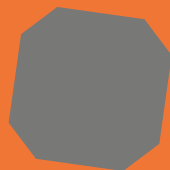
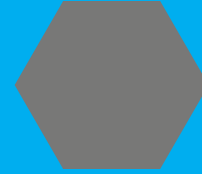




ASCI FINAL REPORT



SHAKESPEARE
in Action



WELCOME!



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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Words are powerful. It's almost a truth universally known that words contain weight, strength and magnitude.

I remember listening to author, poet, social justice activist and educator Sonya Renee Taylor talk about the dislike for the word 'ally', which all too often subscribes to the performative, and as Sonya Renee Taylor pointed out, the exploitative. Their dislike for the word became clear as soon as they searched out the definition of the word 'ally'.

This was a reminder.

Words can be used in ignorance.

Words can be used to satiate, to avoid, to redirect, to deflect. To harm.

I would like, with you, to confront the word acknowledgment. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word acknowledgment (a noun) means, "The fact of accepting that something is true or right". Cambridge Dictionary goes a step further and shares the American Dictionary's definition of acknowledgment (again a noun), "The act or fact of accepting the truth or recognizing the existence of something".

I ask that you let this sit in you. In your heart. In your mind. I ask that you consume yourself with the definition of 'acknowledgement'.

Shakespeare in Action and its team have been welcomed into Weston.

As settlers, we know in absolute truth Weston is the traditional territory of

the Wendat,
Anishnabeg,
Petun,
Seneca,
the Mississaugas of the Credit,

And all other Nations that have cared for this land, recorded and unrecorded.

May we continue to be gifted the responsibility of taking care of this land that we occupy as settlers.

We gather on land that sits with the Humber River, a river that has given and continues to give life. We meet on the Carrying-Place Trail, a route that has witnessed people come, stay and go over hundreds of years.

However, we must acknowledge that we cannot continue our work without clearly accepting the truth that we are a part of the gentrification that is currently occurring in Weston.

In care and love, we ask that we always be held accountable.

With love and gratitude,

Tamara Freeman
Associate Managing Producer



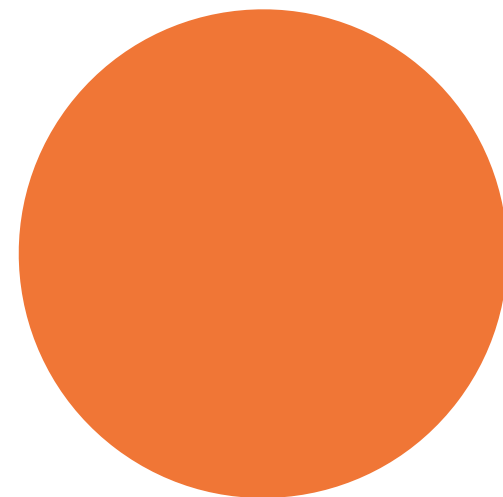
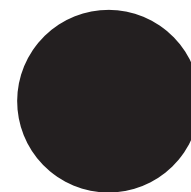
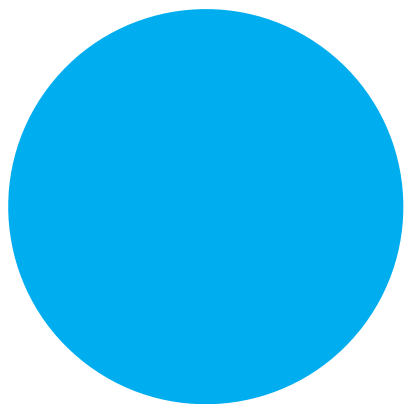
INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare in Action

In mid March 2020, Ontario entered into a full lockdown in response to the global pandemic, COVID-19. As a result, many business and organizational sectors including the performing arts were deeply affected due to the necessary and mandated shutdowns happening province wide. Shakespeare in Action (SIA) was no exception.

Recognizing that the performing arts will be one of the last sectors to recover, with many theatres cancelling their in-person productions till tentatively the summer of 2021, SIA made effective and necessary pivots to still engage artists, as well as community and audience members. One of the programs developed as a response to Ontario's regulations and protocols against COVID-19 was the Artists Supporting Community Initiative (ASCI).

This report will outline the ASCI program from its inception to its current state as of March 2021.



