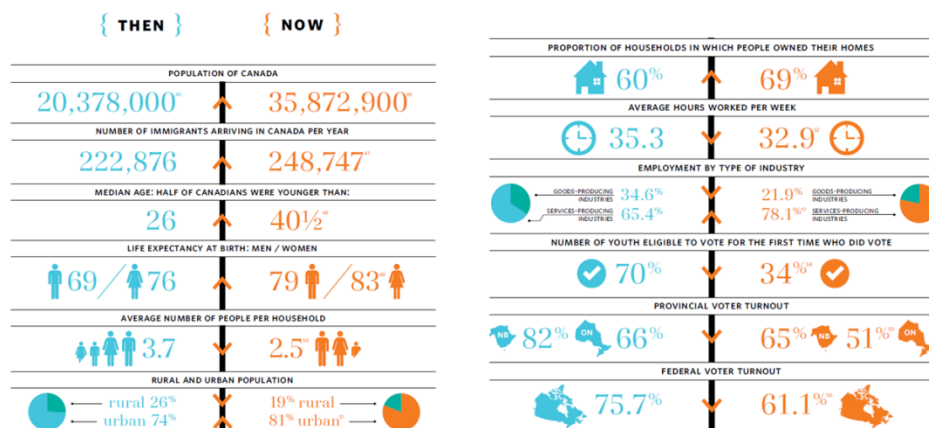
Highlights of the Presentations

The presentations at the beginning of the day provided some great insights and information to the group. The group was joined by Cindy Lindsay of Community Foundation of Canada; Gurpreet Malhotra from Indus Community Services; Shari Lynn Ladanchuk from Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Peel, and Royale Godfrey who works with the Bank of Montreal, but also serves on the Board with Peel Children's Aid Society.

Cindy Lindsay began her presentation by sharing how Community Foundation of Canada had learned to define belonging while undertaking a three-year study to understand community belonging across the country. Community Foundation of Canada has come to define belonging as simply being a part of the collective "we". However, they suggest that being a part of this is a two-way street: It is about how much we believe we fit in a place or group and it is also about how much that place or group welcomes and includes us.

Next the group was treated to an understanding of a significantly changed Canada since 1967. The image below shows some of the data about how much Canada has changed.

A CHANGING CANADA SINCE 1967



It was also noted that Mississauga is not different than the rest of Canada and is actually still changing at a dramatic pace. Over 50% of residents in Mississauga were born somewhere else. Mississauga has the highest proportion of immigrants in Canada and just more than 20% of all residents are living with low income.

These low income numbers and the shrinking of Mississauga's middle class are among the most concerning issues for Mississauga residents. Since 1970 in Peel Region, including Mississauga, we have seen our middle class deteriorate at alarming rates. In the last 50 years, in the region, the percent share of low and very low-income neighbourhoods has increased by 52% while middle income neighbourhoods have decreased by 41%. This disparity between the rich and the poor creates an issue related to belonging. As the gaps between the ways people live within communities grow people become increasingly isolated believing they understand less about their neighbours due to economic status. This lack of a desire to know your neighbour and know your community results in a lack of participation in the community and city.

Community Foundation of Canada also learned over their three-year study that social participation and belonging influence each other. The more we get involved in the community, the more we feel like we belong. The stronger the sense of belonging, the more willing we are to volunteer and contribute to the community because we feel responsible for its well-being. The image bellows shows how Canadians engage with their communities and how important they feel that engagement is.



The data and narratives show while many of us in Canada feel a strong connection to our communities and country, significant barriers to belonging exist for many groups, most notably for Indigenous people, newcomers, racialized groups and women. Communities need to do more to ensure that everyone feels like they belong.

