



**Facilitating Transformative Social Change:  
A public health response to community violence**

Monday, April 30, 2018

10am - 2pm

G Building Humber College Lakeshore Campus

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## Summary

50 attendees shared the day with us.

### Panelists:

1. Zya Browne, Program Director, *Think Twice*, [www.think2.org](http://www.think2.org)
2. Elizabeth Correia, Founder, The *D.e.v.a In You* Group, <https://www.elizabethcorreia.com/>
3. Dr. Alok Mukherjee, Distinguished Visiting Professor, Ryerson University & Former Chair, Toronto Police Services Board
4. Chris Glover, Trustee, Ward 2, Etobicoke Centre
5. Louis March, Founder, *Zero Gun Violence Movement*, [zerogunviolence-movement.com/](http://zerogunviolence-movement.com/)
6. Scott McKean, Manager of Community Development, Safety & Well-being for the *City of Toronto*

### Agenda:

10:00am – Welcome – Arthur Lockhart

10:10am – 11:30am – Panelists

11:30am-12:00pm – Lunch Break

12:00pm-1:30pm – Open Space

1:30pm-2:00pm – Defining next steps

***"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."***  
**James Baldwin**

***"The greatest security we can have is created through healthy relationships."*** Arthur Lockhart

***"Like the infectious diseases in our history, violence is better understood and more successfully treated as an epidemic."*** Cure Violence

## Theme Statement of the Meeting

*In essence the day is dedicated to engaging in meaningful actions aimed at transforming the cycle of community violence-*

*And in order to do this it can be instructive to explore violence not exclusively through the lens of criminal justice but by way of exploring violence as the manifestation of trauma. And trauma is best approached as a relational matter of public health.*

*A wonderful book on trauma and transformative social change can be found at:*

<http://www.traumaandnonviolence.com/chapter1.html>

*According to the author Steve Wineman:*

*Understanding trauma can help us to articulate what is deeply wrong with the current society. **Personal suffering is the most basic reason for social change.***

*Understanding trauma can help us to mobilize rage in the service of nonviolent social change.*

There is much less recognition that *oppression is generically traumatizing.*

Racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and economic brutality all routinely violate people's integrity and repeatedly render people powerless in the face of overwhelming personal and institutional forces. The social experience of people of color, gay people, women, workers, poor people, children, and disabled people is saturated with abuse, humiliation, violence, and negation of personal worth. As Aurora Levins Morales argues, "abuse is the local eruption of systemic oppression, and oppression the accumulation of millions of small systematic abuses."

Trauma belies myths that people are immune to destructive social environments, that anyone can emerge unscathed and through hard work succeed, and conversely that those who don't succeed are to blame for their own failures. The study of trauma can teach us that ours is a society in which *toxic social conditions* create psychological and physical illness by routinely traumatizing people. It teaches that a society organized around domination is bankrupt not only because it spawns enormous material inequality, violence, and oppressive power relations, but also because it degrades the quality of individual lives on a massive scale through the mechanism of trauma.

Expanding on the exploration of community violence and trauma, additional thought and comments have emerged in conversations as we prepared for this meeting including:

1. *Address poverty. Reverse the growing gap between rich and poor*
2. *Understand what's happening. The mainstream narrative is about bad individuals, about guns and gangs. This feeds into a punitive police response. It does nothing to change the survival culture that feeds the cycle of violence. It doesn't give young men an alternative to picking up a gun in order to get respect.*
3. *Empower people in the communities. Programs should be run by people from the communities and inside the prisons. Recruit them as mentors and as peace negotiations. Focus on Restorative, Transformative Community Justice Facilitation Processes*
4. *Address the trauma. Take a public health approach – treat the anger, aggression, fear, anxiety, depression and PTSD.*
5. *Could Torontonians, who have shown such heart after the Yonge St. and Finch Ave. horror, be persuaded to extend their compassion to marginalized communities repeatedly torn apart by tragedy that is often inflicted by law enforcement?*
6. *To not see protestations against violence as divisive or the violence as deserved?*
7. *In our moment of vulnerability, are we able to empathize with the perpetually vulnerable?"*  
[sparadkar@thestar.ca](mailto:sparadkar@thestar.ca)
8. *Gun violence is increasing in the city, and the word on the street is that it's going to get worse. There are more guns in the hands of younger people and they are not restrained by affiliations with older community members. I know that you do not want growing gun violence to be your legacy. When you came into office in 2014, there were 180 shootings, 196 victims and 27 gun deaths in Toronto. The numbers have been increasing steadily and*

last year there were 392 shootings, 591 victims and 39 gun deaths.