ABOUT

Shakespeare in Action

Shakespeare in Action is a theatre company made up of multidisciplinary and culturally-diverse artists that aspires to enhance the arts and education through the presentation of new works and performing classical and contemporary plays that are relevant to young audiences, their families, and the community. SIA carries out ambitious year-round productions and arts education programs. We have successfully impacted over one million children, youth and adults across the GTA in our thirty years of operation.

Shakespeare in Action is a not-for-profit, charitable organization registered with the Canadian Revenue Agency. SIA operates under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Actors Equity Association, and is proudly a member of many professional organizations including TAPA.



ABOUT

Artscape Weston Commons

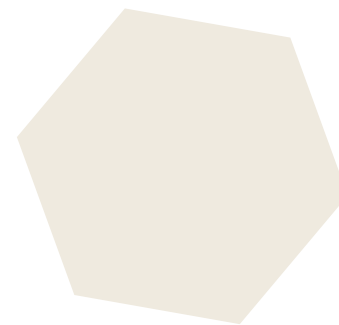
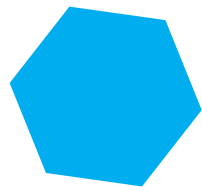
In 2019, SIA was invited by Toronto Artscape Inc. to become a Program Partner and northwest Toronto's resident professional theatre company at the new Artscape Weston Common cultural centre. As one of the only professional resident theatre companies operating in northwest Toronto, we are beginning to broaden our mandate to include the development of artists and audiences across age, cultural background and income level from northwest Toronto.



ABOUT *York South-Weston*

At SIA, we believe in the magic of York South-Weston. We know that York South-Weston is a place that welcomes newcomers, supports diverse family structures and is home to seniors and youth alike. We honour the amazing network of community organizations that provide resources, all who have cultivated a sense of belonging. We can also testify to the richness of independent businesses that are owned and operated by the members and residents of the York South-Weston community.

We acknowledge that it is a blessing to be part of such a vibrant and active community that is beautifully diverse and rich in its history dating back thousands of years.

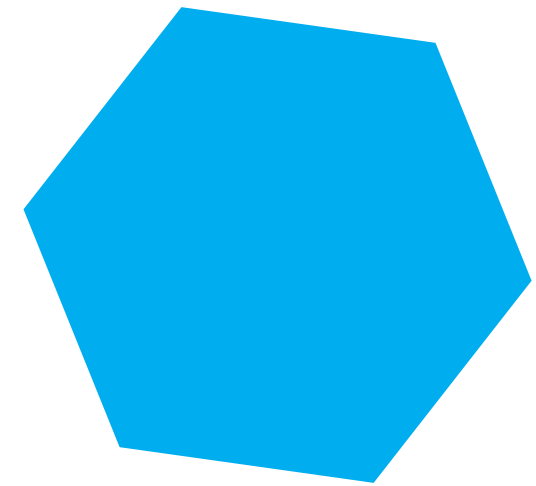
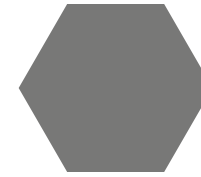
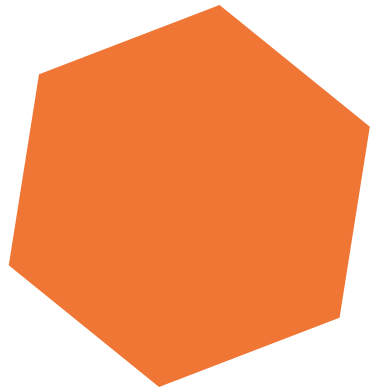


ASCI PROGRAM

Artists Supporting Community Initiative

The impacts of COVID-19 have disproportionately affected the York South Weston community. Essential service organizations such as food banks and mental health organizations, many of whom rely on volunteer support, have seen a significant increase in use and have been struggling to keep afloat.

In our arts community, with many theatres still facing the challenges of whether or not they should cancel their seasons until 2022, there continues to be a deepened uncertainty of work opportunities. Many artists who rely on self-employed income to support their living expenses continue to be in and out of work due to the ever changing, and necessary, landscape of COVID rules and regulations. Artists, creatives and theatre companies are all too aware that the performing arts will be one of the last sectors to recover.



CONT.

