

1UP

TORONTO

 urbanminds

1UPToronto
Youth Conference
March 2017



*Imagine tomorrow. Lead today.
Our mission is to shape the next generation of
urban changemakers.*

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Introduction

What is 1UPToronto?

The 1UPToronto project evolved from co-founder Ryan Lo's graduate research project on youth engagement in the city-building process. Unsatisfied with the lack of education and engagement, and driven to do more beyond academic research, Ryan organized the Tomorrow Starts Today Conference (TST) in Toronto in March 2016. The conference served as a platform to test a variety of educational and engagement tools, strategies and formats. The interaction with more than 70 high school student participants and volunteers offered valuable lessons in effective youth engagement.

The success of TST helped to build the foundation of 1UPToronto, as the team worked to finetune elements that were effective, and explored new strategies and perspectives to incorporate. While TST was primarily focused on urban planning education, the emphasis of 1UPToronto was to inspire youth to be community advocates and take real action.

On March 19th, 2017, 1UPToronto was held at Ryerson University's DMZ Sandbox. Over 40 high school students across Toronto came together for the event. The conference featured 13 guest speakers and 20 volunteer facilitators. From short talks and interactive workshops, students explored the topics of *play*, *move*, and *eat* - public spaces, food equity, and transportation. Applying what they had learned, students participated in a "Design Jam" case competition based on Toronto's real-life challenges of *play*, *move*, and *eat*.



Tomorrow Starts Today Conference, March 2016



1UPToronto, March 2017



1UPToronto Design Jam

About Urban Minds

Combining the city-building context and the design thinking approach, Urban Minds helps youth to find creative, human-centred solutions to local challenges, and in becoming advocates and champions of their communities.

Founded in June 2016, Urban Minds is a Toronto-based, multidisciplinary team with experience in architecture, urban planning, community engagement and design.



Katrina Shiu (left), Ryan Lo, Angela Ng

2 Themes: Play, Move, and Eat

In the process of curating content for 1UPToronto this year, the Urban Minds team saw the need to select topics that were important, relevant and comprehensible to youth. In this regard, the Toronto Foundation's *Vital Signs* report was used as a valuable source of inspiration. In the 2016 report, health and wellness was named as one of the top concerns of youth in Toronto, especially regarding mental health issues and youth obesity¹ (Toronto Foundation, 2016, 35-39). Having accessible and affordable transportation was also identified as key to improving youth employment² (Toronto Foundation, 2016, 69).

Drawing connections to the built environment surrounding youth, the team narrowed down these high-level challenges to three tangible areas of improvement: public spaces, food systems and transportation. Youth needed

more inclusive and youthful public spaces to play and socialize in, more affordable and accessible food systems to improve their health, and more efficient and equitable transportation systems to take them to places of opportunities. Hence, *play, move, and eat* became the three central topics of the conference.

To better engage students and to prepare them for the Design Jam activity, they were divided into three sections according to the topic that they chose when signing in. For each section, the team invited three groups of speakers to present on the respective topic. Each speaker or group had a 5-minute "lightning talk" and a 15-minute interactive activity to share ideas, projects and hands-on skills relevant to the topic.



Toronto's Vital Signs 2016 Report - Source of inspiration

¹Toronto Foundation, Toronto's Vital Signs 2016 Report, 35-39.

²Toronto Foundation, Toronto's Vital Signs 2016 Report, 69.

3 Design Jam

Set-up and Format

After the talks and activities from the morning, students formed teams of four to tackle a case challenge corresponding to the topic they learned about. Each team was guided by facilitators and had access to topic experts in the room available for consultation on the topics.

The format of the Design Jam was inspired by a similar exercise that was run at the Civic Design Camp event hosted at the MaRS Discovery District in 2015. It followed the Design Thinking model which has five phases:

1. Empathize
2. Define
3. Ideate
4. Prototype
5. Test

The Urban Minds team looks to the city itself for inspiration to develop case challenges which reflect issues that are real, current, and relevant to youth.



Team organizing Post-it Note ideas during Design Jam

Each case challenge was provided with 2 personas for participants to consider when designing solutions. These personas were developed to reflect the needs of the youth population.

Goals

- Inspire student leaders to further their community impact.
- Increase the number and visibility of youth-led community initiatives.
- Connect student leaders amongst themselves, and with key city-building people.
- Empower students with confidence to tackle their own community challenges.

Desired Outcomes

- Have greater empathy and curiosity of current challenges facing Toronto's communities.
- Create imaginative solutions to address our community challenges.
- Apply a user-centered approach to solve real-world community challenges.