As you are aware the number of shootings in the city has more than doubled since 2014 and now far exceeds the number during the 2005 "summer of the gun".

**Trauma is best approached as a relational matter of public health and transformative social change.**

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.

As a comprehensive approach to progressive social change, transformative change seeks to distinguish itself from conventional social change and social justice, and their respective organizing practices by placing emphasis on personal, organizational, and systemic change that creates a state of "deep meaningful change."

**What is Transformation?**

“Transformation – A process whereby we move over time to reformulate our structures for making meaning, usually through reconstructing dominant narratives or stories. This provides us with a more dependable way to make meaning within our lives, since we are questioning our own points of view, looking and reflecting on alternate points of view and often creating a new, more reliable and meaningful way of knowing that may be different from our old habits of the mind. This requires us to become open to others points of view, and to be able to reflect on new points of view and information and often go back and reconstruct what we know and how we know it” - Jack Mezirow

*So the question for all of us to engage is:*

**How to create healthy relationships as a response to manifestations of community violence?**

## Open Group Discussions

### Group 1: State Violence

- How we at the individual level react to situations of state violence
- Child welfare systems
- Indigenous Residential Schools
- Identity creates a ripple effect
  - They fight and struggle with who they are
- Without family structure identity can manipulate
- Economic status
- State representing a norm that certain individuals may not be a part of
- All violence starts at a state level
- Violence is imposed
- Foster care violence – school violence
  - Institutions are violent to begin with
- Deviation from situations bring out reactions
- Safe and compassionate schools program
  - In families where parents are not around much, single parents, parents constantly working = poorer families
    - Children become target of police attention
      - Targets are ones that deviate from the norm
- The norm forces people to conform without taking a look at people who have different methods of work – learning etc.
- Being labelled out of the norm
- Schools – obedience is imposed – not always realistic
- State violence starts at the top – political, etc.
- Systems create fiction

### Group 2: Leadership

- Stewart → Empowered
  - Anna → Optimistic
  - Tonya → Hopeful, ambitious
  - Mechanda → Grateful
  - Zada → Hopeful
  - Maria → Humble
  - Louis → Still looking
  - Ushnish → Committed
- Substance
  - Determination

- No part of their work that is easy
- Self-care – don't think that you're invincible because you will be challenged
- Swimming
- Status quo – comfort zone – challenge it – resistance
- Systemic institutional structures
  - If you're going to make change – it's not a walk through a rose garden
  - There's going to be challenge
  - Understand the reality – pushing against systems that have been operating for years
- Experience of doing something for a long time – been through it – adds value to the work ethic
- What a textbook tells you will be different from the street
- Getting someone of similar status talking to them
- Build trust with the community
  - “We play you”
- Someone who can cut through the layers
  - People – with experience
  - Grounded → well → rounded – heart in the right place → learning to integrate
- Combination of well-rounded knowledge and skills
- Being able to see capacity in others
  - Foster capacity
    - How do you get to have that leader?
    - Can't quantify it
    - Continuous learning – open to new experiences
    - Opportunities for success
    - Racism is out there
- Experience – mentorship
  - Those with experiences have learned (work with)
    - Domino effect – live that
- “Shared leadership” → not dependent on a course
- Notion I can offer something to somebody else
- Decentralized leadership
- Shift in the mindset of what leadership is
- Scattered leadership
- Too much power too quick
- Advocate for those – open the door – help others
- Central figure
- Look in the mirror for the leader
- There's a new generation of what is a leader
- Not recognized: individual acts of kindness
- #ZGVM – not president/office
  - Hids – leadership – leaders of tomorrow

- You can lead today
- Compassion → don't have to change that
- Different ways → programs → that market leaders
- People intentionally excluded from being leaders
  - For example: Aboriginal studies – IPV – Indigenous culture
    - Anybody can make change
- Leadership = initiative → parents not able to provide socio-economic opportunities
- If you don't have support systems, less opportunity
- Motivation
  - Have to believe in yourself
- Schools training followers or leaders
- Shift in some spaces
  - Void of hearing those voices
- Learn from all others in experience
  - Opportunity
- Engagement – love to have people developing things
- Awareness – what resources are available – sometimes they don't know
- Who are the leaders – in the schools
- Streams in education – politics
- Leadership
  - Gatekeepers – remove the gatekeepers
  - Self-care → young people have to be part of the change → solutions
- Social norm
  - Looking to one person
- People who do small things don't get recognized
- Both → leaders
- Trained to be followers
- Foster skill sets & provide opportunities to all – not just the kids in private schools
  - Encourage
- Programming for kids – keep active, engaged
  - Find free events – engage in community
  - Organized
- School is not enough to be a leader
  - Sports teams develop skills including
- Zada → leaders are both born and taught
- \*Marvin Samuel
  - marvellousworshops@gmail.com

