

# OPEN STREETS TO

**NEWSLETTER**  
**August 10th 2017**



We're almost a week away!! Check out this issue  
for more of what YOU can expect 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!

**CITY OF TORONTO PROFILE:** SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, FINANCE & ADMIN.....PG. 3  
Interview with Jedrek So, Community Development Officer, Tower & Neighbourhood Revitalization

**VOLUNTEER PROFILE:** MOLLY WILLATS.....PG. 5

**WORKING GROUP MEMBER PROFILE:** MICHELLE SENAYAH.....PG. 7

**PROGRAMMING PARTNER PROFILE:** CJRU 1280AM .....PG. 9  
Interview with Noah Sniderman



# CITY OF TORONTO PROFILE: Social Development, Finance & Administration

Interview with Jedrek So, Community Development Officer, Tower & Neighbourhood Revitalization

## **1) So just to start off, could you please give a bit of background about yourself, the Social Development, Finance and Administration Division, and how you came to be involved with Open Streets TO.**

I am a community development officer for the City of Toronto Tower and Neighbourhood Revitalization Unit for the Social Development, Finance and Administration Division. Tower Renewal is a city wide strategy that targets Toronto's older apartment towers and the neighbourhoods that surround them, by focusing on improving the environmental, social, economic, and cultural changes in the community.

Toronto has over 500,000 people residing in mid-century apartments. 43% of residents have low-income and 25% of residents are newcomers. Therefore, car ownership in these apartment communities is low. Incidence of diabetes and heart disease is high. Use of bicycles increases fitness and provides practical low cost transportation.

Tower Renewal became involved with Open Streets TO as another outlet to promote and support cycling culture in apartment tower communities that helps derive social, economic, health and environmental benefits.

## **2) What does Open Streets TO mean to you? What is your favourite part of the day/program?**

As mentioned, Open Streets TO provides Tower Renewal another outlet to promote and support cycling culture in apartment tower communities. Our favorite part of the day is that it allows us to further encourage community groups and leaders to discuss cycling-related issues and challenges, explore best practices, and share successes of community bicycle hub programs at such networking events.



**3) We see you're teaming up with the Wellesley Community Centre! Do you mind sharing some of the activities SDFA has planned and what participants have to look forward to?**

- Bicycle Safety and Repair booth with Tower Renewal
- Ball Hockey
- Arts & Crafts (Face painting)
- Chess

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

I am most excited about how Open Streets TO links Toronto's diverse neighbourhoods together by closing down main streets making them accessible for everyone to celebrate and promote healthy lifestyles.





# VOLUNTEER PROFILE: MOLLY WILLATS

## 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.

The first year that Open Streets ran I was working with Councillor Wong-Tam's office, which is how I found out about the event. I volunteered to help out with outreach to businesses and then to act as one of the area captains on the day of the event. I've been volunteering with Open Streets ever since!

I recently graduated with my MA from the University of Toronto in Geography and Planning. I'm a bit of an urban nerd - I love cities, and I love this city particularly. My research was not about active transportation, but it was about urban accessibility broadly speaking - how do we ensure our cities are affordable, equitable and accessible for all of our communities and community members? It's a big question, but I think projects like Open Streets are important and have a part to play. Plus, Toronto is a great place, a beautiful city, and I love how Open Streets disrupts our regular experience of the city and gives people a chance to maybe see some of that beauty in a different way.

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

I guess I started to answer that above. It is one way of thinking about, and answering questions around, how we tackle questions of affordability, equity, and accessibility in our city. Does it solve the growing levels of disparity in Toronto? No, of course not. But I think it disrupts business as usual in terms of how we view one of our most substantial pieces of public infrastructure and extensive networks of public space - our streets! It asks us to think differently about their purpose, who has a right to use them and how. We start to think...does our city have to look the way it does? It creates a space for questioning accepted dogma around infrastructure and transportation planning, and if we can question whether we should really plan streets for cars first, what else can we question about public space planning?!

I was born and raised in Toronto and I have been biking all over this city since I can remember. I think you see the city in a really unique way when you're on a bike - at once intimate and removed. On the street hearing all the noises, smelling all the smells, feeling the wind and weather and bumps in the road, but also flying through it all as fast or as slow as you want. I wish everyone could see Toronto by bike, but a lot of people can't because they don't feel safe biking on our streets in traffic. Even the bike lanes on busy streets like Bloor or Bay can be overwhelming. Open Streets gives people who wouldn't otherwise bike on Bloor or Yonge a chance to see the city by bike.



**3) What is your favourite part about volunteering?**

So many things! I get to be outside all day on my bike. I get to work with a group of students from Peel every year who have given up a whole day of their weekend to help out. I love seeing the students who really get into the day, and the students who are shy but put themselves out there and chat with people at the event anyway. I get to work with the amazing organizing team. I get to talk to people from all over the city who have come out to be part of the day. I get to tell people who haven't heard about the event before that they are, in fact, allowed to walk in the middle of the road. I see kids with their families out on bikes. People dancing and doing yoga in the middle of the street. What's not to love?

And as much as I'm not a morning person, it is pretty cool to bike down the middle of a Bloor St empty of cars first thing in the morning as we set up for the event.