Team pitching idea during Design Jam

PLAY

Case Challenge

In the realm of public spaces, Toronto is in a unique position to develop a largely underused space beneath the Gardiner Expressway for community use. While the construction process has already begun, there will be opportunities to program the space for different purposes. Therefore, we asked, **“how might we make this a fun place for youth who hang around the Bentway after school?”**

Personas

1. Cindy

Cindy is a grade 9 student living in a CityPlace condo with her parents. She likes to play all kinds of sports and is always up for a quick pick-up game with others.

She’s an outgoing person who likes to meet new people. She likes to hang out with a big group of friends after school, but she wants to explore other cool spots other than the nearby library and community centre.

2. Everett

Everett is a grade 11 student living in a Fort York townhouse with his parents and younger brother. He has to share a room with his brother at home, so he’s always looking for a chance to leave the house even just for a little while.

He is a quiet guy who enjoys spending time alone or with one or two of his best friends. He and his friends would like to have a place of their own to relax and talk about anything they want.



The Bentway



Cindy likes to play sports.



Everett enjoys spending time alone.

Ideas & Pitches

Project 1:

The Bentway Cave is a multi-purpose space for recreation and relaxation catered towards youth. It is a rock climbing wall and cave for studying and relaxing with green space, sleeping pods, WiFi, and charging stations.



Project 4:

A basketball court along the Bentway provides a public program for everyone to enjoy, whether coming alone or in groups.



Project 2:

This social recreational hub aims to make the Bentway feel like a safe, comfortable place for high school students to hang out. It includes a variety of amenities including a multi-use trail/ skating trail, soccer field, yoga space, cafe, seating, rock climbing walls, and interactive public art.



Project 5:

This proposal aims to create a safe and clean space with planted trees and bird feeders so people can interact with nature. There are trails for biking, walking and jogging where high school students can meet other people while exercising.



Project 3:

Under the Gardiner are foldable bike racks that transform into a skate park. Beside this is a retractable roof that provides shelter during the winter, and allows natural light during the summer.



Case Challenge

Move: In 2017, Toronto City Planning and its partners launched the King Street Pilot Study, looking to test ways to improve congestion, among other qualities, of this east-west commercial corridor. As transit pressure continues to increase along King Street, we asked, **“how might we transform King Street into a more enjoyable commute for young people?”**

Personas

1. Hans

Hans is a grade 12 student who has recently started his summer job at a Tim Horton’s on King St, and he lives in a condo off of King St. On most days he walks 15 minutes from home to work to take the day shifts, but at times he also has to work night shifts. After a tiring and stressful shift, he just wants his trip back home to be a relaxing and enjoyable experience.

He is an outgoing person who loves the outdoors. He likes to ride his bike in his neighbourhood but he’s not comfortable enough to ride on busier streets. He’s willing to try biking to work if there’s a fun and safe way to do it.



Hans lives in a condo off King Street.



King Street

2. Millie

Millie is a grade 10 student who lives on the west end of Toronto but goes to school on the east end. Throughout the school year, she takes the streetcar on King to go to school but is often frustrated by the slowness and overcrowding in the morning rush hour traffic. She is also bored by the wait at the stops and the long and uneventful ride between home and school. Walking, especially in the winter, is not really an option because of the distance.

In her spare time, she enjoys performance arts and loves going to shows and concerts with her friends at the entertainment venues on King St.



Millie is frustrated by the overcrowded streetcars.

Ideas & Pitches

Project 6:

This proposal aims to make the experience of waiting for and riding on a streetcar more enjoyable. The streetcar shelter would have WiFi and interactive displays that are accessible to all people (not just people with smartphones). There would be a dedicated transit lane and the streetcar would be equipped with WiFi and napping pods.



Project 7:

By adding another streetcar lane above King Street, the streetcar avoids traffic allowing more streetcars to be moved across King Street.



Case Challenge

Many suburban neighbourhoods on the fringes of the city face issues of food equity and accessibility. Malvern in Scarborough, as an example, is a mixed-income neighbourhood and has very few places for residents to buy groceries. We asked our participants: **“how might we improve access to fresh, healthy food for young people living in Malvern?”**

Personas

1. Will

Will, a grade 12 student, lives with his mother and 3 younger siblings. His mother works 3 jobs, while Will goes to school and participates in several after-school extracurriculars. At night, he’s often the only one at home taking care of his siblings and cooking meals for them. He has very little time to himself or to hang out with friends.

His family lives on a tight budget, with most of his mother’s income going to rent and transportation. Will finds it difficult to afford fresh food all the time, and has to make food with whatever is on sale that week.



Will often has to buy canned food on sale.



