EVERY ONE EVERY DAY:
TORONTO
Our Neighbourhood Project

Pilot Phase Report
March 2020-March 2021
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In January 2020, the Centre for Social Innovation Institute (CSII) began its journey with Participatory Canada, a new initiative created to adapt and prototype the Participatory City approach in Canada. Toronto, selected along with Montreal and Halifax, was one of three cities to explore new ways of building community infrastructure and strengthening neighbourhood ecosystems.

Calling our undertaking, “Every One Every Day: Toronto (EOED:TO)”, this project falls within CSII’s Community Wealth building work. It is part of a larger City of Toronto-lead strategy CSI is participating in, designed to identify opportunities for building and strengthening community infrastructure in Regent Park, and ultimately in communities across Toronto.

The purpose of the EOED:TO pilot project was to:

- test the feasibility and appetite for a larger-scale participatory project design - such as a storefront and maker space, in the Regent Park community;
- learn how to adapt the Participatory City, UK, model to the local Regent Park community context; and
- share insights about adapting the UK model to the Canadian context, by taking part in a community of practice between the Canadian Participatory City pilot project hosts from Toronto, Montreal and Halifax.

This report describes the EOED:TO Our Neighbourhood Project - the wins, the challenges, the learnings, and next steps.
Our Neighbourhood...

Toronto’s increasing income inequality is being exacerbated by the financialization of housing, precarious work, a shifting economy and underfunded social programs and services. These socio-economic inequalities are starkly evident in the social housing neighbourhood of Regent Park.

Regent Park (RP) is approximately halfway through a 20 year revitalization project, initiated by Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), the largest social housing provider in Canada. The redevelopment has transitioned the neighbourhood from low income into mixed-income strata, shifting the social and economic fabric of the community and surfacing challenges around the integration of residents who live in subsidized versus market value housing. Despite some economic advances for low and middle income earners in the RP, there are increasing social tensions, and continued barriers to economic mobility. These challenges have been exacerbated by the changing reality brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our Timeline

- **Jan 16 2020**
  CSI accepted as one of the Canadian Participatory Cities Pilot Cities
- **March 1 2020**
  Study trip to London cancelled due to Covid
- **May 6**
  Commence Co-design Process
- **May 20**
  Confirmed Every One Every Day: Toronto as the local brand identity
- **Aug 10**
  Begin Every One Every Day Kit design
- **Aug 24**
  Our Neighbourhood Project created
- **Sept 15**
  Program Newspaper developed
- **Oct 5**
  Every One Every Day: TO Our Neighbourhood Project Phase 1 Launch
  First 5 registrations
- **Oct 6**
  18 registrants
- **Oct 20**
  Booklet Distribution
- **Oct 20 - 31**
  20 new registrations
- **Nov 3**
  First Workshops launched
- **Nov 9**
  8 workshops hosted in ONE WEEK!
- **Dec 10**
  Final Phase 1 workshop
- **Feb 1**
  Launch of Our Neighbourhood Project Phase 2: Starter kits
Located in Toronto’s downtown easterly edge, Regent Park comprises 70 acres of mostly housing - high rise mixed strata in the new development, and low rise social housing in the old areas. There is a large park in the centre of the footprint, a large athletic ground, an ice rink, a swimming pool, and a community centre. There is one junior school in the footprint, multiple service agencies, and a handful of commercial units including a grocery store.

CSI has had a “home” in Regent Park for the last 8 year, operating a launch pad, community hub and coworking space for social mission driven businesses. More recently, we have partnered with the community to build social capital and community wealth infrastructure as an active contributor to the City of Toronto’s Social Development Plan.

CSI is centrally located in the community, in an accessible shared community space called the Daniels Spectrum Building. The opportunity to pilot Every One Every Day: Toronto in Regent Park was a natural fit given our history, relationships, and understanding of the community.