Shakespeare in Action was proud to announce the Artists Supporting Community Initiative (ASCI) in June 2020. The ASCI paired out-of-work artists and creatives with paid opportunities to support emergency frontline relief efforts in the York South Weston community. Artists, creatives, and arts workers are brilliant, flexible and resourceful, constantly contributing in abundance to the well-being of their communities. With a growing demand of personnel needs in the emergency relief sector, and an increase in underemployed artists, the ASCI built the bridge. By building a bridge between artists and essential service organizations in our community, this program facilitated unlikely relationships, grew human resource capacities, and provided relief to both the arts sector and our community's urgent needs. Support included food delivery for seniors, staffing at local food banks, food prep and meal packaging, and more.



FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE ASCI PROGRAM

The ASCI program would not have been possible without the financial support of the Government of Canada's Emergency Community Support Fund and the Toronto Foundation. We also would like to thank TD Canada Trust and the Hodgson Family Foundation for their additional financial contributions that continue to support the ASCI's Coffee Box and Care Kits delivery programs.

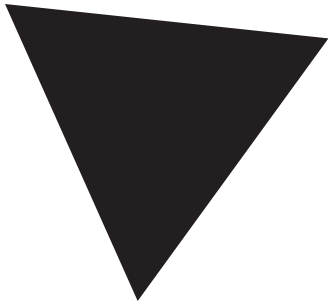


Canada 

Hodgson Family Foundation



2.0



ASCI 2.0

When the ASCI was originally developed its model was as a volunteer support effort with an honorarium attached to committed hours which was outlined in our Emergency Community Support Fund grant application. The thought and intention behind that model was to make room for any artists, creatives and/or arts workers to apply for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), as well as additionally taking on other contract work. SIA released the ASCI program as a soft launch to SIA's Artist Educators with the information seen below:

20 hours- \$140.00

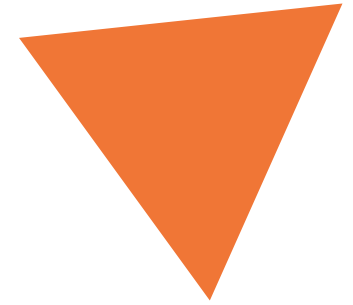
40 hours- \$280.00

60 hours- \$420.00

80+ hours- \$560.00

*Transportation support available upon request, though not guaranteed.

The ASCI is designed so the maximum payout is \$560.00/month, which leaves participants eligible for CERB as well as other contract work.



However, SIA received critical feedback from our Artist Educators about the ASCI's original model which included the dangers that this program would be exploiting artists, creatives and/ or arts workers during very unprecedented and precarious times. Being held accountable by our Artist Educators, we reassessed and updated the ASCI's fee for service, relaunching the program within two weeks of the original soft launch. The updated fee for service, including the transportation fee, can be seen below:

\$17.50/ hour for up to a maximum of 55 hours.

*Supplemental transportation support available for delivery drivers (prorated fee of \$2/hr with a maximum of \$110 for 55 hours)

The ASCI is designed so the maximum payout is \$962.50, which leaves participants eligible for CERB.

In the new year (January 2021), with the addition of a stay-at-home order, the ASCI program was able to update the fee for service, including the transportation fee, to the following:

\$20/hr for up to a maximum of 55 hours.

*Supplemental transportation support available for delivery drivers (prorated fee of \$5/hr with a maximum of \$275 for 55 hours)



THE *Artists*

Over the span of 8 months, we were able to onboard over 30 artists and creatives to the ASCI program. Artists and creatives are exceptionally resourceful, smart and flexible. Many have been taught to actively listen to others, approach people and situations with no judgement, seek understanding of the world and look for compassion even in the smallest of places. Each artist and creative brought to their placements energy and enthusiasm that was palpable and honoured by our community partners and community members.

The ASCI artists are actors; singers; dancers; spoken word artists; musicians; graphic designers; writers; filmmakers; visual artists; digital illustrators; arts workers; students of the performing arts and/or performance production; divisors and multidisciplinary artists.



ARTISTS' Quotes

“As an illustrator and designer whose work is solely commercial, I am very excited to be part of SIA’s ASCI program where I can use my art skills to help support communities in need. The project I am doing with Syme Woolner Neighborhood & Family Center is one I have not done before, and this experience also helped me grow as an artist. I am thankful for this opportunity and I hope that the ASCI program will be developed further so that more artists like myself and more organizations can participate and do great projects together.”

- Vy Do

“Becoming a core member at the Community Food Bank at the Jane Alliance Neighbourhood Services Centre grounded me in a core human trait: that amongst hardships, humans always find the strength to help those around them no matter what.

