

Young Changemakers: The Koffler Arts Studio Program

An immersive arts
program for students

Impact Report 2022-25



Introduction

In 2022, Koffler Arts and Recreate Place launched *The Young Changemakers* program, a three-year immersive arts program embedded in Toronto public schools, with the goal of bringing art education and experiences to children.

The program was grounded in the understanding that **art has the power to ignite creativity, support mental wellbeing and foster problem-solving skills**—foundational tools for children navigating the complexities in their world.

Arts education in public schools is chronically underfunded, despite its proven benefits to children and communities. This program was designed to help address this gap.

Through supporting schools with limited access to arts programming and fostering meaningful collaborations between artists, children, educators, and the community, ***Young Changemakers* brought dynamic, high impact arts experiences into school environments.** This offered a powerful experience for children and educators to take with them well beyond the classroom.

This Impact Report shares the evolution of the program over the three years and the results of this work. The program's impact grew from:

- ▷ Collaborative and interactive arts based activities with artists
- ▷ Opportunities for creative self-expression
- ▷ Creating art in public spaces on school grounds (e.g. courtyards, playgrounds, hallways, library)
- ▷ Celebrating the co-creation of artwork

Young Changemakers Program Snapshot

Deep engagement through student programs

“Art Jams” are at the heart of the program—a series of four half-day, in-class immersive art workshops with professional artists over 4-6 months.

Teachers, artists, and volunteers were engaged in the program, with teacher resources created to complement the “Art Jams”.

A school library program included books highlighting “Art Jams” and activity guides to extend the program for the whole school.

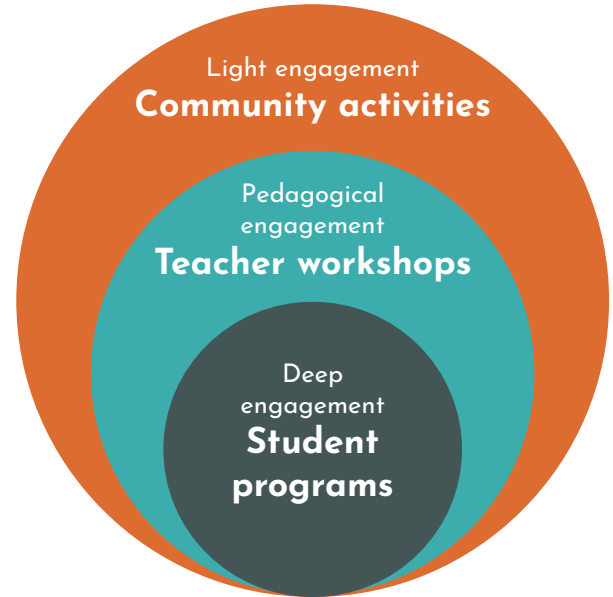
Watercolour art kits for participating students further enabled creative expression.

Pedagogical engagement through teacher workshops

Interactive workshops with additional teachers enhanced their practice and use of art in the classroom, extending the experience to each of their students.

Light engagement with community activities

“Art Jam” Celebrations showcased the student projects at the end of each year, while “Art Nights” during the year engaged their families in the work. Extending programs into the local public library built valuable community connections.



Three Years of Growing Impact

The Young Changemakers Program engaged **over 5,000 students, teachers, and community members** through three interconnected strategies that collectively fostered meaningful change.

Launched at Thorncliffe Park Public School, the program expanded over the following two years to include Faywood ABC Public School and workshops at four additional schools. The program engaged **22 classes** (28 teachers) in **88 “Art Jams”**—four half-day immersive art workshops per class. The program’s impact deepened as an additional **57 teachers** participated in professional development workshops that explored strategies for how to integrate arts into the classroom setting.

The project reached into the **broader community** through closing celebrations, “Art Nights”, public library programs, and workshops at other schools.

