



The Unforgettables — a family band of Music School students — play at Dundas West Fest.

Unforgettable voices at the Music School

Moises and Francisca play Crazy Eights at the communal table as they wait for their music lesson. Other students filter into the Music School as Sherry, the Music School Coordinator, looks over sheet music and greets students with her Newfoundland welcome, “How are you, my ducky?”

The Music School, one of the oldest programs at West Neighbourhood House (86 years old and counting), continues to be a special place for local kids to hang out and get excited about music.

Moises, Francisca, and their brothers Jose, Isaac, and Elmer have been students of the Music School for about five years. When they were asked to play

something at a family gathering a few years ago, they put their music lessons to the test and formed a band — *The Unforgettables*. The family band plays gigs around town such as local street festivals and is always expanding their repertoire. So far there are only five members, but their band just might grow in the future (they have five other siblings who are growing up fast).

The Music School is staffed by professional teachers who, according to The Unforgettables, “encourage us to improve every time we are in a lesson.” It is apparent that the art of teaching has rubbed off. Elmer, the eldest of the bunch, wants to become a music teacher: “Teaching others is something that I enjoy doing, especially teaching younger children, because I can inspire them to do great things in music.”

What first started as music lessons has now turned into so much more!

Many kids who take part in musical programming at the House find a sense of purpose and confidence in addition to learning a new skill and having a creative outlet. To ensure these opportunities are accessible to every child in our community, the Music School offers lessons on a sliding scale. If you are interested in signing your child up for lessons at the Music School, contact Sherry Squires at sherrysq@westnh.org or call 416-532-4828.

Scoff 'n' Scuff Music School Fundraiser

Join us for an evening of Newfoundland music and fun! All funds raised go to support our Music School at West NH. If you aren't able to attend the event, buy a ticket anyway! We can donate it to a community member so they can attend.

- Students and seniors: \$10 in advance (\$15 at the door)
- Adults: \$20 in advance (\$25 at the door)

Pick up tickets at 248 Ossington Ave. reception or call 416-532-4828 ext. 127. Make sure to get tickets soon – last year we sold out before show night!

Saturday May 14th at 7:30pm

248 Ossington Ave

Stan Meek Community Hall

Newfoundland snacks, cash bar and raffle



Run with us, support our community!

Do you want to go the distance for West NH at the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon on Sunday, October 16? Run, walk or wheel the 5k, half or full marathon. Run with your family, your friends, or go solo! Contact Kaleigh at kaleighwi@westnh.org or 416-432-7586 ext 215.

SALUTE TO OUR AMAZING VOLUNTEERS

Prasad Rao received the Volunteer Toronto Legacy Award

In 2010 Prasad starting volunteering with us, lending his marketing expertise for many,many hours over several years as we went through the process of re-branding. His humour, patience, and creativity ushered us through a pivotal point in the House's growth. He has continued his legacy of generosity by volunteering with his family in our Meals on Wheels Program and sitting on our Fund Development Committee.

Fatima Ammari received the Leading Girls Building Communities Award

Fatima is a participant in our Newcomer Youth Program (NYP)

who has been an exceptional leader and volunteer since 2013. She has promoted inclusiveness and equality within NYP, spearheading a sports and recreation program for female youth to have a space to build their confidence and skills.

Ontario Volunteer Service Awards

12 volunteers from across the House received Ontario Volunteer Service Awards. This award recognizes individual volunteers for continuous years of commitment and dedicated service to an organization.

25+ years:

Maria Cidade

15+ years:

Teresa Correia

Francisco Brito

10+years:

Michael Moreau

Cecile Ong

5+years:

Inacio Natividade

Ling Bai

Tomasz Korycki

Sokol Asllani

Matthew Christie

Susan Todd

Antoinette Camacho

Thank you to all of our phenomenal volunteers who give so much of their time. The impact you have on this community is absolutely incredible. Interested in becoming a volunteer? Email volunteers@westnh.org or call 416-532-4828

Understanding the ‘informal economy’

‘**W**orking under the table’, “the underground economy”, “cash under the table” – the informal economy goes by many names and involves most people in our community as workers, consumers, and/or employers.

Over the past few years, with the support of the Metcalf Foundation, West NH has been trying to understand the effects of the informal economy by interviewing local workers, consumers and businesses/entrepreneurs.

We are especially interested in the impact of the informal economy on low-income earners and what can be done practically and systemically to improve their situations. We have appreciated the candour with which people have discussed this somewhat taboo topic, shared their challenges, and proposed solutions.