Being a face to an organization that continues to provide marginalized community members a helping hand made me find the light within myself to face a brighter tomorrow despite the obstacles that may come.

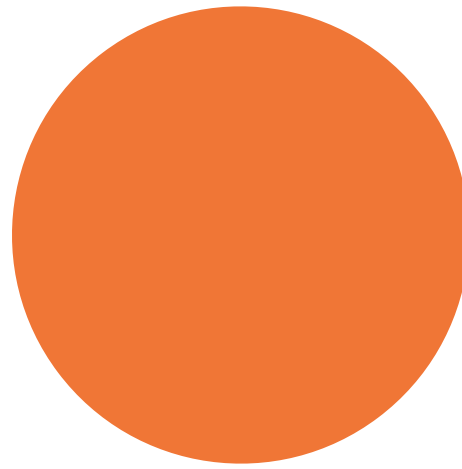
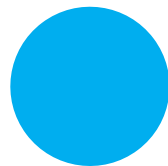
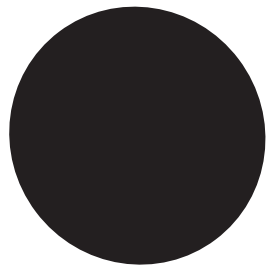
Thank you for helping your community of artists help those around them.”

- Claudia Liz

“ASCI was the perfect reflection of what community engagement should look and act like right now. As artists, working in and out of artistic organizations, it has been wonderful to engage with reshaping theatrical practices but it is of greater importance now for us to step back and really consider what our communities truly need from us. We seek to reflect a community back to itself and invite them into a space to take part in our work and I think it is important that we do the same in return with this type of support. I am so fortunate to have participated in this program and to have had the opportunity to work with the different communities and organizers - for me it has very much highlighted how resilient the human spirit can be when we look out for one another.

Thank you!”

- Lizzie Moffatt



“Meeting people is one of the greatest gifts of this life, I think. Every morning, I wake up curious about who will cross my path on this day and how it will change my life...forever. Dramatic? I think yes and I ask why not be dramatic about it?”

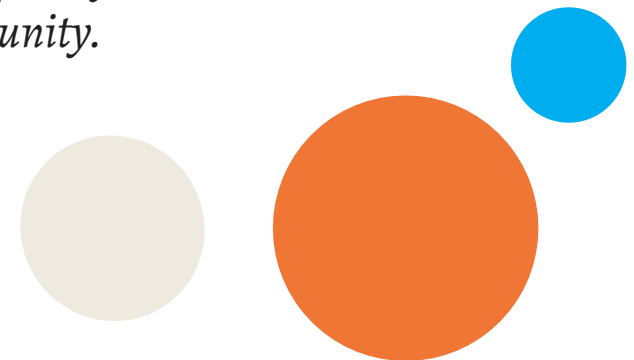
On the days I delivered lunches to the people of the Weston community, I encountered new souls every shift. Of course, I had my regulars- incredible beings with whom I made quick friendships- alongside the new faces and unique stories that showed up once, one day, then never to be seen again. I appreciated that I never knew who I would meet on these deliveries and I was thrilled that the community welcomed me without question or judgement. I felt like a member of a community family right away.

Going to the community hub on Weston (just south of Lawrence) was another highlight of my shift. Working and laughing with Buki and Kaltuma, observing their passion and light for the work they do in the community was exciting to witness. There were days when I came to work frustrated because I dropped a meal in transport or was in great panic that the meals would not get out in time--Buki and Kaltuma, always met me with sincere patience, love and joy. Working two months in this program, I learned from these positive and effective community leaders that love, kindness, generosity and self-forgiveness are always within reach. Every person that came through the community hub, was met with open hearts and ears. There is great work being done in this place and I hope they receive the resources they need to continue to provide a haven of warmth, sustenance and community.

I am thankful for this experience. I appreciate the souls I got to know.

Feed the people. It's important and necessary work.”

- Amanda Cordner



THE COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATION

Partners

Service organizations in York South Weston, one of Ontario's poorest ridings, are also struggling to survive, and many must rely on volunteer support. However, many of these organizations and their volunteers have been forced to reassess who can and who cannot provide these volunteer supports due to COVID protocols and regulations, as well as age restrictions.