### **Group 3: Community, Lived Experience, and Knowledge Translation**

- School was a saving grace (it was a privilege)

- People were targeted when they were at a young age
- People need a sense of connection with others in order to live
- How should people approach people being abused?
- How do we change society to make it better?
  - Where do we start?
- Society is not where it should be
- Helping young girls be aware about teenage pregnancy, gangs
- Without trust we can't move forward (people need a mentor)
- You need to talk about the emotional aspects of a person
- There is shame in poverty – it's the shame that people want to overcome
- Building trust in the community (lack of trust)
- People are trapped
- People need support from the community in order for them to survive
- Trust begins when a community cares
- Libraries have a role to play (free, public space, access to resources, not stigmatizing)
- Libraries were a house for most people
- Most schools end at 2 or 3 but most work shifts end at 6 or 7 (giant gap)
- Access points could be libraries, and after school programs
- Parents are designed to be role models
- Adults should have a culture building throughout the community (making them more aware)
- Getting people to vote to make their community more efficient
- Highlighting the issues that matter to people
- To create change we have to identify the problem
- Jobs, foods, safety, housing is what should be highlighted – not more basketball courts
- Informing youth about their political rights
- Making everyone more aware of certain situations
- Systemic bias plays a part
- The issue is people are being overlooked by the colour of their skin
- TDSB needs to implement new programs for people of colour and people with mental disabilities

#### **Group 4: Restorative and Retributive Justice, Incarceration, and Community Action**

##### **ISSUES BROUGHT FORWARD**

- Incarceration
  - The criminal justice system pressures people to plea guilty
  - There is a lack of resources and education for those facing charges and those incarcerated
  - Coming out of prison there is no sense of employment or support
    - Overall, resources are lacking



- When people leave prisons there needs to be a focus on reintegration
  - There needs to be hope, second (or more) chances, etc.
  - There needs to be a focus on where people can go, rather than what they did to get into the prison system
- Support offered to communities and individuals
  - Support needs to be trustworthy
    - Authoritarian support doesn't work
  - Support needs to be individualized
    - There is no one-size-fits-all for support
    - We need to meet people where they are
      - For example, people who have been incarcerated may be institutionalized. This needs to be recognized and addressed
    - Resources need to fit the individual's needs
  - We need to listen to people
- Stigma
  - Stigma has a huge impact on people
  - People who have been incarcerated often face stigma upon re-entry into society
  - Change must start from within
    - People need to address their biases
    - People need to be open-minded and non-judgmental
- Lack of funding
  - Important to remember that overall there may be funding, but there is a lack of funding for certain groups
    - For example, "Think Twice" runs off of solely volunteers and has no funding
  - This is a systemic issue
  - There is a lack of funding in particular for racialized groups
  - No wonder there is recidivism
- Lack of recognition for certain organizations
  - For example, "Think Twice" is not an accredited program within the prison system
  - There are barriers for the organization and also for those incarcerated who want to participate since their participation is not considered for parole given that the program is not accredited
  - "The system" is designed for certain people (i.e., White, European individuals) so certain organizations and populations may be ignored
- Lack of space within prisons
  - The "Amadeusz" Program has found that there is a lack of space, in particular classroom space, to work with within the prison system
  - This leads to organizations fighting for the same space
- Losing motivation once individuals leave the prison system
  - Once out of the prison system, individuals need to have a lot of back and forth with different organizations

- Many lose motivation to pursue education once they are back in their communities
- Individual barriers
  - Parole and probation requirements may be impossible to meet
  - People may not be able to achieve all of the things required of them if their individual circumstances and resources available to them are not considered

