IS EVERYONE IN THE POOL?
Lessons on Access and Equity from Toronto’s Regent Park Aquatic Centre

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aquatic centres offer families and individuals opportunities for physical activity, leisure, and recreation. Additionally, these centres have the potential to improve the overall quality of life of those who participate, while also benefiting neighbourhoods through positive community development (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2008; Boys and Girls Club, 2007; CPRA, 2001; Mulholland, 2008; Totten, 2004). However, many Canadians are unable to fully participate in activities or programming at aquatic centres because of socio-economic or cultural barriers. The architectural and interior design of an aquatic centre, in addition to the programing options offered, as well as the cost of those programs, can all act as barriers to participation for those who wish to make use of the facility (Forsyth, 2001; Tynan, 2005).

Any person regardless of their socio-economic status, culture, religion, age, sexual orientation, or even swimming ability deserves the ability to access and comfortably use public aquatic centres. However, when these aquatic recreation facilities do not incorporate the proper inclusive programming and design accommodations, many Canadians are unable to use them. This is troubling considering that access to recreation, an integral issue with health and social planning, is a critical element in enabling Canadians to become more active and healthy. Aquatic centres that incorporate principles of access and equity for all, can play an important role in fighting Canada’s obesity epidemic by empowering individuals to become more active, but also more involved in their communities (Millar & Rappaport, 2009; Robert et al, 2012). Thus, as aquatic centres are built or renovated, it is important that issues relating to access and equity are addressed in the planning, design, and programming of these urban oases.

The Regent Park Aquatic Centre, a recently opened public aquatic centre in Toronto’s Regent Park neighbourhood, was selected as the sole case study of this report. The research aims to discover how the Regent Park Aquatic Centre accommodates persons from all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and what planners can learn from the process that created this aquatic centre. The exploration of how the centre accommodates all persons was completed using a three-part qualitative research methodology, involving a literature and document review, interviews with key informants, and site visits.

Through this process, it was discovered that the Regent Park Aquatic Centre has been remarkably successful in bringing together numerous groups of residents from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This success has been made possible by a number of programing and design elements that accommodate the various socio-economic and cultural groups present within Regent Park and Toronto. Particularly, the inclusion of universal change rooms, privacy screens, and variation amongst the pools, as well as free programming, female-only programming, and enabling in-person registration all contributes to the accessibility of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre.

This report concludes by putting forward five important lessons from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre that should be considered when building or renovating a public aquatic centre. These lessons are the culmination of existing literature, conversations with key informants, and research site visits to the aquatic centre.
i. the need for extensive public consultation
It is important that extensive public consultation occurs with as many stakeholders and residents as possible in order to discover the needs and wishes of the community. In order for a future aquatic centre to be accessible to everyone, it is extremely important that as many people as possible, from various communities, are given the opportunity to take part in the visioning and planning process of the future centre.

ii. understand the community context
It is imperative that planners understand the community context in which a future aquatic centre will be situated. In order for an aquatic centre to be planned, designed and built so that it does not create any socio-cultural or economic barriers for the public, it is important to understand what those barriers may be in advance.

iii. programming should be free of barriers to participation
Free programming is much more equitable and accessible to economically marginalized individuals and families than waiving fees or offering subsidies. Aquatic centres located within socio-economically marginalized neighbourhoods should have some, if not all, free programming.

iv. inclusive physical design
Design elements such as universal change rooms, privacy screens for female-only programming, and other accommodation features make an aquatic centre much more socio-culturally accessible.

v. the importance of swim culture education
For those with little or no swimming experience, going to an aquatic centre can be an uncomfortable and nerve-wracking event, thus it is imperative that aquatic centres incorporate an educational component to swimming culture into their programming. Furthermore, it should be the goal of those who are responsible for programming at aquatic centres to get out in the community, and to encourage as many people as possible to learn how to swim.

Both planners and municipal decision makers ought to incorporate these lessons into the planning, building, and renovation of municipal aquatic centres, so that social, economic, and cultural barriers are removed. This will enable as many people as possible (if not everyone) to comfortably make use of these public facilities. Every Canadian, including the residents of Regent Park, should be able to access an aquatic centre where people of all backgrounds can engage in aquatic recreation and leisure. However, for everyone to be able to get in the pool, socio-economic and cultural barriers first need to be removed.
LIST OF ACRONYMS

HVAC – Heating, Ventilation, and Air-Conditioning
MJMA – MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects
RPAC – Regent Park Aquatic Centre
SPO’s – Social Planning Organizations
TCHC – Toronto Community Housing Corporation
UCR – Universal Change Room

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1 | INTRODUCTION

1a. introduction to the topic

Aquatic centres can provide individuals and families with excellent opportunities for recreation and physical activity. Additionally, these centres also have the potential to improve overall quality of life, while also contributing positively to community development (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2008; Boys and Girls Club, 2007; CPRA, 2001; Mulholland, 2008; Totten, 2004). However, the ability to enjoy all that aquatic centres have to offer is in some cases limited or restricted depending on cultural or socio-economic barriers. The design of the building, the types of programs offered, and the cost of those programs are all determinants in who makes use of the facility. For example, socio-economically marginalized populations including those living in social housing, or cultural minority groups, such as Muslim women, are in many cases unable to access aquatic centres (Forsyth, 2001; Tynan, 2005; Taylor & Toohey, 2001).

Every Canadian regardless of their socio-economic status, culture, religion, age, sexual orientation, or swimming ability should have the ability to access the public aquatic centres or swimming pools within their community. Additionally, accessing an aquatic centre must result in all users being made to feel safe, welcome and comfortable in the space. However, if proper physical design accommodations and inclusive programming are not in place at aquatic centres, many Canadians for various reasons will be unable to make use of them.

The planners, architects, and policy makers behind the new Regent Park Aquatic Centre in Toronto Ontario, have integrated many features, both in terms of programming and building design, that promote equitable access for everyone. This facility can act as blueprint and guide for how to design, build and renovate aquatic centres across Canada. The Regent Park Aquatic Centre can demonstrate how an aquatic centre can not only be welcoming and inviting, but can also be accessed by everyone in the community.
1b. why is access to aquatic centres important?

Access to recreation, an integral issue to health and social planning, is an important element in enabling individuals to lead more active and healthy lives. This is particularly poignant today as Canada grapples with an increasing population of overweight and obese citizens (Robert et al, 2012). Aquatic centres that are designed and are operated based on the principles of access and equity for all could play an important role in empowering individuals to become more active, while also encouraging social integration and personal development (Millar & Rappaport, 2009). However, barriers and obstacles exist that can limit or prevent access to aquatic recreation. As Canadian aquatic centres are built or renovated, it is important that access and equity issues are addressed in the planning, design, and programming of these urban oases, and that planners and policy makers are in a position to be able to ensure that such principles are upheld in planning and design.

