

MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

SCADDING COURT: ONE COMMUNITY CENTRE'S APPROACH TO ECONOMIC INCLUSION MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Toronto, ON – Scadding Court Community Centre (SCCC), a multi-service agency in Toronto, creates conditions for people to chart their own pathways toward sustainable decent work, while generating a social dividend. Identifying retail opportunities, offering supports and space at affordable rates, and in locations that require animation and investment, SCCC is catalyzing microeconomic activity in less affluent parts of Toronto, particularly in neighbourhoods where there is evidence of deepening poverty.

“Strengthening Toronto’s social fabric means offering opportunities beyond social and recreational programming; building strong local economies is crucial to individual, neighbourhood and city prosperity,” says Kevin Lee, SCCC Executive Director.

Market707 on Dundas West has a business model, Business Out of the Box (BoB), that supports entrepreneurs facing financial barriers by offering affordable rental spaces in retrofitted shipping containers. This project is one of many community-driven projects focused on helping to measurably improve the lives of those most affected by poverty. It received a \$121,500 Local Poverty Reduction Fund grant in 2016. The Fund supports projects in communities across the province. Ontario will harness innovative ideas – rooted in evidence – from local, community-based approaches and establish new ways of tackling poverty. Using the evidence gathered from these projects, the government will share best practices and focus on funding programs that are proven to work and that can expand over time. The Ontario Trillium Foundation, an agency of the Government of Ontario, administers the program.

SCCC offers wrap-around supports such as childcare, settlement services, adult literacy classes, group vendor meetings, and a discount at our shipping container commercial kitchen. Vendor Shinji Yamaguchi’s ‘Gushi’ has been so successful that he has opened a permanent location on Queen Street West. Others choose to stay as they are making a stable income from Market707. All surplus revenues from BoB are reinvested into previously grant-funded core community programs (After Four, Walking School Bus, etc.), grants for which are becoming less available at an alarming rate for agencies in the downtown core. “There just isn’t enough money around and other neighbourhoods are in dire need of these grants, so the community sector needs a fresh approach if we are to sustain services and programs that are critical for the health of our families and our neighbourhoods,” said Lee.

A shipping container ‘Park Café’ will open this summer in RV Burgess Park, operated by the Thorncliffe Park Womens’ Committee with support from Toronto Parks staff and local Councillor Jon Burnside. The Café will animate the park while providing an economic opportunity for newcomer women who are low-income and racialized, who will simultaneously learn how to run their own enterprises. SCCC continues to partner with development firms to place container markets on pre-development lands. They also operate seasonal markets to expand opportunities for vendors while contributing to the city’s economic vitality. Ryerson University’s Diversity Institute is conducting the evaluation to determine impact on the vendors and local community.

Another social enterprise geared toward poverty reduction is Aquaponics 707, a closed-loop organic micro-agriculture system that provides a mutually beneficial habitat for plants and fish. Produce and fish are sold to food establishments at market rates, and to the community at reduced rates. The system is used as an educational tool for the public and school groups, and as an employment tool for low-income, racialized and criminalized youth to develop skills for the growing urban agricultural and food service industries.

Scadding Court developed these scalable models that can be implemented in any community. They demonstrate that, with the right tools and supports, innovative social enterprises can be the entry point for many in breaking the cycle of poverty.

“When people can fully participate in the economic life of a neighbourhood, everyone benefits and that’s when we know we are making progress on becoming a more inclusive city overall,” stressed Lee.

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