Gurpreet Malhotra, who works incredibly close to newcomers in Mississauga, shared perspectives on the opportunities and challenges that diversity presents to belonging. With Mississauga being one of the most diverse cities in the country, there are a lot of challenges faced when dealing with belonging. A newcomer for instance experiences the city in a much different way than someone who has been here for years. Even the most welcoming neighbourhoods and shared spaces can be daunting to someone who has not experienced life in this city. This creates problems in utilization of shared spaces, public institutions and public policy. It becomes a challenge to make them welcoming and structured for people who need to learn to navigate them while making them as un-intrusive as possible to people who already feel comfortable within them. The diversity can even impact the way neighbours live around one another creating widening gaps between them because of a lack of cultural understanding.

Despite this, the diversity brought into our city brings a wealth of opportunities to create a more inclusive community. For instance, diversity allows for vibrancy and flare in our arts and culture sectors. Artistic newcomers provide something different to Mississauga's culture that brings people out into shared spaces and places to experience new things.

Gurpreet also notes that newcomers to Canada are among those who feel like they belong here the most. This is likely because they are the ones who have most recently gone through citizenship tests and the learning of our national anthem and language classes. All these things serve to bring newcomers closer to Canada. Even closer than some of us who have lived here for generations. This also suggests that perhaps a deeper focus on civic engagement in our education system would create a more socially inclusive place.

Diversity is also an opportunity for diverse interpretation, this diverse interpretation coupled with a modern move to inclusivity results in some amazing things, both positive and negative. Diverse interpretations of experience and the respect of those interpretations in recent history has led to some seismic shifts in the way historical figures and programs are perceived. In Toronto having police officers in schools was once considered a positive on all fronts. Diverse interpretations of this experience from the minority communities in Toronto has shed light on how this very program can be a barrier to social inclusion as students may feel threatened by the presence of a police officer and not participate. Without diversity and the respect for the opinion of that diversity there would not have been a great conversation around whether the community thought it was appropriate for police officers to be policing in schools.

Royale Godfrey from Peel Children's Aid Society spoke to the group about her personal journey to belong in Mississauga. Royale told her story about growing up in foster care and group homes as a

ward of the state. She recounted the challenges of her youth which centered on a lack of a sense of belonging. Royale said that missing the close family unit that most kids have left her without a connection to the city she was in and even further without a connection to who she was. In group homes she dealt with this by acting out and often getting into trouble. Royale's big change came when she met a great mentor who began to show her how to navigate the complex system she was a part of. Royale recounts that as this began to happen she began to see the shortfall of the group home system she was living in. It lacked any continuity or connection to the community.

Royale's presentation shed light on the fact that it really does take a village to raise children. It's not just about stability or instability in the family unit, but also about how the community receives the youth and the youth engage with that community. As Royale began to engage with different government, and charitable services her life began to change. She found her way through university and into a great professional career all the while staying connected to her group home roots with Peel Children's Aid. Now Royale works with the Board of Directors at Peel Children's Aid and helps them develop programs and services that connect youth to the communities in which they live.

Shari Lynn Ladanchuk shared perspectives on mentoring based on her experiences with Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Peel. She was also able to share some insights on program creation and development for charities to ensure social inclusion. Shari Lynn echoed much of what Royale was saying when discussing the power of mentor relationships. The key behind the idea of mentorship is to create a safe place, for those who need it, to learn about how to be successful at anything. This, at its roots, is about establishing belonging. Being able to see how someone successfully navigated a complex system before you are one of the most important ways for people to be able to see themselves navigating that system. Mentoring also takes individuals out of their usual circles and engagements and shows them that the community around them is enabling and not a road block. This is because when someone outside of your traditional family or friend's unit takes an interest in you, you feel like you belong.