Number of participants	2023 1 school	2024 2 schools +libraries	2025 6 schools +library +training	5030
Student Programs	190	1103	915	2208
Teacher Workshops	0	0	1587	1530
Community Activities	0	535	700	1235

Art Jam
Thorncliffe Park Public School
2023

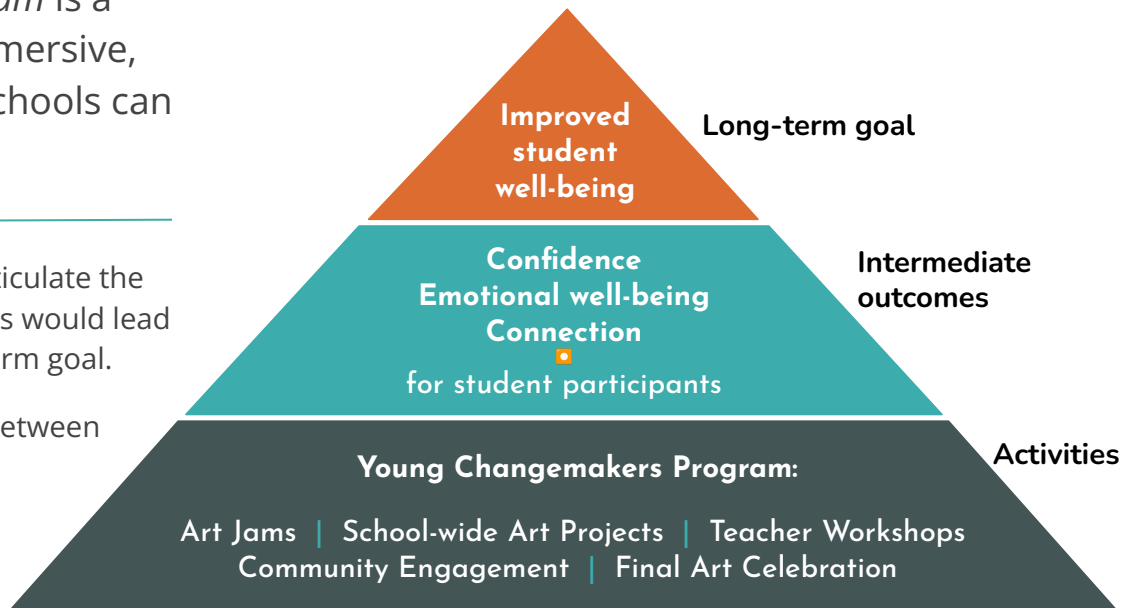
Enhanced Wellbeing Through Immersive Arts

We need to ensure that people recognize that art works in service of big ideas. It creates innovative learners, but it also creates community and well-being. —TDSB Arts Leader

The *Young Changemakers Program* is a compelling example of how immersive, high-quality arts programs in schools can inspire meaningful change.

This **Theory of Change** was used to articulate the hypothesis of how the program activities would lead to intermediate outcomes and a long-term goal.

The program explored the correlation between **children's wellbeing** and **increased equitable access to high-quality arts-based programming**.



Child-friendly Impact Evaluation

To assess the program impact on the three intermediate outcomes, an **evaluation framework** was designed, using a range of approaches for students and teachers. A three-year time span allowed for testing and refining these approaches.

We discovered that the **more playful and creative evaluation approaches** allowed for greater authenticity and ease with student engagement. More structured approaches, such as student surveys, proved less effective. The evaluation activities also supported the development of students' reflective practices. For participating adults, debriefs and surveys provided helpful perspectives.

Sparkling Reflection with Visual Prompts

Tested and proven over the last two program years, "Collage Chats" emerged as **the most valuable and engaging evaluation activity**, where over **60 students** shared about their Art Jam experiences.

During an Art Jam, small groups of students were invited to participate in this fun activity. Printed images provided a scaffold for students to reflect on their experience. Using these images, they then shared their feelings with other students and a facilitator.

Students enjoyed creating mini-collages using expressive printed photos to reflect experiences.



Art Jam

Thornccliffe Park Public School
2024



Growing Confidence

Increased feelings of empowerment, pride, self-esteem, and problem-solving abilities.

Students and teachers felt proud of their work, especially when displayed for all to see. Teachers noted signs of increased confidence in their students.

