

## **Bridging the growing divide in Toronto**

Wednesday, March 9, 6:00-8:30PM

10 Old Meadow Lane

### **MEETING DESCRIPTION: "Bridging the growing divide in Toronto"**

Emerging leaders came together to discuss trends of growing income polarization in Toronto and explore actions that can be taken to address this issue. Following context-setting remarks by Dr. David Hulchanski of the Cities Centre of the University of Toronto, breakout discussions were held to start to map out how we can better understand the issue and engage more people in this discussion. The meeting was facilitated by Blake Connoy and Keesha Abraham.

At the end of the meeting, all of the meeting participants agreed to meet again to build on this discussions and in time, to take appropriate action.

### **1. Meeting Participants**

- Keesha Abraham, Toronto Community Housing
- Kunaal Arya, Marlin & Associates
- Gelek Badheysang, DreBu
- Tamara Balan, CivicAction
- Brett Banks, Industry Canada
- Tiffany Blair, CivicAction
- James Chan, CIBC
- Adam Clare, Wero Creative
- Blake Connoy, Canadian Business for Social Responsibility
- Julia Deans, CivicAction
- Derek Eng, Toronto Public Library
- Michael Friedman, North York Harvest Food Bank
- Wendy Gold, OpenCity Projects
- Heather Goodwin, CivicAction
- Andrew Graham, George Weston Ltd
- Bryan Heal, YouthLink
- Peter Howard, Ontario Ministry of the Environment
- David Hulchanski, Cities Centre, University of Toronto
- Bronwyn Krog, Toronto Community Housing
- Michelynn Laflèche, CivicAction
- Sean Lehane, 918 Bathurst
- Nate Lewis, Operations Manager, Mercana Growth Partners
- Julia Lo, CivicAction
- Tinashe Mafukidze, Polycultural Immigrant & Community Services
- Ian Rice, Export Development Canada
- Jamie Robinson, United Way Toronto
- Tammy Rogers, University of Toronto
- Racquel G. Smith, Good Partners Consulting
- Cindy Tan, CivicAction
- Barbora Vokac Taylor

### **2. Introduction to Lawrence Heights**

Using large-scale models, Keesha Abraham and Bronwyn Krog of Toronto Community Housing introduced participants to the Lawrence Heights community and its planned revitalization.

### **3. Do we agree there's a problem? *Three Cities Within Toronto***

Dr. Hulchanski provided a brief overview to the group of *Three Cities Within Toronto*, a report mapping income polarization trends from 1970-2005 in the City of Toronto.

Subsequently, Blake Connoy and Keesha Abraham facilitated a discussion with participants on the factors that lead to growing income polarization as well as implications of these trends.

#### **4. Discussion Questions**

In breakouts, participants discussed the following questions:

1. Who should members of ELN engage in this process in order to learn more?
2. Are there specific programs/initiatives already underway that could benefit from the ELN's support? Programs/initiatives need not be explicitly aimed at alleviating poverty, but could have that indirect benefit (e.g., initiatives to rezone land for commercial development).
3. Are there specific programs/initiatives that should be created that the ELN should initiate?

#### **5. Summary of the Discussion**

1. Meeting participants felt they need to learn much more about the trends of growing income polarization, particularly:
  - The factors that lead to income polarization, the growing incidence of low-income households and erosion of the middle class and the relationships between them
  - Programs, initiatives and leaders that are currently addressing issues related to income polarization
  - Why income inequality matters to everyone
  - The correlation between ethnoracial background and income cohort
  - How labour market conditions can be improved
    - E.g. Reducing the number of contract and part-time employment opportunities in favour of full-time, with benefits, opportunities
    - Providing mentorship to support immigrants in translating their international experience into a Canadian employment context
    - Enabling more entrepreneurial and small business support
2. Participants felt it is critical to engage the expertise of:
  - Community leaders (living and working) and organizations operating in areas identified as City 3 in *Three Cities Within Toronto*
  - Leaders working in the private sector, broadly speaking
  - Organizations providing mentorship and/or small business support
  - Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in/around the neighbourhoods with higher numbers of lower-income households
3. Among meeting participants, there was an interest to explore community-based strategies to meet the specific needs of Toronto's different neighbourhoods
  - E.g. How can communities be made stronger?
    - E.g. Improving access to affordable childcare in low-income communities
    - Developing community gardens
    - Using community spaces as hubs to enhance networks
    - Encouraging greater connection between the downtown core and the inner-suburbs through Jane's Walks and other activities
    - Building strong community connections and reduce isolation
  - How can local economic development be encouraged?

- E.g. Building the capacity of Business Improvement Associations (BIAs) in the inner-suburbs
- Eliminating development fees in priority neighbourhoods

## **6. Next Step:**

A follow-up meeting will be held on April 28 at the Northern District Library (40 Orchard View Blvd.).