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

This year I'm actually most excited about \*not\* volunteering one of the days! Because I volunteer every year I haven't actually ever had a chance to explore the whole route and stop and take part in activities, so this year I will be volunteering on the first day in August and then joining as an event goer in September. I'm really excited to get to explore all of the amazing activities and to bike up the middle of Yonge Street :)



**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**

I'm an architect and urban designer by training, and so far in my career, I've been really focused on public space. I approached Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam back in late 2012/early 2013 as I wanted to run pop up spaces and I knew that she was interested in improving her ward's laneways. I had actually previously worked on a couple of experimental public space projects like the Celebrate Yonge project to partly pedestrianize Yonge street with her. She told me that they were starting a project called Ciclovía, which Open Streets was first called at that time, and she asked if I could come do pop up events in that space, which is how I got into the programming piece of Open Streets.

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

To me, Open Streets means, or what it symbolizes, is a willingness to think creatively about how we use our public space: to recognize that it doesn't need to be the same thing all times of day, all days of the year, and that it doesn't need to be only for one type of user. It means recognizing the fact that our spaces exist 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year, and that if we are smart about how we can allocate our time, so to speak, we can actually help to make sure that as our city grows, that it is growing well, and that it is growing in a way that has a vibrant public life and spaces for people to come together.

I guess my favourite moment for Open Streets was in 2014 and experiencing the program actually happening for the first time. I remember that first day when I was riding my bike between hubs to make sure the programming was going well, and while riding my bike down the yellow centre line realizing "yes", we did it! I think I ended up biking 64 km over the course of that day.



**3) As the Programming Director for Open Streets TO, can you please describe the activity hubs and what participants should look out for!**

Broadly speaking, the point of the activity hubs is to give people an excuse to stop along the route, rather than just biking and roller blading through, to enable people to enjoy the recreational space, rather than traffic space. It allows people to stop and connect, even in a transient way, with each other. The idea is that each of these hubs are animated by Torontonians, so different groups, organizations, businesses, with most of them based in and around the hubs where they are located, but also from other areas in the city, leading activities that are free for all participants in Open Streets. Whether these are exercise classes, or music performances, or dance classes, or dental hygiene workshops, or arts and crafts, or road hockey, they should all be interactive and open to all comers. As well, the hubs are fairly evenly spaced along the route. One of the unique things about Toronto is its dense diversity of neighbourhoods - by going through so many, the hubs give the opportunity to see the flavour of each one, even if each hub isn't solely animated by those neighbourhood groups.

**4) As part of the Laneway Project and an urban designer, could you please explain the role of urban design in shaping public spaces? How is this applied to Open Streets TO?**

My interest in urban design has always been the two-way conversation between the space and the people that use it, because the way the space is designed and regulated actually impacts how people use a space, or how they think they can use it. It is also about how people use spaces differently to meet their needs. So for me, urban design, whether it is Open Streets which is super pop up in nature, or The Laneway Project, or even a more conventional urban design project for an area, the key is figuring out what is the range of what people can do and want to do in the space, and who wants to do it, and then making sure that the physical design or the regulation framework, or realistically in combination, are providing the base condition that enable people to use the space how they want to. It is not about prescribing what happens in that space, but figuring out what are the no-brainers that need to happen there, or that need to be in place, to enable people to do what they want to do in a space.

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

I'm excited for the density and variety of activities, and how the different activities in all of the hubs will come together- it's going to be pretty fabulous. There will be at least six or seven activities in each hub, in some cases up to 11 or 12, and all completely different things. So yes, I'm just really excited to see these series of windows into Toronto. Returning to my point about having the right stuff in place to facilitate the use of a space, this is the fourth year we are doing Open Streets, so it's been really interesting observing the changes in the hubs and activities that result from the different tweaks that we've made to the organizing and physical framework of the



**1) So just to start off, could you please just give a bit of background about yourself and the Scope?**

CJRU has been on air just over a year at Ryerson, but has been an organization for several years! I started volunteering in the fall as I wanted to do a standup comedy documentary and was looking for support and resources to get it going, and found that here, as well with an awesome community of students and community members all volunteering and making some really cool stuff. So it's a campus community radio station, so students and community members can pitch a show!

**2) That's great you guys are students and getting that visibility! What motivated the station to get involved with Open Streets TO?**

We have this idea for an audio time capsule with regard to Canada 150. So, we want to create a project where we ask people what they see for the next 150 years of Canada, and Open Streets TO seemed like a great event to launch the project at because there will be lots of foot traffic and visibility to talk to people.


**3) The time capsule sounds like a really cool idea! Do you mind sharing some of them and what participants have to look forward to?**

Basically we are going to have a portable recording studio set up and we're going to invite people recording themselves expressing their wishes for the next 150 years, and will bring it together at the end in a project idea. We're going to be located at Yonge and Gerrard which is awesome because our station is basically at Church and Gould, so right by there!

**4) Finally, what does Open Streets TO mean to you and what are you the most excited for this year?**

What's really exciting is the opportunity to engage with the community right by our radio station and also to be able to reach out to the larger Toronto community and see what their wishes are for the next 150 years! We will have a silver radio tower that people can identify us with.





Don't miss out on the fun! Skip on over to  
<https://www.openstreetsto.org>  
to see more of what we have planned!

There's still some time left to submit a proposal for an activity hub. If you have an interactive activity you want to share with Toronto, check out  
<https://www.openstreetsto.org/activity-hubs>  
and apply before Sunday, August 13th or September 10th for the next one!

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

If this sounds like you, bike 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  
to experience Toronto from a new perspective!**