“ I didn’t know when I moved to Regent Park that I would FALL IN LOVE with this community. It’s diverse, sometimes disparate, it’s broad in its socio-economic and cultural representation - AND it is a vital and INTENTIONAL community. Working, living and volunteering in RP has allowed me to meet some of the most amazing human beings - I would LOVE to be a part of a broader initiative which would support, scaffold and immerse me further into a place I already have so much heart investment in.”

- EOED Participant
Our Neighbourhood Project

The Our Neighbourhood Project was the Covid pivot-iteration of the Every One Every Day: Toronto Participatory Cities model. The intention was to introduce and build inclusive participation by providing many different entry points for residents to participate, and opportunities to build the social ecosystem. In order to facilitate this, we designed a series of kits, to be introduced in 2 phases, to help people take action on projects at home and in their community.

Here’s how the project workshops and kits were described to the community in the Project booklet:

**Phase 1**

Our Neighbourhood Workshops - perfect for individuals or single households, for folks who want to start small and still contribute to their neighbourhood. These workshops will give you everything you need to complete a fun project at home with workshops held online or in-person in the neighbourhood.

In Phase 1 (October - December 2020), we ran project workshops based on 6 themes over the span of 6 weeks. The workshops were titled as neighbourhood actions: Our Neighbourhood plus a verb to help the residents of Regent Park see themselves in the participatory process of these workshops and kits.

1. **Our Neighbourhood Paints:**
   - 3 weeks of art workshops online.
   - Each participant produced a hexagonal tile that can be added to a community mural. Partnership with Art Heart, a local art agency.

2. **Our Neighbourhood Grows:**
   - Participants learned the basics of hydroponic food growing right at home. Partnership with Justvertical, local green tech social enterprise.

3. **Our Neighbourhood Explores:**
   - A guided deep dive into thoughts feeling and values around community, social enterprise and participatory action. In partnership with WOSEN - the Women of Ontario Social Entrepreneurship Network.

4. **Our Neighbourhood Cooks:**
   - Neighbours participated in 4 separate batch cooking sessions: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, and Fun snacks. In Partnership with Paintbox Bistro, a local employment social enterprise.

5. **Our Neighbourhood Plants:**
   - A community tree planting project, raising indigenous species from seed to tree. With guided local tree walks to identify local species. In partnership with Green Thumbs Growing Kids, a local garden education organization.

6. **Our Neighbourhood Learns:**
   - Peer to peer skills and hobbies sessions, taught by local residents.

**Phase 2**

Our Neighbourhood Project Starter Kits - there are 12 starter kits to choose from, so you can start working on projects with your neighbours for your community! Or if you want to team up with your colleagues, neighbours or classmates...

The workshops were well received by the community, with over 100 participants taking part in 30 workshop sessions in 6 weeks.
Our Neighbourhood Grows and Our Neighbourhood Paints had the highest number of participants. Our Neighbourhood Explores fostered some deep rich connection between participants. Our Neighbourhood Plants really helped people to feel connected to their community - and was the only workshop we were able to do live, given the pandemic.

“\This is the first thing I have ever planted! I’m so excited to nurture it, and watch it grow, so I can give it back to the community. I learned so much walking around the park and getting to know the species and history of the trees. I want to be part of that. Like a legacy. It feels good to know I am contributing”

- Our Neighbourhood Plants participant

We were surprised by the low turnout for Our Neighbourhood Cooks, and Our Neighbourhood Learns, as we thought that these subject areas would be of interest to the community, and hypothesized that the peer-to-peer nature would draw more people out.