1c. the regent park aquatic centre

This report focuses on the newly built Regent Park Aquatic Centre (RPAC) within the Regent Park neighbourhood of Toronto, Ontario. This particular aquatic centre was chosen as the sole case study for several reasons. First, the planning, and later programming, of the RPAC involved a substantial amount of input from a variety of stakeholders. Furthermore, the facility has the potential to become a community hub, where residents, neighbours, and visitors can interact, form relationships and make personal connections. Second, the design of the building is a dramatic departure from traditional swimming pool design, incorporating cultural and socio-economic accommodations that are more in line with Regent Park’s diverse population. Third, RPAC received a great deal of media attention upon its opening, and is a key part of the much publicized and debated Toronto Community Housing Regent Park Revitalization Project (Allen, 2013; Hume, 2012; Lorinc, 2013; Rochon, 2012; Shulgan, 2012). As such, it is important to investigate how the planners, architects, policy makers, and community members accomplished what they set out to create. Lastly, Regent Park is a neighbourhood with a large proportion of social housing and social service providers, as well as having higher rates of poverty and crime relative to the City of Toronto (City of Toronto, 2013; Friesen et al, 2012). These factors make Regent Park an ideal setting to explore how an aquatic centre can be accessible for everyone.

1d. research question

The purpose of this report is to learn how the Regent Park Aquatic Centre accommodates persons from all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and what can planners learn from the process that created this aquatic centre.

How RPAC incorporates principles of social, cultural and economic equity is the central theme of this report. As such, it is important to define these concepts. Social equity can be defined as “the fair, just, and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract, and the fair and equitable distribution of public services, and implementation of public policy, and the commitment to promote fairness, justice, equity in the formation of public policy” (National Academy of Public Administration, n.d.). Cultural equity refers to the protection and promotion of an individual’s cultural diversity. The principle of cultural equity as a human right was affirmed in UNESCO’s Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity (Association for Cultural Equity, 2013). Additionally, economic equality refers to equal opportunities afforded to a person regardless of their socio-economic status, and that everyone should have guaranteed minimum income, and access to public services (Atkinson & Stiglitz, 1980). Furthermore, a person’s socio-economic status refers to their circumstance or context within society that can be measured by using criteria such as occupation, health, income, educational level attained,
and value of dwelling place (Brenman & Sanchez, 2012).

As the research question identifies, only factors relating to social, cultural and economic equity have been examined. Additionally, this report has not investigated accessibility for persons with physical or intellectual disabilities.

1e. contents of this report

This report gathers and presents information on RPAC that has not yet been presented in an academic manner. Drawing, on a qualitative mixed-method approach, this report utilized three methods of data collection. First, an in-depth literature and document review looks at themes relating to accessing recreation, as well as the barriers to it, and the benefits from it. Second, a series of interviews with key informants were conducted to gather information relating to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre. Third, a number of site visits were conducted at the aquatic centre in order to better assess the building and its features.

This report is organized into seven chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 (Methodology) outlines the research methods used within this report, including a discussion on limitations to the research. Chapter 3 (Literature & Document Review) discusses themes including a right to recreation, how recreation positively affects quality of life, barriers to recreation, and how aquatic centres contribute to community development. Chapter 4 (Regent Park Aquatic Centre) gives a brief historical background of the Regent Park community, presents the planning process leading to the creation of RPAC, including the process of public consultation. The chapter also gives a detailed overview of RPAC’s building and programming and how each identified feature or amenity incorporates principles of social, cultural and economic equity. Furthermore, additional concerns regarding access and equity are presented. Chapter 5 (Lessons from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre) presents five of the most important lessons or pieces of advice taken away from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre and that should be considered when building or renovating a public aquatic centre.
Figure 1: Location of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre Within Toronto. Source: Michael Rac
2 | METHODOLOGY

2a. research methods

This report utilized a three-part method in collecting information and data: a document and literature review, interviews with key informants, and site visits to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre. This approach allowed for a thorough investigation of the research question, how the Regent Park Aquatic Centre accommodates persons from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds, and what planners can learn from the process that created this aquatic centre.

2b. literature + document review

An extensive document and literature review was conducted, creating a solid foundation of knowledge for answering the research question. All of the reviewed materials were categorized into one of the four following themes relating to the project:

1. A Right to Recreation for All
2. How Recreation Positively Affects Quality of Life
3. How Aquatic Centres Contribute to Community Development
4. Barriers to Recreation

While there is extensive literature and numerous reports about the benefits of, and barriers to recreation, only a small proportion focuses on swimming and aquatic centres. This suggests that although a great deal of research has been conducted relating to recreation in general, little has been paid specifically to aquatic recreation.
Academic literature and various documents were sourced primarily through a keyword search using both Queen’s University, and the University of Winnipeg’s library catalogues. Searches were conducted independently at each university for each of the four literature themes previously mentioned. Generally, the disciplines that provided the most academic literature were gender and cultural studies and political history. In terms of documents and reports, national youth and health advocacy groups, as well as immigrant and recreation associations, offered relevant sources. These sources included Active Healthy Kids Canada, the Boys & Girls Club of Canada, the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, as well as the Canadian Health Measures Survey.

One paper in particular, Millar and Rappaport’s *Winnipeg’s Best-Kept Secret: A Community Development Vision For Sherbrook Pool* (2009), was consulted heavily for its discussion on how swimming pools can have a significant positive effect on the neighbourhood in which they are situated, and the residents they serve. Millar and Rappaport’s community development approach to aquatic centres served as an inspiration for viewing Regent Park Aquatic Centre from an asset-based community development approach.

A review was also conducted of news, magazine, and blog articles that uncovered background information specifically relating to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre. However, not stated within the Literature and Document Review section, these articles provided the necessary background information for the Regent Park Aquatic Centre case study and are cited within that section. Articles from news sources such as the *Toronto Star*, *the Globe and Mail*, and the *Grid TO*, in addition to national design and architecture magazines were used to highlight and summarize the facility’s design characteristics, amenities towards accessibility, and were also used to provide a context for the aquatic centre within the community of Regent Park.

The completed literature and document review provided the required information needed to develop focused interview questions, so that additional information could be collected from key informants. Information specifically relating to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre acquired through the review was also beneficial in developing a better understanding of how to assess the physical design attributes of the building while on site visits.

2c. key informant interviews

In total, five in-person interviews were conducted over a two-month period in Toronto, Ontario with individuals who were in some way involved with the Regent Park Aquatic Centre or community of Regent Park. Additional information was gathered from email correspondence with a sixth key informant.

All key informants were asked to comment on their relationship to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre, physical design characteristics or programming that relate to socio-economic or cultural accessibility, the planning process behind the facility, and how the centre engages with the community. The five in-person interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. All six key informants were informed of the research project’s goals and objectives, the intended use of the research, that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the research at any point without consequence. Each participant also signed a consent form. In one case, a key informant wished to be anonymized and the report reflects this accommodation.

The five in-person interviews took the form of semi-structured interviews, in which the literature influenced interview questions acted as guide for the researcher. As Hay identifies in *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (2010), “the questions asked in interviews are content-focused and deal with the issues or areas judged by the researcher to be relevant to the research question ” (p. 110). Semi-structured interviews were conducted,
as opposed to structured interviews, because they allowed for flexible questioning. Some conversations were redirected if they moved too far away from the research topic. A list of questions posed in these semi-structured interviews is provided in Appendix 8d. Interview Questions.