With regards to charitable programming, Shari said that it is very important not to get tied to specific outcomes and processes to achieve these outcomes. When a charity creates a program that maintains a rigid structure and process it becomes hard for that program to adapt to be inclusive of the diverse population in Mississauga. Charities must be able to create programs that utilize a softer structure and allow for diverse opinions and perspectives to manipulate and shape the program according to the participants needs. Shari also suggests that rigidity in getting to specific outcomes creates opportunity for exclusion. Charities become so concerned with creating the right outcomes that they forget that success is different for everyone. This is best exemplified through English language classes for newcomers. While the program itself is created with some rigidity around proficiency and outcome, graduation rates of English language learner courses for newcomers mean very little. This is because each person who passes through the program sees their success as different. For instance, one individual may think that success for them is learning to speak English as well as they can. These individuals will typically stay in a language program as long as they can or until they graduate from it. However, many newcomers see success in learning the language as defined by their ability to get a job in Canada. Often newcomers will stop attending their language classes once they have obtained work. This

does not mean that they were less successful than those who graduated the program, in fact, they were just as successful. Ensuring that program offerings at charitable and social institutions are nimble and designed to produce the outcomes that attendees need is crucial to ensuring they are inclusive of all and foster a sense of belonging.

Highlights from Table Conversations

Those in attendance at the Vital Conversation on December 1st were asked 3 questions about Community Belonging:

- Why is community belonging important in the work you do?
- What is working well in Mississauga with regards to community belonging?
- What gets in the way of community belonging in Mississauga?

Below are the highlights of how these topics were covered by the smaller groups

Why is Community Belonging Important in the Work That You do?

Despite the room being filled with people who work at different places and in different sectors there were some overarching themes that all of the groups discussed at their tables. These themes seem to play a role across all sectors that were involved in the conversation.

Youth Engagement

Youth engagement or fostering a strong sense of community belonging among our youth in Mississauga was considered an important aspect of community work across all sectors. Even those organizations working with seniors and older adults noted the importance of having a youth population that was eager and engaged with the city. The reasons for this are plentiful.

First and most importantly, when youth feel like they belong in a community they are more likely to be successful in that community. That means that achievement gaps close, graduation rates increase and students feel safer in schools and more connected to the curriculum they are learning. Further to this a youth population that is engaged and feels like it belongs also results in lower rates of criminal activity and mischief among young people.

Secondly, when youth belong they are better able to connect to their community, neighbours and family units. This increases their involvement in these things. Youth who feel like they belong in their community are more likely to volunteer, fundraise for charitable activities and be involved in organized sport and recreation.

Lastly, it was noted that a youth population that feels like it belongs also feels safe to share its opinions and be involved in civic duties. This means that an engaged youth population is one of the best ways to ensure that feelings of community belonging are high in future generations and increases the numbers of those taking part in civic duties like municipal, provincial and federal elections. Interestingly

enough, in the United States, a recent school shooting in Florida has shown how a group of youth who feel like they belong can start a national conversation about policy change.

Diversity

Mississauga's diversity was the second overarching theme in conversations around the importance of community belonging. Mississauga is one of the most diverse cities in Canada with over 50% of our population identifying as a visible minority or immigrant. Even further Mississauga has welcomed over 53,000 newcomers in the last 5 years. The diversity in Mississauga is not just about visible minorities and newcomers. In fact, Mississauga's population is 51% female and 49% male, Mississauga is home to a large LGBTQ population and also has a large population of individuals who require differing degrees of accessibility services.

With diversity like this in our population, it is no wonder that everyone in the room believed that community belonging work was important because of Mississauga's diversity.

For newcomers and visible minorities, fostering a sense of belonging ensures that these communities feel like they are a part of the fabric that makes Mississauga the city it is. It is important that our public places, public events and public communications are diverse enough for people to see themselves as included. This means naming parks and places after minority or immigrant people of importance, ensuring Celebration Square events are representative of the diverse cultures in our city and releasing important communications in a variety of languages and formats. These things along with many, many more ideas can help to diversify Mississauga's history and ensure that people can see themselves as represented within the community they live.

Mississauga, like any other community, is home to a number of women who may be marginalized or abused. Ensuring that a strong sense of community belonging is fostered in these women by providing safe spaces that are culturally appropriate is critical to their participation and success.