Phase two had 12 project starter kits planned:

1. **Our Neighbourhood Celebrates**
   a winter lobby party

2. **Our Neighbourhood Feasts**
   a community potluck

3. **Our Neighbourhood Pollinates**
   build beehives and plant pollinator gardens

4. **Our Neighbourhood Plays**
   open access community activity boxes

5. **Our Neighbourhood Reads**
   children’s stories and activity programming

6. **Our Neighbourhood Blooms**
   beautifying our community with bulbs and blooms

7. **Our Neighbourhood Composts**
   reducing waste, and keeping our soil healthy

8. **Our Neighbourhood Recycles**
   find ways to reuse our community plastic waste

9. **Our Neighbourhood Shares**
   swap things with your neighbours, to reduce waste, and get the things you need

10. **Our Neighbourhood Swaps**
    organize a cloth swap. It’s fun, creative and money saving

11. **Our Neighbourhood Stories**
    collect and share stories of our vibrant neighbourhood

12. **Our Neighbourhood Farms**
    chickens! Right here in Regent Park
Given that the planning process happened in August 2020, we had optimistically predicted that we would be in a position to welcome the community back into spaces by winter 2021, but by January, we had to once again adapt the program.

The team went through a process of adaptation and redesign of the project starter kits. A decision was made to postpone a number of the project starter kits in the interest of preserving the magic and excitement of roll out until a time that it was safe to gather, and carry out the kits as intended.

Wanting to ensure that there were still options for residents to continue to engage in the EOED:TO pilot, we adapted 4 project starter kits to be run safely with persistent Covid protocols. In February 2021 we launched 4 project starter kits that we were comfortable adapting with proper safety precautions: Our Neighbourhood Pollinates, Our Neighbourhood Blooms, Our Neighbourhood Stories, and our Neighbourhood Reads.

We have more than 30 residents engaged in these project starter kits, and the groups have decided to amalgamate to create more comprehensive projects: Our Neighbourhood Blooms and Butterflies including both blooming and pollinator gardens, and Our Neighbourhood Stories will both gather the stories of local residents, and histories of Regent Park, and showcase Canadian authors in the neighbourhood.

### By the numbers

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Booklets distributed</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total registrants</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Kit offerings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop offerings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop sessions</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Project Starter Kits (offered)</td>
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</table>
Our Theory of Change

Ultimate Goal

A joyful, connected community whose members are thriving as a result of benefiting from the social, political and economic aspects of the community. The creation of a participatory ecosystem supports this goal by enhancing RP residents’ autonomy, agency and social capital.

Desired Outcomes

To test the efficacy and effect of participatory principals in the neighbourhood using the PC model

To get a baseline understanding of the Regent Park community

Assumptions

Residents support this goal and outcomes

The grassroots social bonds we’re cultivating / enhancing will be long lasting and adapt to various other kinds of challenges

We are allowing the “community” to choose what they want to change.

Activities

Our Neighbourhood kits and workshops that foster social capital

Develop and implement developmental evaluation to prompt continual dialogue, reflexivity, learning and responsiveness to community needs

Asset mapping and story mapping on Esri to present rich data in a visually compelling way that becomes a living community owned asset and project legacy

PAR with residents to survey broader community that builds research capacity and grounds research in community wisdom

Deliverables

Our Neighbourhood kits and work shops. Marketing materials, website, and evaluative tools for capturing narratives, feedback and participatory data.

DE Framework and guidebook containing instruments. Information resources. Data feeds into strategy for moving beyond prototype.

Asset and story map on Esri. Community license. Training for community practitioner

Survey and analysis. Data feeds into map.
## Our Program Participation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>How Many sessions offered</th>
<th>How Many cohorts</th>
<th>How Many participants (total)</th>
<th>How Many Females</th>
<th>How Many Males</th>
<th># of Adults</th>
<th># of children</th>
<th># of seniors</th>
<th># of Market Value residents</th>
<th># of TCHC residents</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Our neighbourhood Paints</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Neighbourhood Reads</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td><strong>19</strong></td>
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<td><strong>75</strong></td>
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### Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How Many sessions offered</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Many cohorts</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Many participants (total)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>How Many Females</td>
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<tr>
<td>How Many Males</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Adults</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of children</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td># of seniors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Market Value residents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of TCHC residents</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Our Participants

With 142 residents signing up for the project, and over 100 people engaging in workshops and projects, we believe this was a successful piloting of the Every One Every Day: Toronto Our Neighbourhood project.