Aside from a small number of City of Toronto documents and a radio interview, the sections relating to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre case study were solely informed through the key informants. In a sense, the beginning of an oral history of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre has been collected. Hay notes, “oral history interviews seek personal accounts of significant events and perceptions, as determined by the informants and in their own words” (pg. 111). This report has gathered the personal perceptions of the key informants and summarized them into relevant sections within the case study in order to answer the research question. However, additional research ought to be completed by speaking with the original key informants again, and by recording more oral accounts of residents of Regent Park and of those who use the Regent Park Aquatic Centre in order to gather a true oral history of the aquatic centre.

2d. site visits

The Regent Park Aquatic Centre was visited by the researcher on four occasions. These visits took place in two different forms. One site visit conducted in February 2014 took the form of a guided tour of the centre by the then acting Regent Park Aquatic Centre Community Recreation Programmer, who was familiar with centre’s operation and programming. This guided tour and subsequent interview provided a thorough understanding of the features and amenities of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre, how they operate, and how participants are meant to, and actually interact within these spaces.

Three additional trips to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre were made over a nine-month period at various times of the day and week, and took the form of passive participant observations. Site visits occurred in September 2013, January 2014, and May 2014. Following a passive participation observation technique meant that the researcher was present at the scene of action, but did do not participate in registered programming or interact with other members of the public (Spradley, 1980). During these three site visits, the researcher visited the pool, used the facilities, swam laps, and interacted within the space as a member of the public. No notes were taken while within the Regent Park Aquatic Centre. Instead, general observations and perceptions were written down immediately after leaving the facility while at a local café. These notes were then referred to, and reflected upon, over the course of writing this report. These visits were done so that the researcher could experience and study the facility’s design, and operation through the perspective of a member of the public.

2e. research limitations

This report utilizes a single case study, the Regent Park Aquatic Centre; as such, it is worthwhile to discuss the limitations of conducting a single case study. The researcher acknowledges that the findings of a single case study cannot be generalizable to all cases; however, it is the aim of this study that other jurisdictions that wish to develop aquatic centres of their own will still be able to learn from this study.

Generalizability, or transferability, refers to the degree to which findings or lessons from a study can be applied to other cases. This process of generalization is achieved through carefully selecting cases and creating useful theories that are neither too abstract nor specific (Hay, 2010). The Regent Park Aquatic Centre was selected for a number of reasons as detailed previously in section 1c. Of these reasons, RPAC was selected most notably because the centre employs numerous socio-economic and cultural accommodations that ought to be shared with municipalities.
considering building or renovating their own aquatic centres. The key lessons on accessibility, garnered from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre, are presented in section 5b. in a way that makes them general enough to be applied to municipalities across Canada, but still detailed enough to be helpful to planners. Additionally, future researchers will be able replicate this case study because of the extensive documentation of procedures presented within this Methodology chapter, and in the attached appendices.

While multiple case studies could have provided a greater degree of generalizability, for reasons of time, the desired detail for each case study could not have been achieved. Thus, it was deemed more important by the researcher to focus more time and attention on a single exemplary case study instead of less detail on multiple case studies.

It has been identified within the report that the researcher may have some personal bias regarding site visits, as an avid swimmer and a non-resident of the community. Methods to mitigate this bias were employed; these included using previous studies and the literature review as a guide, as well as to personally reflect immediately after each visit to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre to distinguish between observation, description, and interpretation. Due to the use of interviews and site visits as research methods an ethics review was completed and received approval from Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board. All quotations included in this report were taken directly from the interview transcripts and were not altered in any way. In some cases descriptive words were added for context and are denoted by square brackets.
3a. overview

There is a wide breadth of academic literature, reports, and studies that discuss the benefits from recreation for youth, families and individuals. Every Canadian has the right to be able to engage in meaningful physically active leisure, whether that be taking a stroll through a park or playing a game of soccer (Tynan, 2005). Swimming and other aquatic recreation are no exception to this. Not only are there many advantages provided from recreation for individuals and families, but also for entire neighbourhoods and communities. As well, it is clear that there are a multitude of positive advantages that recreation and swimming pools provide in terms of physical health. However, this literature review will also focus on how aquatic centres contribute to positive community development. Additionally, reports and academic literature was examined regarding various barriers that prevent access to pools for socio-cultural or economic reasons. In order to answer the research question the literature review has been structured into four thematic sections:

1. A Right to Recreation for All
2. How Recreation Positively Affects Quality of Life
3. How Aquatic Centres Contribute to Community Development
4. Barriers to Recreation

In order to garner a clearer picture on all that aquatic centres can offer for individuals, families and communities; it is important to first look at how the right to recreation developed in Canada and why every Canadian regardless of socio-economic or cultural background should have access to aquatic recreational opportunities.
3b. a right to recreation

Shirley Tilloston (2002) traces the emergence of “leisure laws” within Canada and the subsequent implementation of public recreation programs. Tilloston asserts that in Canada during the twentieth century, the ascendency of democratic ideas contributed to a reduction in the differences between who was considered to be a ‘citizen’ and whom a ‘non-citizen’. These differences included class, gender, race, and to some extent geographic location (rural versus urban). She identifies that a pattern of change occurred between 1930 and 1965 in which Canadian public policy limited leisure rights, or extended them, based on these citizenship differences. The emergence of leisure rights in the early twentieth century included laws which limited the hours worked per day, the number of days worked per week, introduced annual paid vacations, and the introduction of public recreation services. Emerging principles of social health and public support were fundamental to persuading governments to provide services for the leisure time of “unpaid as well as paid workers, women as well as men, and rural as well as urban folk” (Tilloston, p. 200).

Tilloston identifies that public interest in leisure rights was partially manifested through the creation of state-financed recreation services, culminating in the National Physical Fitness Act of 1943. Public recreation programs were framed as a way to provide recreation for all Canadians, although this was not entirely true. Advocates of publicly-funded recreation programs emphasized that people with low incomes were less likely to be able to afford recreation or leisure on their own. It was also believed that by engaging in recreational organizations, individuals would come to feel as though they were part of the larger community. However, in the post-war years, discriminatory access to recreational services continued to exist based on class and gender; in fact, there were several obstacles to making existing services inclusive of all races and religions. Tilloston identifies that barriers to leisure persist to this day. Still relevant today, her research acknowledges that, “many people find that lack of leisure is a barrier to their ability to be involved in the life of their communities in a way other than through work” (Tilloston, p. 217).

For many Canadians today, access to recreational and leisure facilities are taken for granted. Take for example the playground, a ubiquitous element in many communities, which is beloved by children of all ages. However, as Simmons (2013) writes, Canada’s first playgrounds only materialized at the turn of the twentieth century in Toronto. This was a result of advocacy by individuals and organizations for the rights of children and a child’s right to safe public spaces. The first purposively-built playgrounds were created as the result of a passionate campaign to aid children living in the slums of inner city Toronto. Previously, children living in squalid slum conditions had no choice but to play in alleys or streets. Here, they faced unsafe conditions and many were killed in collisions with carriages, streetcars, and the first automobiles. Activists, or “child savers” as they were known, believed that all children had a right to play, and that children should have safe spaces in which to do so. It was widely believed at the time that these ‘street children’ were being drawn into a life of delinquency, addiction, and homelessness (Simmons, 2013).