Students definitely developed confidence—they successfully learned new techniques and were impressed by the overall final product.

—teacher

Students' belief in themselves grew with support from peers and the team. Though some began unsure or hesitant, they ended the program feeling proud to be part of it.

I used to be nervous, now I am not. Now I feel confident.

—student

Initial hesitations transformed into expressions of “I won’t give up” and an increased capacity to deal with challenges (perceived “mistakes”) in the process.

I feel a lot more comfortable now. I know I can do art, and I believe in myself now.

—student

The program gave students a voice, the agency to be creative and to have a say in their environment, ultimately fostering pride in their contributions.

I felt a pride emanating from many of them as they saw their work as being “worthy of public display” [as public art].

—teacher

Students felt proud of having their work displayed in public spaces for their peers and school visitors to see.



Improved Emotional Well-being

A sense of contentment, satisfaction, engagement, and happiness at school and in life.

Feelings of happiness, excitement, and calm emerged as consistent emotions among students during the Art Jams.

It makes me feel good and calm.
—student

Students really enjoyed the time, looked forward to the sessions each week, and were sad when they ended. It increased their sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

You see students who academically aren't successful. But when it comes to the arts, it gives them the opportunity to be successful. —TDSB Arts Team

I felt so much joy today!.
—student

As trust grew, students opened up about frustration or boredom, often when faced with challenges. These feelings often lessened over time with encouragement and support.

The most exciting thing about, this project, is the energy that it has brought to the school and the students.
—librarian

Art Jams offered a joyful and supportive outlet for students who were facing challenges elsewhere, contributing positively to their emotional well-being.



Students shared how “Art Jams” made them feel joyful, calm and happy.

Better Connections

A sense of belonging and acceptance by others, including the class, the school community and the environment.

Students and classes bonded through teamwork and cooperation, learning to work collaboratively, and to help and encourage each other.

I liked teamwork and how we helped each other with ideas.

—student

Existing friendships deepened, and new ones were formed. Students also felt a strong connection to the artists and facilitators.

The common art experience was a vehicle to talk more freely, or with peers that aren't in their usual friend circles.

—teacher

At times, students were hesitant to work with others who might not like or accept them, but this diminished over time.

They respected each other. They listened to each other. They were engaged and they were friends.

—librarian

Students discovered more about their schoolground and community and enjoyed their time outdoors.

When you work together, you find out who someone is.

—student

By supporting each other in shared art projects, students' teamwork grew and evolved throughout the "Art Jams."



Growth, Creativity & Engagement

Themes around learning, growth, creativity, and student engagement also emerged.

Students felt more creative, shared new ideas, and were inspired to make art at school and at home. They valued the chance to experiment and began to see art in new ways.

It helped students see art differently—not just as a hobby, but as a potential career path.

—teacher

I never wanted to do art. But honestly, now, when I think about it, our art is actually kind of fun.

—student

Teachers observed students communicating and sharing more with their peers.

Students felt empowered and capable and some stepped up as leaders to help their peers.

They are more open to express themselves and just ask questions and be curious. They're able to open their eyes to the things around them.

—teacher

Students learned to work hard and focus. They were amazed, delighted, and even surprised with what they co-created.

I noticed that some of the students who were sort of disengaged and not focused in the beginning, were really into it by the end.

—artist



Student interest in art expanded through the program.

Teacher, School, and Community Benefit

Positive ripples from this program will resonate for years to come.

Teachers consistently described the program as having a very positive impact on their classes, with ripple effects across the school community.

The program sparked the transformation of underused outdoor courtyards into vibrant teaching spaces, now equipped with 16 benches (Thornccliffe).

We saw the courtyard largely unused when we arrived, and now teachers are double booking the space. —facilitator

Students' excitement drew in parents and families, highlighting the power of art. Take-home watercolour kits inspired and

facilitated arts-based learning within and beyond the classroom.

Library activity books showcased “Art Jam” projects and brought simple art activities to more students. One group of students was inspired to form an “art club” to create and share mini artworks with others.