Connecting our community to those who have accessibility issues and those who may be part of a smaller community than the main stream is extremely important to ensuring the long-term viability of our communities. When we ensure that all people who live in Mississauga have equitable access to the physical spaces and resources, we ensure long term engagement and prosperity. It is of the utmost importance that even those who are in the smallest minorities in our population feel strongly that they belong.

What is Working Well to Foster Strong Feelings of Belonging in Mississauga?

Once again, in discussion of this question, across our room of diverse participants there were central themes that came through in every conversation.

People Power

In every conversation there was an overwhelming belief that Mississauga's best asset when it comes to creating a sense of belonging was the people who are working to achieve results. Across the board the groups relayed that those working to create social inclusion in our city are doing great work. Organizations and individuals in Mississauga are collaborating and designing programs that ensure equal access. There are limitations as to what can be done based on funding and other resources, but on all accounts the passion of the people was considered something that was working very well.

Public Policy

Interestingly enough, public policy is something that showed up equally in the conversations about what is working well and what could be done better to foster a stronger sense of community belonging. Without a doubt, public policy plays a significant role in how community belonging is perceived.

Public policy in Mississauga is something that makes those working with it stop and think about the inclusivity of a project or program. Policy is the driving force behind how a lot of programs and projects are created in the educational sector. It is also at the centre of most community development projects as well.

In the arts and culture sector, public policy has played a key role in the city's ability to grow and develop audience and artists collectively. Since 2008, Mississauga's administration has been significantly increasing the available funding and resources for arts and culture programming within the city. This has resulted in more public art, better utilization of our museums, galleries and theatres. It has also resulted in diverse populations having the venues and resources needed to share their creative abilities with the population. Further, by committing to develop better public policy with regards to arts and culture, the city has enabled arts organizations and artists to truly build relationships and allegiance with the municipal government.

Public policy and service is also widely viewed by the public through the correspondence of the city through pamphlets, online resources and other documentation. In Mississauga, it is worth noting that all documents are released in at least 2 languages – English and French, but increasingly official city correspondence is being made available in the languages that the majority of our population speak. This includes Mandarin, Urdu, Punjabi and Tagalog.

What Gets in the Way of Community Belonging in Mississauga?

Again, in the discussion of this question there were many common themes and responses from the diverse group. Many of those in the room agreed on a few aspects of Mississauga that were detrimental to creating a sense of belonging.

Resources

The first and most prominent point in the conversation around what gets in the way of creating an engaging community that includes everyone is a lack of resources to address the problem.

The first issue that was mentioned in almost every group conversation was funder restrictions. The conversations noted that funding coming from either the public or private sectors, including government funding, came along with too many restrictions and these restrictions make creating nimble programs that can be customized for inclusivity harder to create. This is not to say that funding cannot be sent to charities earmarked for specific outcomes or goals, but it should not be so tightly restricted to achieve these things that it keeps the organizations running the program from being able to think outside of the box in order to deliver results. For instance, funding a program to bring youth out to a public space and engage with the arts may receive funding to develop and deliver the program, but there may be restrictions on the amount of funding that can be used to market the program. This creates problems in releasing engaging marketing materials in multiple languages or at all. Being unable to market a program or project to the people whom you want to engage makes it extremely challenging to create a successful program.

On the topic of donor restrictions, the issue of education on the topic of community belonging was raised. It was felt around the room that perhaps more had to be done to educate the general public on the importance of things like belonging, engagement and inclusion. The Healthy City Stewardship Centre echoed these sentiments by mentioning the importance of educating the general public on the connections between belonging and inclusion and better public health outcomes.

The conversation around resources at many tables also led to a discussion about the timelines it takes to create an impact or change in the way people feel about their own community engagement. Many of the charities in the room mentioned that the one-year time restrictions on funding make it a challenge to really impact things like community belonging and inclusion. This problem becomes exasperated when an organization is unable to receive the funding for a program it has received the funding for in the past. This creates budgetary deficits for charities and forces them to make tough decisions around which programs and projects will need to be cut. Having sustainable funding sources for these things is important due to the long-term nature of the kinds of projects and programs needed to impact feelings of community belonging.

