

Building Community in Davenport West

by Rene Adams

The sense of community spirit is alive and well in the Davenport West Neighbourhood of Toronto. Until recently, the Davenport-Perth Community Church of The United Church of Canada and the Davenport Perth Community Ministry responsibilities were shared by one minister. Now these responsibilities have been shifted into two separate ministries. Each ministry is in the process of defining its own mission and direction. While these missions are being sorted out, the key to community success has been and remains steadfast collaboration.

We are fortunate to share our space with the local Neighbourhood Centre. This allows us to pool resources, whether the need is for community dining programs, culturally relevant social groups, seniors, children, youth, and literacy programs, volunteers, or administrative support. We are also lucky to have The Stop Community Food Centre next door to serve as a food bank, drop-in centre, and venue for community gardening, education, and participation. The Stop not only meets the urgent need for emergency groceries, breakfast, and lunch, but it also seeks to address the root causes of poverty in Davenport West. Events such as political engagement, voter education, and movie nights have been integral in building our community. These programs are organized through the collaboration of all groups concerned via the Bread and Bricks Davenport group.

[Davenport-Perth Community Church](#) was the worship centre for many early and prominent community members, who helped to develop west Toronto. Many were doctors, lawyers, judges, politicians, and architects. The congregation celebrated its 190th anniversary in October 2008. Many dignitaries attended the service; among the guests were three generations of one of the founding families. We recently received news that one of our congregants, who is over 100 years old, is still alive. As with many urban churches, we have seen a decline in membership. Many are simply too old or too busy trying to make a living. Others have simply moved too far. The congregation is reflective of the diverse ethnic makeup of the area. Special community meals are held at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. We have a Sunday school program for children ages three to 12, a junior choir, and a Christmas sharing program for those in need. Community members are also invited to our annual fun day retreat.

[Davenport Perth Community Ministry](#) has entered into a partnership with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation to run an after-school reading circle and JUMP math program for neighbourhood children. Many families benefit from the positive reinforcement of concepts taught to the children. They are also treated to field trips, such as a visit to the Royal Ontario Museum. The Pelham-Symington Women's Group was

formed to train women from two nearby Toronto Housing neighbourhoods as facilitators on raising sexually healthy children. This was done in partnership with The Toronto Community Housing Corporation and Opportunity for Advancement. The Ministry has also formed a partnership with groups such as the Community Action Resource Centre, York Community Services, and Bathurst Street United Church. We look forward to a youth mentoring partnership with members of the Toronto chapter of the Journeys of Black People in the United Church. The Ministry was also fortunate enough to run a highly successful photo-voice project on community building with area youth.

Rene Adams is active in the congregation and community ministry life at Davenport-Perth. She is also a member of the Journeys of Black People.