The energy at our school has just bumped right up.
—librarian

The three-year timeline offered a rare opportunity to strengthen TDSB relationships (e.g. Arts & Sustainability Teams) with the school principals, staff, custodian team, and librarians.

Creative Pedagogy

Teachers placed high value on their own professional learning and were inspired to integrate nature and art into their teaching practice—allowing students to be more creative, expressive, and reflective and to celebrate together. Program and evaluation toolkits provided resources to support and sustain these actions.

I will use it in my class to inspire my students with developing a love of learning through art.
—teacher workshop participant

Virtually all (96%) teachers attending teacher workshops found them highly valuable and planned to bring art activities into the classroom.

Art Jam

Faywood ABC Public School
2025



Key Insights

Arts education is vital

- ▷ Schools valued this extensive arts program, with its artist collaboration and project budget, as a deeply meaningful and transformative experience for students and the community.
- ▷ Art is an outlet and provides a place for all students to flourish, including those who may struggle in other areas at school.
- ▷ Students took pride in seeing their work on display
- ▷ These experiences strengthened student connections to school and community
- ▷ A three-year timeframe deepened the impact.

Collaboration & community are key

- ▷ Co-creating with professional artists inspired and engaged students in the creative process.
- ▷ Collaborations and partnerships with outside organizations deepened and extended impact beyond the classroom.
- ▷ More children and families could benefit by expanding programming and resources into to local communities (public library, nearby schools), while fostering new relationships and collaborations.
- ▷ Connections developed over the program have built a foundation for future collaborations beyond the program lifespan.

Programs must consider participant needs

- ▷ Cultural sensitivity and responsiveness are essential.
- ▷ Planning and scheduling well in advance and starting early supports teachers.
- ▷ Providing the right tools, materials, and appropriately challenging activities sets students up for success and reduces frustration with new experiences.
- ▷ Evaluation activities must align with time and attention limitations for students and teachers.

Transformation Through the Arts

Students are thriving. Teachers are expanding their practice. Schools and their communities are engaged. Relationships have grown.

That's the impact of this longer-term investment in arts programs—in the classroom. Programs that help students to express themselves, to learn and grow, to explore, and to work together. Programs that go deep, that engage with artists, that enhance the school.

Thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for supporting Koffler Arts and Recreate Place for bringing this program to life.

Young Changemakers and Beyond—Next Steps

- ▷ Seek innovative partnerships and funding models with schools and school boards in an effort to bring immersive arts programming to children.
- ▷ Explore cross-sectoral partnerships—such as health, arts, science—in an effort to find creative solutions to funding gaps that help to address multiple goals.
- ▷ Continue to leverage community resources and partnerships to bring arts programming to schools. For example, invite community artists into classrooms and share resources with libraries and local cultural institutions.
- ▷ Advocate for arts funding to be included in school budgets, emphasizing its essential role in student development.

kofflerarts

Koffler Arts is a multi-disciplinary arts platform for contemporary visual art, performance and literary events, that situates the contemporary Jewish experience within broader social, historical, and cultural conversations on identity, memory and place. Working with an elastic network of Canadian and international artists, Koffler Arts provides a stimulating and supportive environment for the promotion of current artistic practices, the creation of new work, and the exchange of ideas across disciplines.

reCREATE place

Recreate Place designs child-friendly experiences that prioritize the meaningful participation of children and young people in community art projects. We create age-appropriate experiences for children and youth to impact the designs, plans and decisions affecting their community.



This project is generously supported with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Creative Collaborators

Many thanks to all the wonderful, creative collaborators who have helped shape this program:

- ▷ The incredible students, teachers, librarians and custodians, led by Principals Christine Harvey Kerr and Alison Rutherford, and Vice Principal Chris Fabbri at Thorncliffe Park PS, and Principals Katia Robles and Alida Pacitti Miele and Vice Principal Georgia Powell at Faywood ABC Public School.
- ▷ Collaborating artists: Leah Gold, Janet Hinkle, Gosia Komorski, Roda Medhat, Christine Dewancker and Katie Strang of D+S Projects, Safna Mohamed Sahileen, and Kseniya Tsoy.
- ▷ The Toronto District School Board (TDSB): Sustainability, Facility & Carpentry Teams; Landscape Architect Karen Dobrucki; The Arts Department, including Miranda Blazey and colleagues
- ▷ Christine Martin, Evaluation Specialist and Researcher
- ▷ Raha Medhat, Teacher and Arts Educator
- ▷ Shelley Kavanagh, Art Therapist
- ▷ Christine Lim, Photographer
- ▷ Henry Mak, Film and Video