Shared Spaces

The next theme which was raised within many of the group discussions was a lack of diversity in our shared spaces and places. While Mississauga does a fantastic job of having public spaces like parks, libraries, community centres, and other spaces we do not do a good job of ensuring diversity in use and culture of them. It was noted at one of our tables that Mississauga is one of the most diverse communities in Canada, but none of our parks or public places are named after people or things that represent that diversity. Of the 480 parks in Mississauga only a few come to mind as being named in recognition of Mississauga's diversity. This problem is also true when one considers the names of

community and recreation centres in Mississauga. While most are named after the neighbourhoods they are located in, all lack representation of the diverse populations that live around them.

The city does a good job of ensuring equitable access to all of our community centres and public spaces with low costs to rent out space and policies that allow diverse communities to use them in any way that is appropriate, however there is a lack of diversity in the kinds of things that are institutionalized inside and around our community centres. For instance, there are hundreds of baseball diamonds and soccer pitches in Mississauga, but only 3 designated cricket pitches.

Mississauga is also home to three museums: the Bradley Museum, Benares Historic House and Leslie Log House. All three of these museums celebrate the heritage of pilgrims and settlers in Mississauga during pre-confederacy and confederation, but there are no official spaces dedicated to capturing the important contributions of immigrants to Mississauga and the role they played in making this city what it is today. Credit should be given to those who work within all of Mississauga's public spaces to find inclusive ways to engage Mississauga's diverse populations. However, this is not enough to ensure true equity and diversity in our public spaces.

Local Media

The next thing highlighted in the discussion around hindrances to improving feelings of community belonging in Mississauga was a conversation about media. It was noted very early in our day that this kind of conversation would have brought out news crews to cover it in Toronto, but with a lack of media in Mississauga there was no one to cover the day's events and share the story of the day. In the past Mississauga was served by Cable Channel 10 which provided local context news and programming. This station was closed down on October 3, 2017 and was replaced by a free preview channel which shows no local content at all. This gap in media is made even worse by the overwhelming shadow Toronto places on our local newsprint coverage. The Mississauga News is a fantastic local paper which tells the stories that people in Mississauga want to hear, but often times the biggest stories which people are concerned with come from Toronto or have a larger than local scope. This has pushed the important local news out of the Mississauga News and onto the web. Further to this, there are no other significant media outlets in this city. This is not just a problem when it comes to sharing the local news or successes of local businesses and charities, it is also a problem with representation.

Community belonging, as has been noted throughout this report, is about people seeing themselves in their own community and connecting to the people, places and things available to them. The lack of media focus in Mississauga plays a role in disconnectedness to this city because people do not know what resources are available to them here or see themselves in the stories of this community. If our media outlets in Mississauga are focusing the story telling on Toronto and other cities around the GTA, the community in Mississauga begins to identify with those stories and those communities and feel less connected to the stories of their own communities and neighborhoods. This idea is felt most prominently in Mississauga's arts sector. Artists and audiences are so beckoned by the bright lights of Toronto and the media coverage of the big city that they connect there, reducing their feelings of connectedness and belonging to the city they actually call home.

Opportunities for Change

As always in Mississauga, the outlook is great for addressing issues of community belonging. The city is well positioned as it grows to address some of the issues that challenge citizens feelings of connectedness to their community.

It is important to remember the two – way nature of community belonging in order to really capitalize on the opportunities we have in front of us. While there is more that can be done from the perspective of ensuring that we as leaders in Mississauga are sending signals of acceptance and inclusion, there is just as much work to be done on the other side of the equation. Community members and citizens have to become aware of the importance of connecting with their community and the importance of stepping outside of their comfort zones or traditional groups to gain new experiences and engage with the broader community. We hear it said all the time that people don't know their neighbours anymore. This lack of interconnectedness within our communities is contributing to the problem of isolation. So, we should take it upon ourselves to get to know our community – if your neighbour is elderly or unable to shovel their own driveway, help them out by doing it for them. Instead of running on the treadmill at a gym or in a community centre, join or create a running group and get out into the great parks and trails we have in Mississauga. Creating these small connections between one another creates a sense of belonging and community pride. It ensures that communities and neighbours can become each other's advocates and it ensures that we always have a safe space to go when we are isolated or in trouble.