In 1909, the first municipality-supervised playground was opened in Toronto. Operated by the newly founded Playgrounds Association and equipped by the city’s Parks Department, the playground was so popular that twelve hundred children attended daily over the first summer. Toronto’s Mayor of the day, George Geary, declared, “fresh air and abundance of playground space is the inherent right of every child, and will do more to obliterate vicious juvenile habits and petty crime than any other means yet conceived” (Simmons, p. 75). By 1931, there were fifty-six supervised playgrounds across Toronto.
Simmons acknowledges that supervised recreation is vital to improving the quality of life for marginalized youth. “Over a century later, as we grapple with youth violence in a variety of neighbourhoods, it seems the child savers had it right: young people must find some sort of positive outlet for their natural energy and passion, and we ignore this at our peril” (Simmons, p. 75). Despite the actions of the twentieth century child savers, youth today in many Canadian communities still do not have access to safe public spaces for play in.

**3c. recreation + quality of life**

It is widely known that regular recreation contributes to a healthier lifestyle both in terms of physical and mental health; this becomes especially important for marginalized populations (Boys and Girls Club, 2007; CPRA, 2001). However, many Canadians are often failing to meet the necessary requirements to live a healthy life. This is especially true for children and youth. Consistent participation in physical activity at a young age is the greatest factor for an individual remaining active into their adulthood. However, many Canadian children and youth, not unlike their adult counterparts, are overweight or obese (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2008). For example, data from the 2009-2011 Canadian Health Measures Survey revealed that 32% of 5 to 17 year olds were overweight (20%) or obese (12%) (Roberts et al, 2012).

Participation of youth in recreational activities like swimming has been shown to promote healthy development, increase self-esteem, and help develop leadership skills. It has also been linked as an important tool for improving emotional and behavioral problems (CPRA, 2001; Mulholland, 2008; Totten, 2004). School-related skills; including problem solving and engagement and school attendance have all improved when kids are involved in sport and recreation. Additionally, participation in recreation has been shown to be particularly beneficial for marginalized youth. Observations have revealed that when youth become involved in recreation set within a healthy and positive environment; incidents of crime and deviant behavior have decreased (Boys and Girls Club, 2007; CPRA, 2001; Mulholland, 2008; Totten, 2004).

Girls and young women also reap specific benefits from recreation and sport. Studies have shown that young women are more prone to depression and other mental health issues as compared to their male peers. Involvement in recreation has likewise been observed as helping empower girls, boost their self-esteem and provide a greater sense of identity and self-direction (Active Healthy Kids, 2013; Mulholland, 2008). Also, adolescent girls who participate in sport and recreation are more likely to refrain from sexual activity or become pregnant than their non-athletic peers (Mulholland, 2008).

Furthermore, additional reviewed literature has revealed that higher participation rates in organized sport and recreation correlates to lower levels crime, and a reduction in anti-social behavior such as high school drop outs, vandalism, or drug use. Observation has exhibited that properly structured recreational activities that are led by positive role models can have a dramatic positive effect with youth who are involved in gangs or other criminal activity. Recreational activities and participation in sport, accomplishes this by providing a positive sense of community and belonging, thus offering a positive and constructive environment for youth (Boys and Girls Club, 2008; CPRA, 1994; Mulholland, 2008; Totten, 2004).

**3d. recreation + community development: lessons from winnipeg, canada.**

Marginalized low-income communities also benefit greatly from recreation; nonetheless barriers to participation in these neighbourhoods are often extensive. Millar and Rappaport (2009) examine the role that swimming pools could play within inner-city communities. Specifically, the two researchers propose how the re-envisioning
of an existing swimming pool could not only provide the benefits of recreation to Winnipeg’s West Central
technology, but also address existing barriers to program participation and facility access. Their work
examines how Winnipeg’s Sherbrook Pool “can provide a holistic range of services not simply through its role as
a swimming pool, but as an integral part of the community” (Millar & Rappaport, pg. 2). Looking at the facility
through a community development lens, they argue that Sherbrook Pool can provide accessible recreational
opportunities for highly marginalized populations, and also play a critical role in an asset-based community
development approach for the whole West Central Community.

Mirroring the work of Kretzmann and McKnight’s (1993) asset-based approach to community development,
Millar and Rappaport see the importance of identifying and strengthening a community’s assets and strengths.
Both groups of researchers acknowledge that inner-city neighbourhoods such as Winnipeg’s West Central are
often only viewed through a ‘deficit lens’, in that problems such as poverty, crime, and unemployment are the
focus. In contrast, these four researchers propose an asset-based community development approach that aims
to build from within a community using already existing assets such as swimming pools. Millar and Rappaport
also purport that municipal governments often view pools as an expensive and burdensome deficit, instead of the
community asset that they can be.

Recreation can also build up social capital in a community. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and
Development (2007) defines social capital as the “networks together with shared norms, values and understandings
that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.” Increased levels of social inclusion, mutual understanding
and trust have all been linked to communities that have strong recreation and leisure amenities. As Canadian
cities become increasingly diverse, it is proposed that recreation has the capability to connect people from various
ethnic, cultural, or socio-economic backgrounds. Recreation can facilitate connecting social capital through
its ability to build relationships between communities and families. In her report, What Sport Can Do (2008),
Elizabeth Mulholland summarizes research from the United Kingdom:

Sport and the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers shows that it can help to break down barriers
between newcomers and local host populations, improve relationships among asylum seekers of diverse
ethnic backgrounds, and build their self-esteem and self-confidence. Sport is also being used successfully
to link newcomers to key community services and supports (Mulholland, p. 15).

She argues that recreation has the capability to bring people together and strengthen the social ties within
families and in neighbourhoods. Recreation has the potential to connect people across economic, ethnocultural,
or geographic boundaries and Mulholland makes the point that such potential will lead to a greater sense of
community and social cohesion amongst diverse groups of citizens.

3e. barriers to recreation

It is apparent that there are numerous benefits to be gained from recreation; these include improved health,
community development, and the building of relationships. However, for many individuals and families, recreation
is simply not accessible, and thus its benefits are unattainable. This is particularly a problem for low-income youth
and their families. For many, the cost of recreation programs has been cited as being the most prominent barrier to
accessing recreation. Additionally, in terms of availability, low-income households often live in neighbourhoods
that are sorely lacking of recreational programs and facilities, and where public transportation is also poor (Active
& Healthy Kids 2013; CPRA, 1994; Totten; Frisby et al, 2005). A study conducted by the Canadian Parks and
Recreation Association looked at at-risk youth and their experiences with recreation; it found that transportation
and the cost of programs were the two primary obstacles for accessing recreation (CPRA, 1994, p. 66). User fees, admissions, a lack of affordable or free programming, as well as inaccessibility of facilities all contribute as barriers for low-income families and individuals wanting to access quality recreation (Forsyth, pgs. 59-61).