Since June 2020, the ASCI program has supported the following essential service community organizations:

Cyborg Circus Project (CCP)
Frontlines
Jane Alliance Neighbourhood Services (JANS)
Kitchen24
Syme Woolner Neighbourhood and Family Centre
Toronto Community Housing
Unison Health and Community Services (UHCS)
Weston Area Emergency Services (WAES)
Weston Community Place Hub (The Hub)



Toronto Community Housing



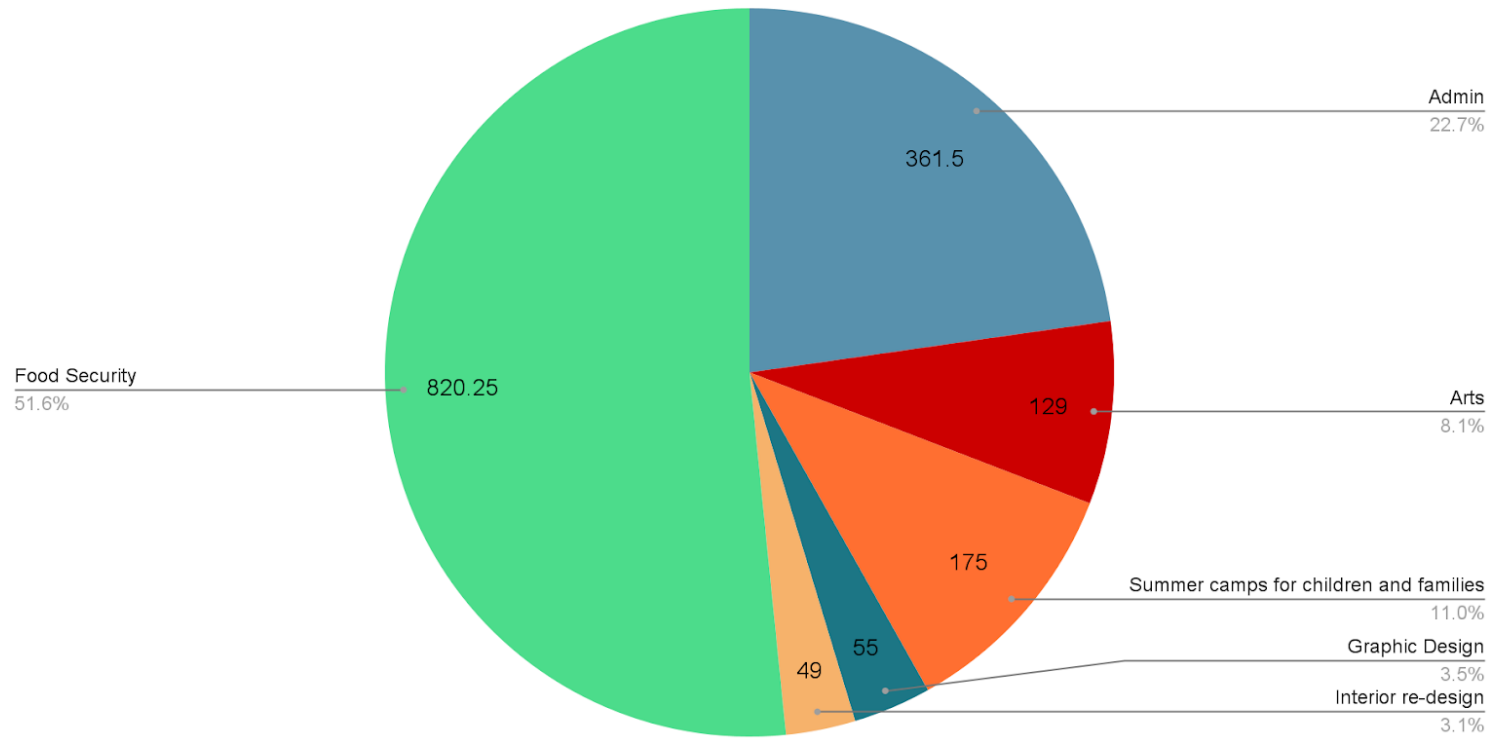


ASCI

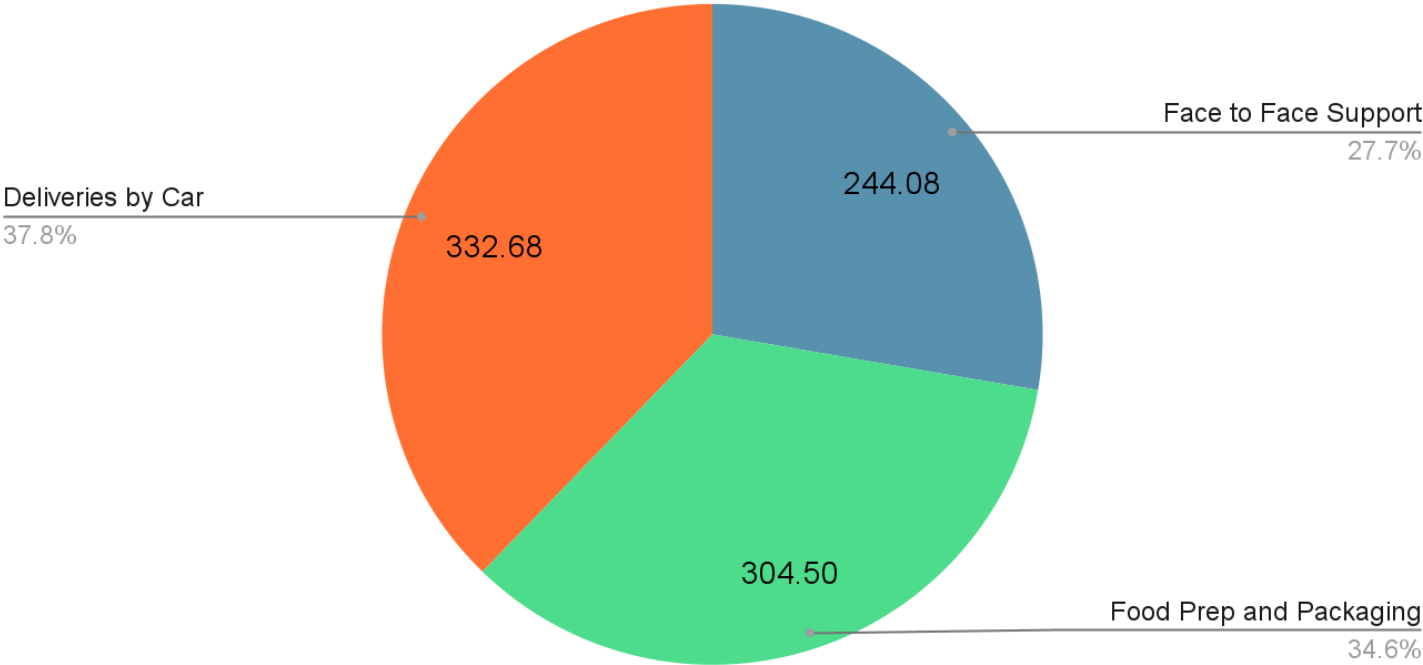
Stats

The ASCI program has dedicated over 1400 hours of support work. Below is a breakdown of the hours committed by artists to the multiple sectors who requested our support.