The general age of participants was 25-45 - especially young professionals, with a small group of 60+ from one of the retirement residents in the community. There were only 3 children, from one family, that all signed up to do Our Neighbourhood Paints together.

There were more “Market” residents (70%) enrolled in the program, than TCHC residents (30%), which was surprising, as generally for neighbourhood initiatives there is a higher percentage of TCHC residents. Through the registration process, many of the market value residents confessed to feeling cut off from their neighbourhood, and a desire to be more engaged and connected. Many pointed to Covid as a reason for wanting to invest the time in building neighbourhood relationships.
Our Neighbourhood says...

Why I signed up...

“ I was feeling blue and thought it would help me mentally to get involved in something.”

“ I’d like to get to know folks in the neighbourhood and contribute to a community feeling here! I’ve just moved into the neighborhood myself.”

“ I think this is a great way to meet with neighbours in a safe setting. I don’t have to feel pressured because of finances to register in my own community (yay for free programs) and I feel having a variety of interesting topics helps me find forms of connecting with individuals through those similar topics. It’s also super relevant to exploring my interests and hobbies at my own leisurely pace. I can balance my busy schedule to still get involved with topics I enjoy learning more about.”

“ As a youth who has grown up in the Regent Park community, seeing this opportunity to make positive changes to the community is something I would really like to do.”

“ I am very keen to be active in Regent Park and to meet my neighbours. I love the idea of these projects.”

Why is this important to me...

“ I’m new to the city, but the pandemic has made me realise how important local communities are - and how their importance will only continue to grow. Strengthening those bonds, especially in Regent Park where there is a mix of community housing and new build condos feels important to continue to bring people together and erase any divisions.”
Our Successes

Over the pilot phase year, the EOED: TO team focused on building the success of the Our Neighbourhood project, and embedding participatory practice and principles into the project design for the Regent Park Community. The team has actively:

» developed and delivered activity kits and workshops;
» completed community-based research with Regent Park community members to better understand how these activities might respond to and leverage their specific needs and strengths;
» evaluated project processes; and
» begun the process of mapping community assets and developing a neighbourhood tool to help the community organize their data (land use, services offered, recreational activities, local points of interest, sites of EOED:TO projects like pollinator gardens).

Regent Park is a rich community with multiple service agencies, and a strong network of community serving grassroots groups. Integrating the current local ecosystem into the pilot was an important part of the local adaptation process. We developed partnerships with Green Thumbs Growing Kids, Art Heart, the Women of Ontario Social Entrepreneurship Network (WOSEN), the Regent Park Catering Collective, and Paintbox Bistro. There was a lot of energy behind doing something different, coordinated and collaborative, at a neighbourhood level. The support and engagement from local partners points to evidence that this kind of platform and programming is a welcome shift to a new way of doing things, and that it can be integrated in the local context.
Feedback from participants

“I really had a wonderful time through the course of the project and am looking forward to continuing this journey with the bigger workshops we have starting in 2021. This was a difficult year for a lot of us, and this project really helped us connect and safely interact with each other in-person whenever possible.”

“I truly enjoyed these workshops! The instructor was knowledgeable and talented and took the time to explain, encouraging each of us and helping when we asked. It was a nice break from feeling alone and isolated and gave me inspiration to create something I have not felt for a long while!”

“As someone who doesn’t paint, I was a little nervous joining the first [our neighbourhood paints] session but they made me feel so welcome. In the subsequent weeks, I always looked forward to the session and the 3 weeks flew by way too fast. I’m definitely excited to see what other community projects will be organized!”

“I really love the unique and fun projects, with an environmental focus, building a space to meet and collaborate with community members who are like minded while making our neighbourhood better for all.”

