



NEWSLETTER

JULY 20th 2017



Check it out for updates on what you can look forward to at Open Streets TO this year!

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE

We interviewed those involved with Open Streets TO to find out what Open Streets means to them, how they came to be involved, and what YOU can expect this year!! Read through to learn more about what these dynamic two days of fun are all about!

VOLUNTEER PROFILE: VERNON..... PG. 3

WORKING GROUP MEMBER PROFILE: DAVID SIMOR..... PG. 4

PROGRAMMING PROFILE: AZERBAIJANI DANCE & MUSIC ENSEMBLE
Interview with Shaghayegh KhodaeiPG. 6

CITY OF TORONTO DIVISION PROFILE: ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY
Interview with Nancy Ruscica, Manager of Partnerships and InnovationPG. 8



VOLUNTEER PROFILE: Vernon

1) So just to start off, could you please just give a bit of background about yourself and how you came to be involved in Open Streets TO as a volunteer.

I am an Airline Employee and a part-time student in the Facility/Property Management program at Ryerson University. I have been volunteering for over 27 years, starting during my college years in Calgary. I spent 10 years volunteering for the Vancouver Marathon, and also during the Winter Olympics in 2010. I have also volunteered for the Pan Am Games in 2015, the Toronto Black Film Festival, the Scotia Waterfront Marathon and the Toronto Triathlon Festival where I met Jeff Chong who invited me to volunteer with Open Streets TO from the very start. Even with such a busy schedule of work, school, etc. I still find time to give back to the community and still enjoy doing so.

2) What does Open Streets TO mean to you and what do you like most about the program?

Open Streets TO to me means for a few hours on a nice Sunday morning where we can all walk, bike, run, skip, sit, or just hang out on two of Toronto's busiest streets for a few hours with no vehicle traffic and enjoy the neighbourhood in a much quieter level than normal.

3) What is your favourite part about volunteering?

I enjoy meeting all the different people in the community, as well as students from Peel Region, for example, who come downtown to work on their volunteer credits. It gives me pleasure to be able to give back to the community and help out as much as I can.

4) Finally, what are you the most excited for this year?

I am looking forward to seeing all the surprised faces of people when they hear that they can walk in the middle of Yonge and Bloor streets for a few hours without having to worry about vehicle traffic. I am also looking forward to hanging out with other volunteers in the community!



WORKING GROUP MEMBER PROFILE: DAVID SIMOR



1) So just to start off, could you please just give a bit of background about yourself, 8 80 Cities, and how you came to be involved in Open Streets TO.

My name is David Simor and I work with 8 80 Cities and am a member of the Open Streets TO Working Group! A little bit about me- I grew up in North York and trained professionally as an actor, but eventually started thinking about my different passions like the city, municipal government, and urban issues which led me to start volunteering and later working with Toronto City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam.

8 80 Cities is a non-profit organization that was founded by Gil Penalosa, a former Commissioner for parks in Bogota, Colombia. The goal of the organization is that if you design a city for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, you'll have an inclusive and accessible city for all.

In relation to Open Streets, Gil was inspired by New York's Central Park and wanted to replicate something similar in Bogota, however, the city did not have the space to create such a large park. Instead, he thought of other ways to create a similar space within the city using what they did have: streets. A small street in Colombia had a more informal Open Streets Program, and Gil saw the potential to make this even larger, creating a pop-up event that stretched 121 km and saw over 1.2 million people participate. When he came to Toronto, he thought it would be a perfect city for an Open Streets Program- it is relatively dense and also flat. When speaking with Councillor Wong-Tam, he told her to visit Guadalajara, Mexico, to check out their Open Streets program. She did, and later became a committed advocate at City Hall for creating a program here. I became the lead on that and fell completely head over heels. The rest is history!

2) Can you please describe the role of the working group more closely and who is involved?

The Open Streets TO Working Group has a core team of 5 people that make the program happen. Jeff, is the Managing Director and brings a wealth of experience to street-based programs as he runs the Toronto Triathlon Festival. Emily, is Executive Director of 8 80 Cities and is an expert with Open Streets Program, advising many cities on how to start their own programs. Alyssa also works with 8 80 Cities, and helps with the programming, coordinates volunteers, and operates the social media. Michelle is a trained urban designer and in charge of programming the activity hubs found along the route. Myself, I primarily work with businesses along the route and community stakeholders to make sure Open Streets operates smoothly! You should be hearing from them in upcoming newsletters! As a small volunteer team, we email and phone call on a daily basis. While we have a lot of work to do, we also have lot of fun which is always an added plus!

3) What does Open Streets TO mean to you? And what is your favourite part of the day/program?

To me, Open Streets TO is a labour of love and passion. It feels like a great way to give back to the city, and contribute something larger than myself. I remember on the first day of the first year of the program, I was with Jeff and we saw a young girl rollerblading for the first time: she was covered in padding, falling every couple steps, but also having the time of her life. It struck me how Open Streets TO enabled her to get out there and try something new, providing a platform to try rollerblading when park space is at a premium. At Open Streets, you can see these moments everywhere and it is wonderful to be a part of something that creates these experiences and memories.

4) Can you please share some of what the working group is working on- is there anything specifically that participants should look out for?

We always talk about how we turn streets into paved parks, so this year, we are really excited to potentially transform a big chunk of Bloor Street into an massive, actual park- stay tuned!!

5) Finally, what are you most excited for this year?

As always, I'm excited to see the program in action! The thing I love the most though is right as the route opens and it's calm and still fairly quiet, standing in the middle of the Bloor and Yonge intersection and thinking, "wow", and just appreciating the city. Now that I gave my secret away, I hope to see you all there!