 Aside from economic and physical barriers to recreation there are also social barriers that exist. Factors such as race, gender, class, and culture can all prevent someone from participating in recreation, and swimming in particular. Newcomer families often live in poverty and in low-income neighbourhoods. Add to this any cultural, attitudinal or language barriers, and access to recreation services and facilities becomes more problematic (Active Healthy Kids, 2008). With regards to recreational programming, inadequate cultural sensitivity by municipal policy makers and recreational facility staff is a significant barrier to participation for many immigrants. Activities, such as swimming, which typically require tight-fitting clothing often compromises religious beliefs. Furthermore, program staff often do not speak the diversity of languages that are reflective of the populations they serve and therefore communication becomes a problem. A lack of involvement in sport and recreation due to socio-cultural and economic barriers is especially problematic for immigrants since sport and recreation can play an important role in their adjustment to a new country and society (OCASI, 2005).

 For example, there is a body of literature (Tynan, 2005; Taylor & Toohey, 2001) that has considered the recreational needs of Muslim women who live in predominately non-Muslim countries. Young women and girls who follow the teachings of Islam require 'modest' recreation space. The Canadian normative concept of swimming in a pool with little privacy and mixed gendered settings prevents Muslim women from participating. As noted by Tynan (2005, p. 187), “The nature of clothing worn in swimming pools, combined with mixed gender programming and open concept design (that is commonly used in newer swimming pools), makes recreational swimming an activity that is not possible in most public pools for Muslim women.” In the absence of female-only programming and other facility design considerations, a right to swim for these women has at times not been attainable due to municipal decisions makers and others who have decided to not make concessions or accommodations (Millar & Rappaport, 2009). As a result, there has been a lack of recognition of the needs of Muslim women when it comes to aquatic recreation.

 There are many advantages when individuals and families are able to participate in recreation and swimming. These include benefits for physical and mental health, but also the capability to bring youth, families, and communities closer together through a process of community building. However, not everyone has access to aquatic recreation. Even when swimming pools are physically accessible there may still be barriers to participation relating to cultural, religious, gender, or other reasons.
4a. A Brief History of Regent Park

Regent Park is Canada’s first social housing project, and at 69 acres, is also Canada’s largest. Initially built in 1949 to replace slums of Victorian era housing, the chief architect of Regent Park, J.E. Hoare, was inspired by the garden city movement. Low-rise apartment buildings and row houses were built facing central garden courtyards. Despite the good intentions of its planners, the inward orientation of Regent Park, where the traditional street grid was broken up into super blocks, created physical, social and economic barriers that exist to the present. Over the years Regent Park residents, many of them new Canadians, have suffered greatly from isolation caused by disconnected roads, limited access for emergency services, a lack of local employment opportunities, and extremely poor living conditions. By the turn of the twentieth century Regent Park was suffering from severe crime and poverty (Yarhi, 2012).

In 1995, Regent Park residents approached Toronto Community Housing Corporation about making improvements to the community. Extensive planning and consultation followed and in 2003 Toronto City Council approved an extensive revitalization plan for Regent Park. The plan emphasizes economic development and focusing on the needs of youth, while also actively involving resident associations in the design process. The plan’s goal is to create a mixed-income community of 12,500 people and to replace over 2000 rent geared to income housing units. Additionally, 700 new affordable rental units and 4,000 market housing units will be added. Other elements of the plan include reconnecting the street grid with pedestrian friendly streets, redeveloping parks and open space, and improving and creating community facilities such as the Regent Park Aquatic Centre. Placing most of these social amenities at Regent Park’s core is meant to create a stronger sense of community. The project, currently in its third phase, will be completed by 2020 (Agostino, 2013). The five-phase plan saw the initial phase of demolition begin in 2006. “Less than a decade later, the partially redeveloped Regent Park – though still a work-in-progress – has
emerged as a remarkable example of what can happen when governments, residents and the private sector come together for a high-minded exercise in city building” (Lorinc, 2013).

**4b. background**

On October 29th 2012, the Regent Park Aquatic Centre opened its doors for the first time to the public. As part of Toronto Community Housing Corporation’s (TCHC) Regent Park Revitalization initiative in the City of Toronto, this state-of-art facility provides the downtown Regent Park community with a new aquatic centre (Jackson, 2013).

The Regent Park Aquatic Centre (RPAC) is the only stand alone aquatic centre in Toronto’s downtown. Bordered by the busy Dundas Street to the south, Sumach Street to the east, and a recently revitalized park to the west. RPAC has become an important public amenity at the centre of a neighbourhood that is undergoing a dramatic transformation. The $14.6-million aquatic centre houses a 1,300-square-metre aquatics hall consisting of three separate pools. The facility incorporates features such as a waterslide, tarzan rope, accessibility ramp entries for each pool, as well as plenty of poolside seating. Toronto’s MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects (MJMA), a firm known for their community and athletic centres, designed RPAC to be a light-filled pavilion. The architecture firm has extensive experience with aquatic facilities, having built over twenty since the firms’ inception in 1988. (Lorinc, 2013; Miller, 2014).

The Regent Park Aquatic Centre has received extensive coverage in both local and national media since its opening. The design of the building has also won a number of prestigious architectural awards. Lisa Rochon (2012) from *The Globe and Mail* called the building “instantly magnetic and powerfully sculpted.” She went on to say, “what might have been interpreted merely as the tank to hold a pool has been upgraded to a City of Toronto facility that embraces all ages as well as the highest aspirations of our collective society.” Christopher Hume (2012) writing for *The Toronto Star* described the building as “exquisitely detailed yet boldly gestural, this is a recreational amenity taken to a whole new level.” Additionally, for their 2013 Fall ‘Best of Canada’ issue, *Canadian Interiors* put the Regent Park Aquatic Centre on their magazine cover. The publication awarded the facility ‘2013 Project of the Year’, stating that RPAC “provides an important civic amenity to a neighbourhood near downtown that was long marginalized as a ghetto for the poor and disadvantaged. This crown jewel of the large-scale urban renewal project at Regent Park, boasting a water slide and a hot-tub area, is not far from where crack houses once thrived” (Canadian Interiors, 2013).
Designed to meet the City of Toronto Green Development Standard, RPAC utilizes the Regent Park central energy supply system, a hot water district energy system. The building also features a green roof with drought-tolerant plants, and cisterns to collect rainwater. Additionally, RPAC was outfitted with energy efficient mechanical and electrical systems, while the pool dehumidification process mitigates heat loss as air is refreshed for the building. The HVAC system (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) uses filters to remove the sharp choline tang in the air, the only municipal pool in Toronto to do so (Balkissoon, 2013). Sliding doors set in the western wall of the pool can also be opened when the weather permits to provide natural ventilation (Architectural Record, 2013; Canadian Interiors, 2013; World Architectural News, 2013).