*The Young Changemakers program has enriched our curriculum,
fostering artistic talent, critical thinking, and emotional
intelligence. We are all very proud of our students and excited to
see how they continue to use their creative voices*

—teacher



Appendix: Year One Art Projects



Roots of Thorncliffe

Roda Medhat

Thorncliffe



The Nature of Art and The Art of Nature

Kseniya Tsoy

Thorncliffe



Spring Shine: A Collaboration with Nature

Christine Dewancker & Katie Strang of D & S Projects

Thorncliffe

Appendix: Year Two Art Projects



River of Art Takes Flight

Janet Hinkle

Thorncliffe



Weaving Together Trees and Community

Roda Medhat

Thorncliffe



Growing Memories

Christine Dewanker & Katie Strang of D & S Projects

Thorncliffe



The Power of Nature, Art and Imagination

Leah Gold

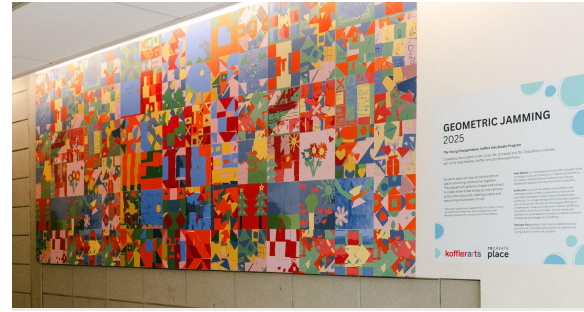
Faywood

Appendix: Year Three Art Projects



Fence Flock
Gosia Komorski

Thornccliffe



Geometric Jamming
Roda Medhat

Thornccliffe



Once Upon a Cushion
Janet Hinkle & Safna Mohamed Sahileen

Thornccliffe



Taste of our Stories
Leah Gold

Faywood

Appendix: Media

PROJECT STORY POSTS (Recreate Website)

[Bird Friendly Window Art: Janet Hinkle and YCM](#) (Aug. 1, 2024 post)

[Children's Art Book Series](#) (Jan. 6, 2025 post)

[Collaborative Fence Mobile: Leah Gold and The YCM](#) (Aug. 12, 2024 post)

[D+S Projects and The Young Changemakers](#) (July 30, 2023 post)

[Fence Flock: Gosia Komorski & YCM](#) (July 7, 2025 post)

[Garden Tiles for a School Courtyard: D+S Projects and YCM](#) (July 31, 2024 post)

[Kseniya Tsoy + The Young Changemakers](#) (July 4, 2023 post)

[Library Cushions: Janet Hinkle, Safna Sahileem and YCM](#) (July 4, 2025 post)

[Roda Medhat + The Young Changemakers](#) (July 4, 2023 post)

[Tree Weaving Project: Roda Medhat and YCM](#) (Aug. 6, 2024 post)

[Visual Storytelling: Leah Gold and The YCM](#) (July 2, 2025 post)

[Young Changemakers: Koffler Arts & Recreate Place](#) (Jan. 8, 2025 post)

[Young Changemakers: The Koffler Arts Studio Program](#) (Apr. 22, 2024 post)

[Young Changemakers: The Koffler Arts Studio Program](#) (April 22, 2024 post)

OTHER STORIES

["A School of Their Own"](#), *Arcade* (Koffler Arts' online magazine) (Aug. 20, 2024 article)

[Child-Friendly Evaluation for an Enriched Arts Experience](#) (Feb. 25, 2025 LinkedIn post)

*Additional [instagram stories](#) by Recreate Place