## PROGRAMS DISCUSSED

- “Think Twice”
  - Volunteers form strong relationships with those currently incarcerated
    - Builds respect and rapport between volunteers, community members, and those in prison
    - Provides culturally sensitive services
    - Focuses on skills needed to reintegrate back into society
    - Very humanizing
      - Focuses on the fact that people in prison can reintegrate and become leaders in the community
  - Some opportunities that are run through the prison include:
    - Involving youth to hear the stories and experiences of those incarcerated
    - Allowing those incarcerated the opportunity to be mentors
    - Giving youth the opportunity to see where they don’t want to be
    - Allowing youth to experience truth from these participants
    - Organizing plays and skits in the prison that involve inmates, community members, and youth
      - Gives men hope
      - Draws on relatable stories
        - For example, the “Story of Three Kings.” This is based off of the “Three Little Pigs” story and involves a king who built his house on drug money, one who built his house from robberies, and another who built it the right way
      - Fosters respect between those incarcerated and community members
  - Some things noticed while working within the prison system
    - Loneliness is rampant within the system
    - For people locked up for long periods of time there are negative psychological and social implications
    - If people are treated like animals, they will act like animals; if people are treated like human beings, they will act like human beings
    - You can see the light in the eyes of those incarcerated when people take the time to come see them and have contact with them
      - A lot of these individuals are forgotten
      - Many don’t have visitors on a regular basis

- It is not a one-sided relationship with those incarcerated solely benefiting from the volunteers
      - Volunteers gain strength and energy from the people in the prison system and the relationships they form with them
    - Volunteers are received well by those incarcerated
      - It's not like what is seen on TV where these people appear to be monsters
    - It is important to remember that those who are incarcerated are our fathers, uncles, brothers, etc.
    - If you experience this opportunity to go into the prisons and interact with people "you will be changed"
  - "Kings to Kings" program
    - Reconstructs the image of young men in certain neighbourhoods
      - The image of certain individuals being "ghetto," "criminal," etc.
    - Challenges older narratives by helping young men realize that they are kings
    - The program "polishes the crowns" that they already have
    - Involves mentors with lived experience from these communities
    - Youth want to and can become leaders
- "Youth Violence Prevention Plan"
  - Important to involve and hire those who have lived within the communities they are serving
  - When examining this issue, remember that females are equally suffering
  - Youth equity as a major focus
    - Education
    - Awareness of what is being done to counter violence
    - Addressing the roots of violence
  - Re-integration within schools
    - Instead of just sending children home on suspension or expulsion, consider alternatives
      - For example, in-school suspensions
    - Creating plans for children on how they can re-integrate back into the school after a transgression
  - Focus on creating safe spaces within schools
  - Look at mental health and well-being
    - Trauma changes a person's mindset
  - Look at the family and generational cycles of violence
  - Focus on leveraging resources available rather than recreating what is already out there
- "Amadeusz" Program
  - Works within the prison system to engage and support incarcerated youth
- "HairTalk" Program
  - Provides support to women who have been involved in the prison system

## MAJOR QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How can we make invisible groups visible?
- How do we connect this to schools?
  - How can we get programs within prison to count as transferable credits for post-secondary school?
- How can we get programs within prisons (for example, “Think Twice”) accredited and recognized?
- How can those who have been in the prison system find support?

## WAYS FORWARD

- Involve the community more
  - Involving more community members can be hugely impactful
  - If as a community we take responsibility for individuals involved with the criminal justice system and care about their reintegration this could make a huge difference
  - So why have we not done this? We often don’t identify with people behind bars. We need to work on community building and addressing barriers
- Ensure integration and partnerships between organizations
  - Organizations fighting one another is not helpful
  - Need for a “holistic approach”
    - Collaboration instead of division
    - Working together so that organizations know where individuals should go for what services
    - The “Youth Violence Prevention Plan” has started doing this by using focus tables to integrate different community organizations
      - A barrier to this, however, may be police involvement. Distrust for police may make some uncomfortable with bringing community issues forward. Cases discussed in these settings most often do not involve identifying the names of individuals in contact with the law, so this may help people feel more comfortable with police presence
- Change the model of punishment within schools
  - Restorative justice may be more effective and appropriate within these settings
  - Often expulsions and suspensions punish parents who have to take off work to oversee their children
  - Retributive models have been problematic historically
    - For example, the “Zero Tolerance Policy” ended up sending predominantly children of colour and children with mental health away from the schools
  - Implementing curriculum in teacher’s college that teaches empathy, information about trauma, and how to properly treat children is another important step forward
- Offer different education and career opportunities for individuals who have been in contact with the criminal justice system