Regent Park Aquatic Centre Recognition

- 2013 Athletic Business Magazine: Facility of Merit Award
- 2013 Canadian Interiors Magazine – Best of Canada, Project of the Year (16th Annual Design Awards)
- 2013 City of Toronto Urban Design Award: Award of Excellence (Public Buildings Category)
- 2013 Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia Award in Architecture Medal
- 2013 Ontario Association of Architects (OAA): Design Excellence Award
- 2013 Parks & Recreation Ontario (PRO): Excellence in Design Award

Architecture and design aside, columnists and bloggers identified many of the positive features and amenities that RPAC provides. Most notably, the use of universal change rooms replaces the traditional men’s and women’s change rooms, the first facility in Canada to do so. Instead, everyone uses one of two ‘universal changing spaces,’ or universal change rooms. Within these spaces, forty privacy cubicles provide the necessary private space to change from street clothes into swimming attire. This results in multi-gender groups being able to use the same space at the same time. The flexibility of these universal change rooms makes it extremely helpful for caregivers, parents, and for camp or school groups (Bozikovic, 2013; Shulgan, 2012; World Architectural News, 2013). For individuals who identify as transgendered, the “one change room for all” concept makes attending RPAC all that more inviting (Canadian Interiors, 2013).

Other features of RPAC include ‘the leisure pool’, or kiddie pool, which at less than a metre in depth, is toddler friendly. Wide steps make it easy for toddlers and adults alike to enter the water. A water feature, shaped like a giant umbrella sprinkles water down into the pool, and jets in the pool floor create bubbling effects, entertaining children. Parents also get to enjoy a back massage from jets set into the walls of the pool at various heights. Additionally, ‘the conversation pool’ or hot-tub is generously spacious and accessible by a ramp, as is the six lane, 25 m ‘lap pool’. (Shulgan, 2012; Rochon, 2012). For women who have an interest in swimming without men, opaque screens can be lowered to offer privacy not only within the pool space but also in the universal change rooms (Rachon, 2012).

Another important feature of RPAC is the physical connection with the adjacent park. The aquatic centre has sliding glass doors off of the pool deck that open to allow access to terrace fronting on the newly opened ‘Regent Park Park’. Furthermore, the length of windows along the western side of the building will bring the sense of
nature from the park into the building (World Architectural News, 2013).

Eight years into the revitalization program of Regent Park, the aquatic centre has become extremely popular within the Regent Park community and for residents from across the city. On a busy day, over 1,200 people make use of the centre. David Miller, the partner in charge of the project at MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects (MJMA) has said, “there was surprisingly little opposition. People accepted the building quite readily (Bozikovic, 2013, p.116). For 2013, Toronto Life listed RPAC as the 11th reason (out of a list of 30) on why you should love Toronto. In the article, Denise Balkissoon (2013), outlined that the space is a busy recreation centre, but also a destination that reveals to the rest of Toronto the potential in Regent Park. Not only does Toronto’s Triathlon Club uses the space to practice in, but so does Regent Parks first ever swim team. Balkissoon ends by saying, “all the time and money is worth it, and the proof is in every splash.”

4c. the planning process

4c. i. project chronology

Prior to the City of Toronto’s amalgamation in 1998, there had been plans to build a city pool at Lord Dufferin Junior and Senior Public School. Located on the western edge of the Regent Park neighbourhood, Lord Dufferin Public School was meant to have their former small indoor pool, which had been lost when the school was rebuilt, replaced with a larger pool (Giles, Personal Communication, e-mail, March 20, 2014; Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014). This new indoor pool for the school and community was to be paid for through Section 37 funds. As part of the Ontario Planning Act, Section 37 enables municipalities to pass by-laws that authorize an increase in the height and density of a development that would otherwise not be permitted. In return for permission to build higher and bigger, the developer provides money or other in-kind contributions to the city (Moore, 2013). Often this money is used for public art, parks, or public facilities.

However, after the amalgamation of Toronto, the Lord Dufferin pool plan fell through. Anne Jackson, former Aquatics Manager for the City of Toronto’s, Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division, described in an interview that a municipally funded pool was not built at Lord Dufferin Public School partly because the partnership between the school board and the newly amalgamated city was still maturing. There were also some concerns regarding access issues for the public, and the allocation of city funds (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014). Doug Giles, Project Manager for RPAC at the Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division, identified that another hurdle for the Lord Dufferin pool was that there was not sufficient room on the school site for the size of pool that the city wished to build (Giles, Personal Communication, e-mail, March 20, 2014).

In 2006, discussions began between the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division (Parks & Recreation) and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) to locate an aquatic centre within the Regent Park redevelopment project as a component of a high-rise residential building. After further discussion, the TCHC and Parks & Recreation decided that a more opportune scenario was to use some of the land that was set aside for a city park as the site for a new aquatic centre (Giles, Personal Communication, e-mail, March 20, 2014). For Parks & Recreation, it was important that any aquatic centre built should be owned and operated by the city, so that the facility could be open to the public throughout the day. This would have been difficult to achieve if a pool had been built within a school. With this new plan in place, Parks & Recreation was thrilled about the ability to build a stand-alone aquatic facility on the site of a future park. Pam McConnell, the local city councilor, was also supportive of this new plan (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014).
In March 2007, a request for proposals was issued to hire an architect for the aquatic centre. In the end MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects (MJMA) of Toronto was hired to design the facility. The City wanted an architecture firm that was experienced with working with the community, something that Ms. Jackson (Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014) says was part of the reason that MJMA was hired for the job. According to David Miller, the partner at MJMA responsible for the Regent Park Aquatic Centre, when the City of Toronto puts out a request for proposals, architecture and design firms have to show that they have high design capabilities. “The city puts out request for proposals and then they tell you what qualifications you need to have to be able to put in a proposal, and it is usually experience with the building type. The City of Toronto, and I think it is quite interesting, is getting more stringent in that you have to show you have design abilities, in that they see awards for both local and national design work. They are kind of saying ‘we want good design now’” (Miller, Personal Communication, Interview, January 17, 2014). In addition to MJMA, several City of Toronto departments, and other organizations were involved in the planning and construction process at various times throughout the project. Aside from the TCHC, and Parks & Recreation; Toronto’s Community Planning and Legal Services divisions were also involved. Pam McConnell, the councilor of Ward 28 Toronto Centre-Rosedale, and who represents Regent Park, also took a vested interest throughout the process.

The original budget for the aquatic centre was not large enough to include two separate pools and a waterslide. However, these features were seen as important by members of the public and councilor McConnell to include. In the end, more funds were found, partly through Section 37 funds, which allowed for an increased project budget and a larger facility. However, construction was delayed as the building had to be redesigned. Construction began in October 2010, and two years later the 31,400 sq. ft. facility opened to the public (Giles, Personal Communication, e-mail, March 20, 2014).

4c. ii. public consultation

Anne Jackson revealed that typically with the City of Toronto, the level of public consultation varies from project to project. The local city councilor also plays an important role as a conduit between the city and the local residents during the planning of a capital project (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014). In order to determine the needs and wants of the community for a new aquatic centre, Parks & Recreation held a number of large town-hall meetings and smaller focus group meetings. The Recreation Supervisor of a nearby community centre and Aquatics Supervisors of other aquatic facilities in the city were also consulted for their feedback and suggestions (Giles, Personal Communication, e-mail, March 20, 2014).