Despite what can be perceived as a lack of media in Canada's sixth largest city, there is still opportunity for Mississauga to be able to tell its story, share its success and allow people to feel engaged and included in the city they live in. It is true that Toronto often overshadows the stories of Mississauga and that this causes people in Mississauga to connect more to the city of Toronto than Mississauga. However, we have some great media outlets in Mississauga that are working hard to fill the gaps left by The Mississauga News and Cable 10. Publications like "InSauga" are making Mississauga the focal point of their publication and are sharing the stories of small businesses and grass roots initiatives. Peel Region's "Tough Times" newspaper is not widely available but does a great job of discussing a lot of the social and political issues around the region, including Mississauga. It is important that we do not ignore these local publications and in fact, enhance their voice. Perhaps this is the solution to developing some strong local media in Mississauga.

In the bigger picture, Mississauga is poised to grow even more into the future and with that comes even more diversity and change. This growth is also creating development and growth in our infrastructure with major projects that have the opportunity to show how inclusive Mississauga wants to be. For instance, the Light Rail Transit project planned along the Hurontario corridor in Mississauga presents a unique opportunity to ensure that Mississauga celebrates its diversity in the municipal assets that will be created as a result of the development. Perhaps transit stations could become home to interesting and unique ways that Mississauga can celebrate its diversity.

The growing arts and culture divisions in Mississauga could play a significant role in brightening up our neighbourhoods and celebrating our diversity. In fact, the arts organizations in Mississauga are already leading the way in this kind of work by providing safe spaces for artists to show their work and celebrating the art of newcomers to Canada and Mississauga on their walls. Much credit must be given to the Art Gallery of Mississauga in this regard, their work with the LGBTQ community in Mississauga has provided a safe space for often marginalized voices to share their perspectives with the broader community.

While there is still much more work to do, the Community Foundation of Mississauga and all those who attended this session on community belonging believe that we can create the kind of change needed to have a positive impact on belonging and inclusion in Mississauga. In fact, the conversation we held has led to several groups coming together to tackle projects which will positively benefit the community and city. Once again proving that the biggest strength Mississauga has is the people who live, work and play here.

Sharing Knowledge and Expertise

Our forum guests represented the diversity of Mississauga organizations who are engaged with issues of community belonging and inclusion. These organizations included:

- Afghan Women's Organization
- Armagh
- Art Gallery of Mississauga
- Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Peel
- Building Up Our Neighbourhoods
- City of Mississauga
- Community Foundations Canada
- COSTI
- Deen Support Services
- EcoSource
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Halton Peel
- Erin Mills Youth Centre
- Family Education Centre
- First Book Canada
- Habitat For Humanity Halton/Mississauga
- Indus Community Services
- John Howard Society of Peel
- Living Arts Centre
- MIAG Centre for Diverse Women and Families
- Mississauga Arts Council
- Mississauga Library
- MNS-MCBP Network

- Monstrarity
- Options Mississauga
- Our Place Peel
- Peel Catholic District School Board
- Peel Children's Aid Society
- Peel District School Board
- Peel HIV/AIDS Network
- Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Peel Regional Police
- Region of Peel
- Regional Diversity Roundtable
- Safe City Mississauga
- Sawitiri Theatre Group
- Services and Housing in the Province
- Support and Housing Halton
- The Centre for Education and Training
- The Compass
- The Dam
- The Mississauga Food Bank
- Trillium Health Partners
- University of Toronto at Mississauga
- Victim Services of Peel
- Visual Arts Mississauga
- Vital Centre
- Volunteer MBC