- For example, for someone who has committed an offence, being given the opportunity to train as an apprentice and get stable employment can be life changing
- Help in resource navigation
  - Some individuals, for example an individual with autism, may be given a “navigator” to help them navigate the different resources available for them
  - Perhaps a “navigator” for individuals re-entering society after leaving prison would be helpful
- Update policies
  - For example, requiring someone leaving prison to use a phone booth to call different agencies or fulfill parole requirements is outdated since phone booths are basically non-existent now
- Encourage genuine listening
  - Before figuring out resources for an individual, listen to them
  - Go to the roots of their trauma and understand what they need as an individual, then figure out resource navigation
- Offer supports at the family level
  - Many families want to help their family members but don’t have the tools or resources to do so
  - It isn’t that they don’t care, it’s that they aren’t equipped to deal with these issues or they don’t know their rights
  - There is a need to offer resources and supports to families so that they can then support their children and other family members
- Keep pushing regardless of the barriers you encounter
  - The system may seem impenetrable or too big to fix
  - We are all creating small ruptures in this system with the work we do
  - These seemingly small actions can have a HUGE impact on changing the system for the better

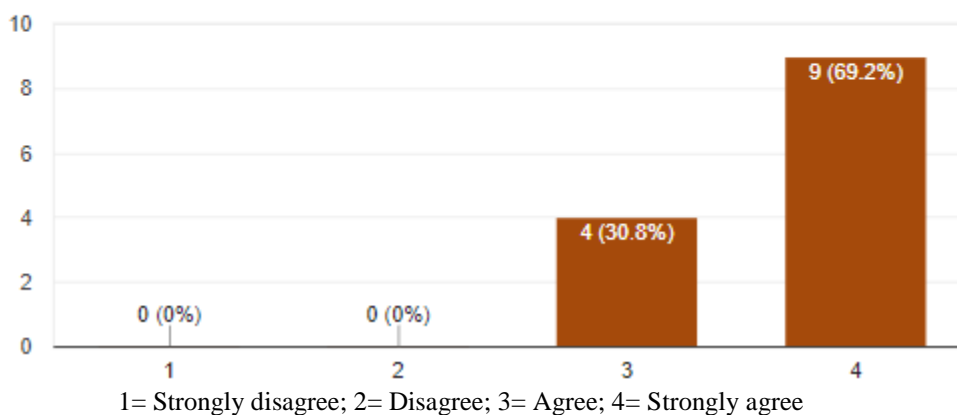
## Participant Feedback

### Highlights

All evaluation participants agreed or strongly agreed that the meeting provided clear objectives, that the content discussed/presented matched these objectives, that the knowledge and skills gained from the meeting and the open space were relevant and useful, and that they would recommend this meeting for a friend or colleague.

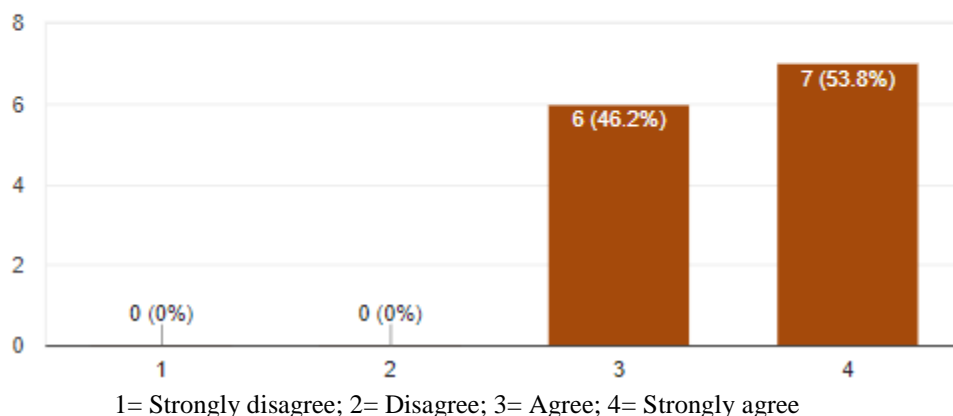
#### The meeting provided clear objectives