The bulk of community consultation took place over the summer of 2007. An introductory town-hall meeting was held on July 9th; this was followed by a town-hall meeting regarding pool programming on July 31st, and then by a town-hall meeting on August 22nd confirming the pool concept. The final pool schematic was presented to the public on September 25th. It should also be noted that town-hall meetings for the planning of the city park, in which the aquatic centre is located, also took place during the summer of 2007. According to Parks & Recreation’s Public Consultation Overview for the aquatic centre and park, the purpose of the public consultation process was to “provide a forum for community input on the master planning of park/parkettes and the schematic design of the new indoor pool.” It was also meant to “establish priority community needs/desires for outdoor components, refine pool program, and confirm preferred relationships between new pool building and the park site” (Librecz, 2007, pg. 1)

Specific groups of people were targeted to attend these town-hall meetings, including local community members and residents from surrounding neighbourhoods. Existing users of City of Toronto recreation facilities were also seen as a priority group to engage with, in addition to youth, seniors, and non-English speaking communities.
Aside from the general public, several key stakeholders were also invited to the public meetings. They included: City Councilor Pam McConnell, the Regent Park Neighbourhood Initiative, the TCHC Design Review Committee, TCHC Security, a local day care, Regent Park Tenant Council, members of the local police division, and the supervisor from the nearby Regent Park Community Centre.

Various methods were utilized to inform members of the public, stakeholders and other community groups about the meetings. Flyers were distributed throughout the Regent Park neighbourhood, including some that were delivered door to door. Posters were placed on notice boards at community centres, libraries, and pools. Information was also dispersed to parents and caregivers through summer camps, and in order to reach non-English speaking individuals TCHC community facilitators were utilized. Councilor Pam McConnell also supplied Parks & Recreation with a list of contacts to reach out to. To accommodate the diverse community at the town hall meetings, interpretation services were provided in seven languages other than English, as well as in American Sign Language. Additionally, there was childcare available for parents and caregivers (Librecz, 2007).

In addition to the public town-hall meetings, three stakeholder workshops were held for three target audiences. The first workshop was held to elicit feedback from various cultural groups, including individuals from Regent Park’s Bengali, Tamil, Urdu, Somali, Chinese, Vietnamese, French, and Spanish communities. Interpreters were present at this workshop in order to interpret for those who did not speak English. The second workshop consisted of two community groups from a neighbourhood just north of Regent Park, the Cabbagetown Neighbourhood Group and the South Cabbagetown Neighbourhood Group. While the last workshop consisted of individuals from various agencies as well as staff from City of Toronto Divisions, including police, Regent Park Recreation Centre staff, local TCHC staff, and staff from the Wellesley Community Centre (Librecz, 2007). Despite efforts by the City to seek feedback from residents and future users of the facility, overall public interest in town-hall meetings was low (Giles, Personal Communication, e-mail, March 20, 2014).

According to Anne Jackson, the public did not have a lot of demands for the new aquatic centre aside from concerns by some regarding public access for everyone. However, Parks & Recreation was made aware at the meetings, and through Councilor McConnell, of a large number of Muslim women within the community that wanted the ability to swim in privacy without being viewed by men (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014).

In addition to public consultation, Anne Jackson, and other Parks & Recreation staff were taken by architects at MJMA on tours of other aquatic facilities in order to get an idea of what design or programming aspects they wished to include at RPAC (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014).

4c. iii. primary design + programming objectives

Coming out of the preliminary planning and public consultation phase, MJMA and Parks & Recreation prioritized certain objectives for the aquatic centre. David Miller, at MJMA, acknowledged that Parks & Recreation were the drivers of the ‘program’ or design components of the aquatic centre. “The City makes policy on the direction and nature of things, and we design them” (Miller, Personal Communication, Interview, January 17, 2014). Parks & Recreation wanted a facility that could accommodate aquatic recreation programming for a broad range of people and users. In fact, many of the residents within the Regent Park neighbourhood are not what Anne Jackson calls “experienced users” (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014), targeting these people and making them feel welcome became a priority for the new centre.

A significant feature that emerged from the planning process was the decision to include universal change rooms
(Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014). Parks & Recreation had previous experience with family change rooms, used in other City of Toronto pools, and knew how popular they could be. However, these mix-gendered spaces sometimes create confrontation amongst users, mostly related to overcrowding due to their popularity. Parks & Recreation officials were also concerned about “entrainment areas” in change rooms where too much privacy and too little supervision could create unsafe situations for swimmers, and particularly for children. When designing change rooms in general, Parks & Recreation acknowledges the importance of escape routes, and raised doors on changing stalls for safety reasons. By ensuring that change rooms have people coming and going continuously, and by creating more open views in the spaces, it makes it more difficult for vandals or others to carry out dangerous or criminal acts (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014).

In the past, traditional gender specific change rooms have also been a source of complaints to the city for a number of reasons. For example, if a female-only change room at an aquatic facility has a maintenance or cleanliness issue and there are no female maintenance or custodial staff present, the change room may have to close down for a time, while a male employee fixes the problem. If this occurs during a busy programming time such as swimming lessons, this can be a source of inconvenience for users of the facility (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014).

Building off the popularity of family change rooms, and the desire to accommodate families and all individuals, Parks & Recreation approached MJMA about designing universal change rooms for RPAC, instead of the traditional male and female change rooms. According to Anne Jackson, “everyone likes to change in private.” It was decided to include a total of thirty-two private change cubicles, providing a private space to change within the universal changing rooms. The idea to add these gender neutral spaces at RPAC, with their increased privacy and safety, was well received when presented to the public at the town-hall meetings (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014).

As previously mentioned, through the consultation process Parks & Recreation were made aware of the need by Muslim women for privacy while swimming and changing. Many non-Muslim women also expressed the desire for the addition of female-only programming. To accommodate these women, motorized blinds, or privacy screens, were added to the building design so that when female-only programming occurs; the aquatics hall and change rooms can be made private when the screens cover the glass (Giles, Personal Communication, e-mail, March 20, 2014; Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014).

Architectural design features of the building also emerged as important design objectives. In particular, natural light was maximized in the building’s design as a way of contributing towards the welcoming aspect of the facility. David Miller identified that the central design theme for the RPAC was to make it an open facility. “How open can one make it? You can make it visually open, and that’s what we tried to do. We treated the building like a pavilion so that it was as open and inviting as possible” (Miller, Personal Communication, Interview, January 17, 2014). Councilor McConnell also indicated that she would like RPAC to take advantage of the adjacent park, and to somehow incorporate nature into the design. As such, the west wall of the aquatics hall, which faces the park, was outfitted with large sliding glass doors that can be slid open to serve as a direct connection between the park and the interior of the building.
4d. the building + programming

As the only stand alone aquatic centre in Toronto’s downtown core, the Regent Park Aquatic Centre has emerged as a flagship facility for the city’s Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division. Now retired from being the City’s Aquatics Manager, Anne Jackson has described the facility as the jewel in her career, and that all along she wanted RPAC to become “an iconic facility” (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014).