Malvern Town Centre

2. Coco

Coco is a grade 10 student who lives with her grandmother in an apartment unit. During lunch hour at school, she would always go to the nearest fast food chain to buy lunch, or she would skip lunch altogether when she “doesn’t feel like eating”.

Her grandmother is a fantastic cook who loves to make and share food with others. But she’s getting old and can no longer go grocery shopping on her own. Without a car, Coco only has time on the weekend to go grocery shopping since it’d take her almost an hour just to get to the store on foot. She is limited to buying a few bags without the luxury of a car.



Coco needs to walk home with groceries.

Ideas & Pitches

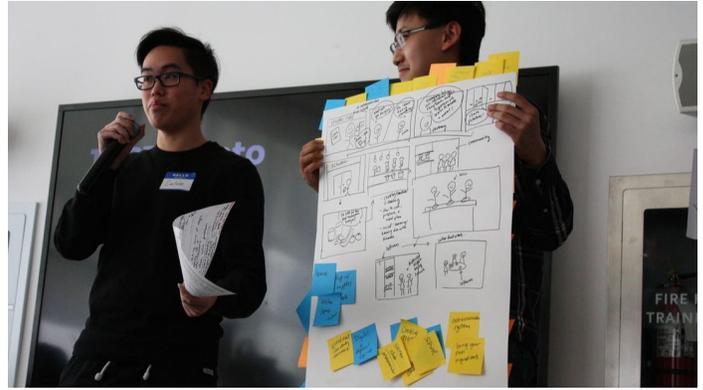
Project 8:

The Weekend Dinner Club provides a space for high school students to cook, eat, and sell food, which is supported by donations from the community. The club is a place to socialize and meet mentors, and offers child care services.



Project 9:

The Collegiate Kitchen is housed at a local school kitchen, and offers group cooking lessons with free dinner. It is run by volunteer school teachers and sponsored by local businesses like grocery stores.



4 Lessons Learned

General Themes

From the ideas and pitches presented by different student teams, we observed a number of dominant themes:

- **Comfort and safety:** Most teams emphasized having a comfortable and safe space for youth to spend time in.
- **Social spaces:** Students wanted to create spaces for youth to socialize and meet new people.
- **Shared resources:** Some teams saw opportunities for other community stakeholders (e.g. schools and businesses) to support the projects they put forward.
- **Multi-purpose spaces:** Students proposed spaces with multiple functions so that the

needs of different types of young people could be served.

- **Integration of technology:** Some teams suggested features such as WiFi and interactive displays to improve users' experience in the space.
- **Connection to nature:** Some teams included features such as planted trees, bird feeders and a retractable roof to optimize sunlight, as ways to help connect users to natural elements.

Although the project ideas came from a small sample of students, these themes could still serve as a general reflection of the values and preferences of youth living in the GTA today.

Strengths & Capabilities

Sense of empathy: Students who participated in the Design Jam have shown that they are very good at empathizing. Many mentioned the needs of the persona as the basis of their thinking, and the ideas they proposed were direct responses to those needs.

Creative and imaginative: Although students did not have the professional knowledge or understanding of costs, structure or logistics, they were not afraid to push boundaries. They did not dismiss their "wild" ideas in their vision.

Clarity of thought: The students' ideas were seemingly simple, but considering the time constraint and pressure of the Design Jam, the ideas presented were strong and clear.

Engagement & Guidance

Youth today are a socially-conscious, resourceful and hyper-connected generation. They want to make a difference and will do a great job if given the opportunity. They are quick learners who demand the same pace from the people they work with and learn from. They prefer interactive, hands-on experiences over static, lecture-style presentations. Many participants indicated in the survey responses that they did enjoy and learn most from the short talks and interactive activities.

The Design Jam embodied those elements to maximize participation and engagement. It was a fast-paced, immersive, and competitive experience, which required high levels of energy and attention that other types of engagement activities may not generate.

The Design Jam has also demonstrated that by personalizing the issues through the use of personas and accessible language, participants were able to relate to the needs of the community, and connect the challenge

and the solution in a coherent story. Jargons were avoided in most cases, and technical terms were defined when they were used out of necessity or for the purpose of education.

The use of real-life issues in the city in each case challenge played both a symbolic and practical role. By 'keeping it real', it signified the importance of the students' participation, as they would be used to working with hypothetical scenarios at school and in other settings. Dealing with real-life issues also meant data and information were easily accessible online and through professional contacts.

Given the right environment and guidance, youth have demonstrated that they are fully capable of participating in discussions with older peers. Their input would represent a valuable, authentic and creative voice that is much needed in this city, as we work to create a more inclusive and diverse conversation around city-building.