13 responses



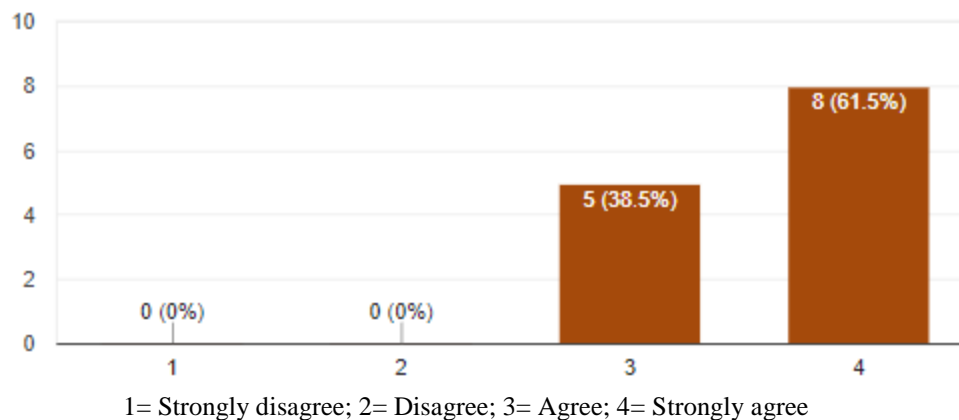
#### Content discussed/presented matches the meeting objectives

13 responses



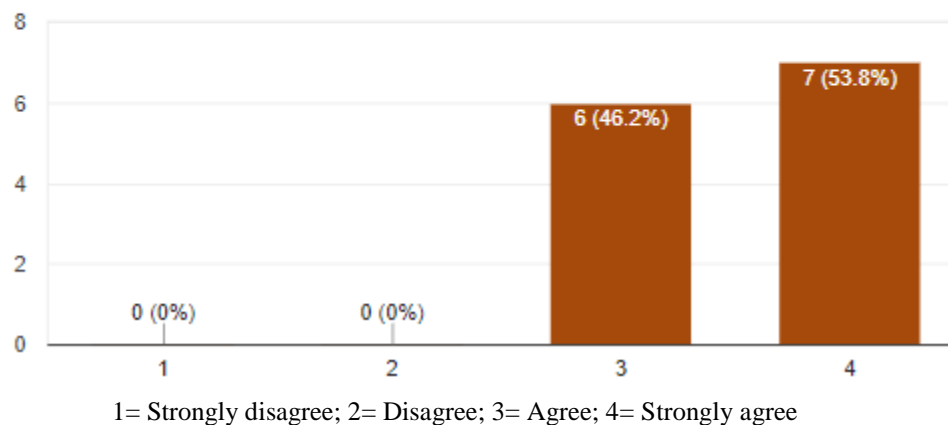
## Knowledge and skills gained from the meeting were relevant and useful

13 responses



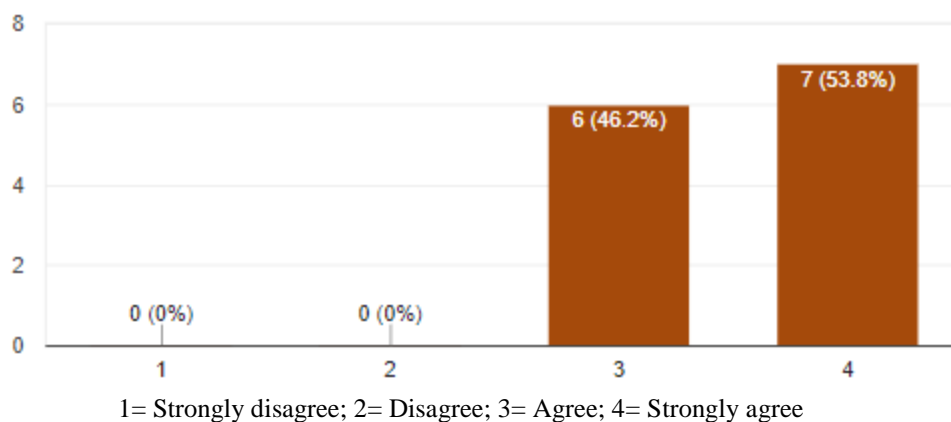
## Knowledge and skills gained from the open space were relevant and useful

13 responses



## I would recommend this meeting for a friend/colleague

13 responses



### Participant Voices

*"I just wanted to say thank you so much for encouraging me to face one of my fears. Also, the discussion we had in the group was so incredible."*

- Meshanda Phillips, Humber College student

*"Community change can be manifested when people come together to share ideas, knowledge, and capacity. It was wonderful to see the energy in the room, the commitment and engagement was refreshing."*

-Anonymous Participant

*"Learned about the diversity & complexity of work being carried out by various community members - incredibly inspiring!"*

-Anonymous Participant

*"I learned that although community violence is a huge issue, there are people like myself out there who want to join together and make a change."*

-Anonymous Participant