In light of high unemployment for young adults, we honed in on the experience of informal workers in their 20s and 30s, many of whom work in the cultural and hospitality sectors. Here are some trends that we unearthed through our recent interviews.

Who?

Our interviewees were between 23 and 37, and the majority had no children or significant assets such as property, investments, or vehicles. Most had debt, primarily due to student loans or business start-up costs, and had no ability to save for the future.

Why?

We heard many different reasons for working in the informal economy including:

- limited employment opportunities in their field
- the need for flexibility to pursue artistic/entrepreneurial endeavours
- insufficient qualifications required for formal careers
- income needed to pay off debt

Difficult finding housing and secure, safe employment

It is hard to find affordable rental housing and workspaces in the city, especially without having proof of formal employment for a landlord. Those working in the hospitality industry expressed concern that the physical demands of their jobs would be unsustainable in the long-term.

Others spoke of poor working conditions including verbal abuse and feeling unprotected by labour laws. Many expressed that they have limited or no access to employment benefits

and government supports such as pensions and Employment Insurance.

Favours and trading as currency

Precarious employment and unpredictable income were often cited as drawbacks of the informal economy. In order to make ends meet, many people rely on what might be called a “favour economy” – people exchanging goods and services to supplement their income.

How informal workers see themselves

Informal workers noted being affected by the negative perceptions of the informal economy held by many people. This skewed perception of themselves can make informal workers – even with high incomes – more reluctant to seek access to credit or to file their taxes. Interviewees spoke of their need for more information about money matters such as taxation, credit, and self-employment.

Moving forward, we are testing some practical and policy suggestions about the informal economy. Ideas include:

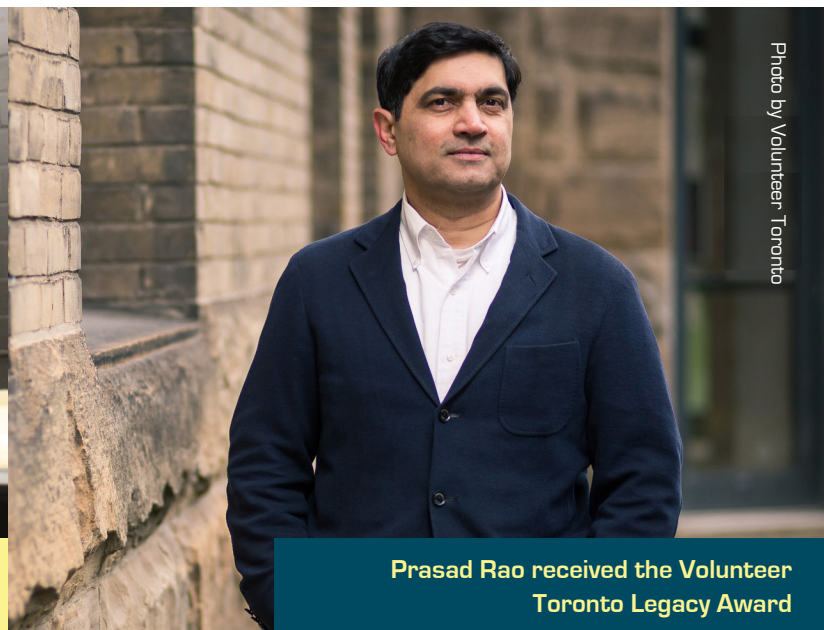
- more access to tax and self-employment information and resources,
 - supports for some to transition to the formal economy,
 - increased asset thresholds for lower-income, and
 - education about and improved employment rights.
- Keep an eye out for our next report on this research – it will be available on our website this summer.



Community researchers, Lucas and Gabrielle (informal workers themselves), said, “The themes explored – precarity, flexibility, stigma, limited employment opportunities, creative freedom – are consistent with our own experiences in the informal economy.”



Fatima Ammari accepts the Leading Girls
Building Communities Award



Prasad Rao received the Volunteer
Toronto Legacy Award

Photo by Volunteer Toronto

A big thanks to all our West NH volunteers!

April is Volunteer Month, month where we take the time to appreciate all our outstanding volunteers. With over 1,000 volunteers across our six locations, we truly could not operate our programs without their generosity and dedication. This year, a few of our volunteers received some special recognition, which we'd like to share with you. *See full details on page two, inside.*

**Please consider becoming
a West NH donor!**

- www.westnh.org/donate
- info@westnh.org or call
- 416-532-4828

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