“I’d like to get to know folks in the neighbourhood and contribute to a community feeling here! I’ve just moved into the neighborhood myself.”

“It was fun to join an activity that wasn’t work related.”
Our Challenges

Without a doubt, Covid-19 proved to be our single greatest challenge. So many of these programs and the very design of this platform required that folks be able to share space. The global context informed by the pandemic was our single greatest challenge and it really can not be overstated how much the global pandemic affected the roll out of this project, from planning, marketing to delivery. At the time of project launch, community members were still figuring out their relationship to the new digital world and how to navigate it. By the end of the project, nearly a year into the pandemic, there was very distinct Zoom fatigue.

The Participatory Cities model encourages the creation of a platform - the blocks and tools for residents to build and shape their community using their own ideas, skills and social ecosystem. Given the realities of Covid and needing to pivot online with limited opportunities for more direct engagement, The Every One Every Day: Toronto Our Neighbourhood project, though still highly participatory, pivoted to more of a ‘traditional’ program, where the parameters were set and participants were guided through. To address this reality, the team sought to create a wide variety of experiences to begin to explore where the energy and interest lay. It’s also fair to say that online participation, even with instructors and kits, tends to encourage passive rather than active engagement, which undermines the participatory guidelines.

The UK model encourages deep participatory engagement, and though that was the ideal, given the Covid considerations, it became more important to focus on rolling out activities, testing ideas and building community partnerships, than participatory program design and platform building. Moreover, creating such a platform takes time, is relational and highly responsive. Through roll out, we were able to introduce the community to new things (like hydroponics!) and connect neighbours to each other in new ways. This style of programming, with embedded participatory principles and ideas, lays the groundwork for the development of a more comprehensive and ongoing participatory support platform in the Regent Park community.

Some other Covid-specific challenges we noted:

➤ Access to technology: Not everyone in Regent Park has access to the internet, or access to multiple computers. If a family member was using the family computer for work or school, other members were unable to participate.

➤ Promotion: Due to Covid, we were unable to distribute the booklets door-to-door throughout the neighbourhood. Because many folks were not leaving their houses, it was challenging to promote the program to a wider audience. Much of the promotion was done online, which limited participants to those with internet access. There was also the absence of community events and informal community gatherings that typically offer opportunities for word of mouth spread.

➤ Zoom Fatigue: Many of the workshop offerings were online, some folks in the community reported screen fatigue, and that adding extra screen time at the end of their work day was too much for them.

➤ Health and Safety: For the in-person sessions, there were some folks, like senior residents, that were under strict no contact protocols and were not able to join in. Also, rolling lockdowns and a lack of clarity around health and safety protocols and progressions, made it challenging to concretely plan different stages of roll out.

➤ Staffing: With a limited staff team it was difficult to grow the project and engage more people, particularly when staff resources were often consumed by simply navigating and pivoting our planning in response to the incredible changes and uncertainties brought about by Covid.

➤ Accessibility: Because it was online/limited resources, all workshops and project meetings were conducted in English, and so individuals requiring translation could not participate.
Our Learnings

From concept, to design, to launch and implementation, this project required considerable effort, but the level of community engagement and feedback provides a strong case for continuing the work. Based on our experience, EOED:TO would have wide success if we adjusted a few of the levers: wider distribution of project materials, in-person and online offerings, translated sessions, door-to-door engagement in all high-rise buildings, and consistent, and ongoing offerings.

Adapting the Participatory City Foundation model to a local context was an area of deep learning for the EOED:TO team, informed by the following insights and observations from our pilot phase:

» The Market Value residents in RP are looking for ways to get involved in the community (which is promising and understandable, given they are relatively new to the neighbourhood)

» The TCHC residents have a lack of access to technology and technology skills making it hard for them to participate online

» Language barriers are present, and should be factored in to any next project

» Local groups and agencies are strong partners, and adds considerably to the value of the experience and strength of the platform

» Having a glossy program booklet with materials included showed residents that this was a different way of doing things, which caught people’s attention. Having well designed and executed program collateral is a key to the success of the project.