PROGRAMMING PROFILE: Azerbaijani Dance & Music Ensemble

Interview with Shaghayegh Khodaei

1) So just to start off, could you please just give a bit of background about yourself and how you came to be involved in Open Streets TO.

We are a folk dance and music group with a focus on the dance and music of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus region. Our group has been active since 2006 with dance workshops and performances around Ontario as well as Montreal, Calgary, and other cities. We love dancing and I believe that as a group what we really care about is bringing joy and happiness to our community and to share Azerbaijani dance with the diverse community of Canada. We like participating in workshop-type events where we can meet and engage with new people to become involved. Yalli dance, which is a circle dance where people hold hands and dance in a circle is great for that. Circle dances are found in many different cultures: Azerbaijan, Turkey, Poland, Hungary, Serbia, France, etc.

I stumbled upon Open Streets TO online! I don't remember exactly how I found it but I was probably trying to find events for us to participate in for the summer. What I do remember is that I got very excited about the idea of us dancing on the streets! I brought this up with our group and they also liked the idea a lot and this is how we participated in Open Streets TO 2016 for the first time.



Azerbaijani Dance & Music Ensemble

2) What does Open Streets TO mean to you and what is your favorite part of the program?

To me, Open Streets TO is a wonderful gathering that brings people closer together. People can walk on a road that they normally can't walk on and this little freedom gives them a small creative, out-of-the-box feeling. You are going to walk on this street that's normally blocked to you and look around for new things to participate in. People talk to each other more and I absolutely love that. I love seeing people walk and bike on the road and notice their curious faces when they see our dance! "Hmmm this looks exciting! Should I join? Should I not join?" Last year, we had so many people join- from kids to seniors! We even had a dog come in to our dance circle, which was quite funny. Open Streets gives the opportunity to each person to both give and take something from the different programs that are available.

3) It sounds like you have some great activities planned this year, do you mind sharing some of them and what participants have to look forward to?

Of course! Usually our music group starts getting everyone excited by playing music. And then our group leader, Samad, starts teaching everyone some dance moves. We are planning to start off by Yalli dance, which is a circle dance where participants hold hands and dance around in a circle. The steps are relatively easy and even if someone can't follow the steps, they can still be part of the circle by walking rhythmically to the beat. Nobody becomes the spotlight and everyone is part of the group! I remember how I loved this when I first started dancing Yalli as I was very shy and the circle dance gave me the opportunity to have fun and feel safe at the same time!

We dance with both slow and fast music and usually everyone gets quite sweaty. After the circle dance, there is also the opportunity for people to dance with their own style to the music. Dancing outside on the street is great.

4) Finally, what are you the most excited for this year?

I think we are just so excited to be dancing on the street! And seeing how many people will show up and what warmth they bring to our event is something we are looking forward to!



CITY DIVISION PARTNER PROFILE: ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

Interview with Nancy Ruscica, Manager of Partnerships and Innovation

1) So just to start off, could you please just give a bit of background about yourself, Environment and Energy, Live Green, and how you came to be involved with Open Streets TO.

My name is Nancy and I am the Manager of Partnerships and Innovation with the City of Toronto's Environment and Energy Division and manage the Live Green Program. We provide resources and rebates, as well as tips and tools to help residents and businesses take action on environmental issues, reduce emissions, and protect the climate.

Live Green consists of a variety of different activities to engage the public, having over 1600 volunteers providing 500 hours of services to the city, speaking over 100 languages. They are a fantastic resource for us as we have over 150 events a year. We also have the Live Green Card Program, which is a tool that connects the cardholder to 500 business for deals and discounts on green products and services combining both resident and business engagement. For more information about different programs we offer, and partners, check out our one stop website!

We became involved in Open Streets TO because it seemed like a perfect fit with our mandate. We love being able to engage, discuss, and have one-on-one conversations – and a street closure like this is a great opportunity for us.

2) Building off that, what does Open Streets TO mean to you? And what is your favourite part of the day/program?

Open Streets TO really aligns with the goals of Live Green Toronto. We love being involved and having the ability to be visible and interact with a wide variety of audiences. Live Green is out and about this summer at different events and program across the city to have that visibility and interact with people they may not otherwise interact with. One of my favourite parts is being able to reach out to new people we haven't met before, as well as the folks we talk to on a regular basis.



3) It sounds like you have some great activities planned this year, do you mind sharing some of them and what participants have to look forward to?


Yes! We have lots of fun and family friendly activities planned for Open Streets TO this year! We are going to have a Family Fun Green Zone that will be kids focused. Our staff and volunteers will be coordinating real hands on eco-activities like making pollinator puppets, decorating reusable lunch bags, and creating take-home seed planting activities- all geared to making a connection for kids between the environment and nature, as well as showing them how they can get hands on and involved. Keep your eyes out for our Live Green tent and cozy seating area with umbrellas – makes the perfect picnic spot. And keep your ears open for some live music too!

4) Finally, what are you the most excited for this year?

To be out on the streets, engaging with the public, and seeing kids and families have fun!

Live
green
Toronto





Don't miss out on the fun! Hop on over to
<https://www.openstreetsto.org>
and get excited!

If you have a cool, innovative, or just plain awesome activity that promotes healthy living, city building, or that encourages people to get moving (to name a few), check out
<https://www.openstreetsto.org/activity-hubs>
to see how you can be part of making this year's Open Streets program the best yet!

Think this is an awesome event and want to help maximize the fun? Open Streets is also looking for some enthusiastic volunteers to help us out!

If this sounds like you, skip on over to
<https://www.openstreetsto.org/get-involved>
for more information!

STAY TUNED FOR MORE NEWSLETTERS

SEE YOU AUGUST 20th AND SEPTEMBER 17th 2017!!