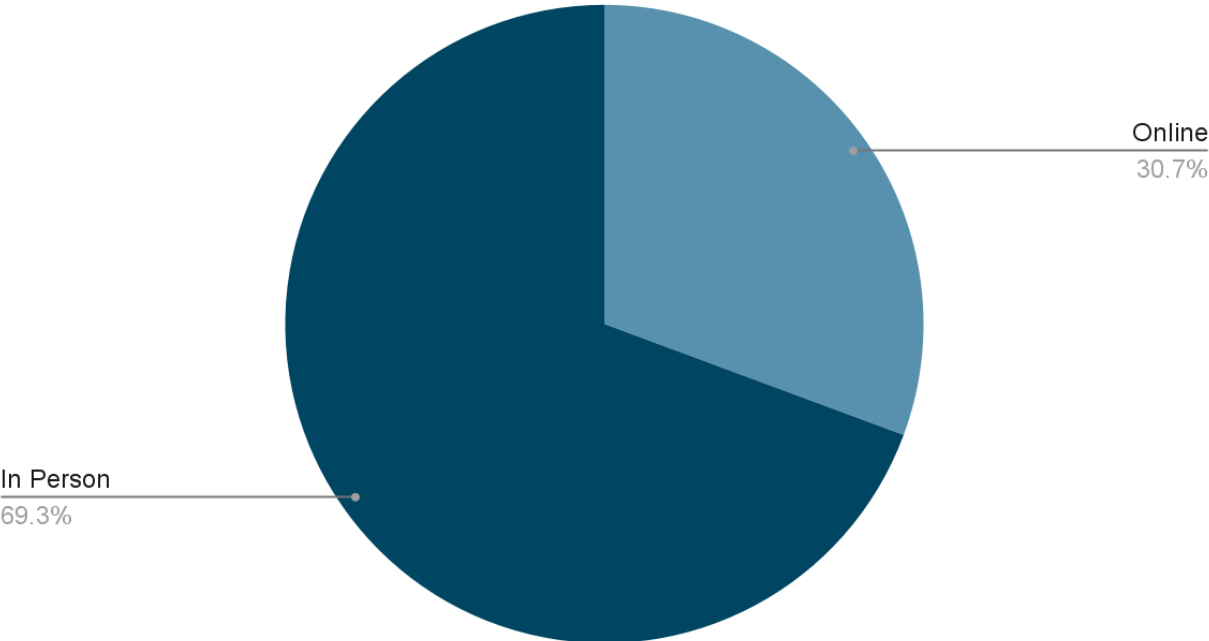
Hours Dedicated



Food Security: Face to Face Support



Online vs In Person





Stats for Infographics (all numbers are approximates):

Children impacted directly: 56 (over the course of three months through online digital workshops and in-person summer camps, June 2020 to August 2020)

Adults and seniors impacted directly: 170 (day-to-day, numbers subject to fluctuate, from July 2020 to March 2021)

Community members impacted indirectly: 455 (weekly, numbers subject to fluctuate, from July 2020 to March 2021)

Community organizations impacted indirectly: 85 (through COVID safe practice engagement infographics, posters released July/ August 2020)

Future community members and residents impacted indirectly: 200 (weekly)





THE REALITIES OF THE ASCI PROGRAM

The ASCI program has given us at SIA a real and honest look at the vulnerable state of the community we are in. Some of those experiences lived out by our ASCI artists and the program itself have been rewarding and sometimes utterly devastating, revealing to us the gravity of just how important the work was that we had done in our community. Being candid, one of the most heartbreaking and eye opening experiences that came across the ASCI program was during our time supporting the Weston Area Emergency Services (WAES) at Eagle Manor, a Toronto Community Housing complex. Two of our artists had been absolute constants in the lives of those at Eagle Manor since September 2020- getting to know the names, faces and the stories of the residents. In late January, early February 2021, one of the regular clients we were serving became unresponsive to weekly calls from WAES regarding their weekly delivery of their food hampers and subsequently became unresponsive to our weekly food box drop offs at their door. To understand, one week of a missed food hamper is not wholly unusual, but a couple weeks did not feel right to the team or myself. We began to inquire after the client each week from friends and neighbours very concerned for the welfare of the client. After a few weeks of our inquiries, we did discover that the client had passed away. When attempting to ensure that our information was correct, we had unknowingly alerted the building's management team, who then did a check on the client. They discovered the client's body in their home, which had been there for several weeks. We have been credited by residents of the building that if it had not been for the ASCI program and the constant inquiries about the client, the client's body would have gone undiscovered for a few more weeks.

The reality for us is this, this experience has heightened our duty of care and awareness that we have become a major extension of care for those we serve. We didn't just deliver hot meals and food hampers. Now more than ever, we deliver constant connection which has allowed the residents to open up to us and trust us. They say we brighten their day, but truth be told, they truly brighten ours.



FINAL THOUGHTS

SIA is grateful for the financial support offered through the Toronto Foundation, Community Foundation of Canada and TD Canada Trust's commitment to supporting arts organizations like ours in the pandemic relief. The importance of cross-sectoral partnerships between the arts and social service sector has become abundantly clear to us. Our partners speak about our enthusiasm, our resourcefulness, and our creative thinking as refreshing energies we uniquely bring to the table. This project has allowed SIA to re-imagine our place as an arts organization in a neighbourhood hotspot, and we have since been invited to partner on the cluster's Vaccine Engagement strategy. Many of the residents we supported spoke about an increase in food support, but mistrust at the different people who would come knocking on their door from various agencies/organizations. Consistency in relationship building feels like a significant part of community support that is not covered so much in these grant metrics. As access to digital was a barrier for many of the residents we supported, we believe emergency community support should also prioritize safe in-person relationship building as a factor that decreases social isolation and increases mental wellness.





THANK YOU



SHAKESPEARE
in Action