» The City is looking at a larger roll out of community wealth and community infrastructure. Embedding the PC model in that work (as community infrastructure) is strategically advantageous to gaining City support. However, more data around engagement and impact, is required for greater municipal involvement.

» Building the right team. Having the right skills among staff who are able to connect with community and have excellent facilitation skills is imperative to the success of the platform.

» As noted, the online process does not allow for the full realization of the participatory principals

» Engagement between the Participatory Canada pilot cities was incredibly helpful to share thoughts and ideas, and to validate the process of learning and development. Greater cross-location collaboration would provide greater program success.
Our Future: Case for Feasibility

Despite the myriad Covid-related challenges affecting the implementation of this pilot project, we see the value of continuing this work throughout and beyond Covid: through, because people need the support and connection; and beyond, because it is time to change the way community programming is done. We’ve only scratched the surface of what’s possible. CSII will continue to embed the participatory program approach through our Community Wealth work, and with the new Community Living Room as the physical home.

With over 120 unique participants in this pilot program, there is an appetite for non-traditional engagement. Every One Every Day: Toronto offered a unique and new pathway to community engagement. The Our Neighbourhood project was a great way to introduce the project team, and the Participatory concept, for a more fulsome roll out when “pandemically possible”.

Some of the feedback we received is that we should run more programming like this, more frequently and more reliably, so that residents can plan to participate.

There is an appetite for low-barriered, fun, community-involved offerings. The Our Neighbourhood Project, and Every One Every Day: TO has an identity in the neighbourhood, and the community is eager to see what comes next.

I really had a wonderful time through the course of the project and am looking forward to continuing this journey with the bigger workshops we have starting in 2021. This was a difficult year for a lot of us, and this project really helped us connect and safely interact with each other in-person whenever possible.”

- EOED:TO participant

I learned how important it is to converse and connect with people. In a world where we often do our own thing, being able to reach out, start a conversation, compliment, and receive acts of kindness is so crucial. I feel these neighbourhood projects push individuals to collaborate without restricting ourselves.”

- EOED:TO participant

With solid enrollment, fair participation in workshops, strong partnerships, and strong positive feedback, we are confident that there is a potential for the viability of this model in Regent Park. This roll out need not wait till after Covid-19 has passed. Rather, there is a massive opportunity to have participatory platforms be integrated as part of the pandemic recovery strategy. The Every One Every Day: Toronto participatory platform can offer a way for residents to help “build it back better”.

Would love to see more of these in-person once Covid’s “over” - I would have really loved to actually meet the other members in the chat, and to have the time to get to know them individually. I also work from 9-5 so would appreciate some offerings in the evenings.”

- EOED:TO participant
Our Next Steps

1. CSII will continue to support the groups that have formed around the Our Neighbourhood Blooms and Butterflies, and Our Neighbourhood Stories. These are ongoing projects, with dedicated participants, and continue to build the community infrastructure and social ecosystem through the pandemic.

2. CSII will open the CSI Community Living Room in Regent Park (COVID dependent). This will be a ground floor space that will be dedicated to community wealth building, and a home for future Every One Every Day: Toronto Initiatives. It will be a meeting place for residents and friends to gather in an open access space to connect, dream, and build neighbourhood solutions together. Most importantly, it will provide the opportunity to connect residents, strengthen social capital, and build community infrastructure at the neighbourhood level.

3. CSII will continue to seek opportunities for partnership and funding to realise the Every One Every Day: Toronto project as an integrated system of community engagement and social ecosystem development as an integral part of our approach to building community wealth.

4. CSII will continue to participate in a community of practice with the other Participatory Canada city teams to continue to adapt the model to the Canadian context, while elevating the local programming.

Photo Credit: Waleed Khogali