In the winter of 2014, the researcher received a tour of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre from Nadia Marrella, the acting Community Recreation Programmer at RPAC. In addition, interviews were conducted with Anne Jackson, David Miller, as well as with a community development worker and community engagement worker from Regent Park. Further to these conversation, the aquatic centre was visited on three occasions in order to gain a better idea of how RPAC functions, and how people interact with the space. What follows is a summary of the various features, amenities, and programming of the aquatic centre and how they incorporate principles of social, cultural and economic equity.

4d. i. the building

According to David Miller, the trend in swimming pool design is evolving towards more inclusive and welcoming facilities. Most pools built before the 1990’s were what Miller calls a “cold blue rectangle” and “very utilitarian.” Today, the trend has moved away from swimming pools that have been designed primarily for high-performance athletes and are instead catering to a much broader range of the public by incorporating leisure components. Indoor swimming pools are now built so that they are filled with natural light and with pools that are shallower with warmer water. Architects are now striving to create aquatic centres that can be enjoyed by people of all ages and all swimming abilities.

The architects and planners behind the Regent Park Aquatic Centre carried on this trend, taking it to a new level however, by making it as welcoming and open as possible, regardless of a patron’s socio-economic or cultural background. According to Miller, “the idea [for RPAC] was as much as possible to see right through the building so it appears, looks, and feels accessible and open” (Miller, Personal Communication, Interview, January 17, 2014).

“This is a see-through building from all elevations, enhanced by clean, simple and strong interior design. The long, low horizontal lines of the white Roman bricks that stack up to form the changing cubicles, and of the blue water in the pools, combine with luminosity of the building’s airy spaces to give an atmosphere of serenity and dignity rarely found in a community athletic facility”

(Canadian Interiors, 2013, pg. 10).
Aquatic Centre vs. Swimming Pool

The City of Toronto’s current aquatics management strategy is to build fewer but larger swimming pools that will act as a destination for a larger number of Toronto residents. The city is moving away from the model of building small pools that have fewer features, which are not as popular with the public. The term ‘aquatic centre’ is used to describe an aquatic facility that offers more than just a singular lap pool. Features regularly found in an aquatic centre include a conversation pool (hot tub), warm-water leisure pool, slides and other water features such as jets and fountains (Giles, Personal Communication, e-mail, March 20, 2014; Miller, 2014).
Figure 3: Ground Floor Plan of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre.
Source: MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects
CASE STUDY - THE REGENT PARK AQUATIC CENTRE

Figure 4: Front Entrance of the RPAC. Source: Michael Rac

Figure 5: Lobby and Reception. Source: Michael Rac
ENTRANCE + RECEPTION

Visitors approach RPAC via a wide sidewalk or set of low stairs that slope up from the busy Dundas Street and across a treed lawn to the southern end of the aquatic centre. There are bicycle racks that offer a safe and protected spot to lock up bikes before heading into the building. An overhang of the roof extends beyond the structure covering a plaza area in front of the entrance. David Miller describes this architectural element as creating a big porch on the front of the building for the community (Miller, Personal Communication, Interview, January 17, 2014).

Upon entering through the glass double doors, visitors walk into a spacious and clean lobby, with views of the aquatics hall to their left, and a reception desk in front. The lobby contains two accessible washrooms that are open to the public and users of the adjacent park. There is also a water fountain, access to the pool deck viewing space, and some seating. The reception desk is situated slightly off to the side in a way that makes it accessible if you need information or some assistance, yet it is not obtrusive. In some other recreational facilities where the reception desk is front and centre, visitors can feel intimidated by the perception that they need to seek approval to enter the building. RPAC’s reception desk instead is tucked to the side, creating an unobstructed path to the universal change rooms. The reception desk is staffed with two people at all times during programming hours.

Just past the reception area is a large community bulletin board. It seems to be well used, so that on all four site visits to RPAC there was a wide selection of postings for different activities. For example, on February 12th 2014, some of these posters included artistic skills classes for youth, seniors Tai Chi classes, French lessons, Sunshine Centres for Seniors Program Guide, and information on a diabetes education program just to name a few. This community bulletin functions as communication hub for neighbourhood activity, education, and social services, and is an excellent way for residents of Regent Park to stay connected with their community. In the same space there was also a piano that invited anyone to sit down and play. Ultimately, the lobby and reception area is an architecturally stunning space, but is also welcoming and pleasant to be in -- ‘welcoming’ being a theme that will be carried on throughout the building.
MULTIPURPOSE ROOM

The multipurpose room, or community room, is a large light filled room outfitted with a kitchenette. This versatile space can be booked for birthday parties, or other gatherings. Nadia Marrella, the acting Community Recreation Programmer at RPAC, notes that on any given weekend there are six birthday parties booked – the fees paid for the use of this space provides RPAC with some extra funds that can be used to supplement the facility’s budget. This community room can also be booked and used by community groups. For example, the Boys & Girls Club has used the multipurpose room in the past. The room has also been used for community parties hosted by RPAC staff, such as a ‘Schools Out Party’ at the end of the school year for youth where a movie is screened and popcorn is served.

This community space offers additional opportunities for RPAC to have a positive effect in the community by offering a space for residents to gather, interact, and in some cases, play. It is important however, that this community room remains accessible for use by community groups and for Regent Park residents.

UNIVERSAL CHANGE ROOMS

Leaving the lobby and multipurpose room, visitors walk down a corridor lined with bench ledges and windows looking out onto Sumach Street, and enter into one of the two universal change rooms.

Both universal change rooms are bookended with glass, enabling one to look out into the aquatics hall, or out onto Sumach Street. There are rows of both paid and unpaid lockers. The paid lockers require a quarter to be locked, while the others can be locked with ones own lock. Having both paid and unpaid lockers removes the economic barrier of always needing to pay for a locker. Adjacent to the lockers are the privacy changing cubicles. These small fully enclosed cubicles with a locking door, bench and clothing hooks are where you change from street
clothes into your swimming attire.

The universal change rooms require somewhat of a shift in thinking for those who may not be familiar with them. David Miller says, “a lot of education needs to come with these, you have to think of this zone not as the change room, but instead each cubicle is the change room” (Miller, Personal Communication, Interview, January 17, 2014). For avid swimmers, or those who are new to swimming, at first it seems a bit odd not to be able to change right at your locker, and instead have to use the cubicles. However, in the end it is a much more comfortable experience than changing in the open as in traditional locker rooms.

The Regent Park Aquatic Centre may be the first swimming facility in Canada with universal, rather than male and female change rooms. However, David Miller reveals that universal change rooms are typical in most pool complexes in Europe. There, they have been embraced by LGBTQ communities because they create a comfortable and welcoming environment by enabling everyone to use the same space, instead of individuals having to choose between either a male or female change rooms. This decision can be particularly difficult for trans-gendered people, or for others with in the LGBTQ community.

In terms of planning, the universal change rooms at RPAC, required a lot of guesswork on the part the architects to determine how many privacy cubicles per swimmer were needed. David Miller acknowledged that it was important to keep the cubicles at the right number; too few cubicles and long waits would occur during peak times, and too many cubicles would result in unnecessary material and construction costs. In the end, thirty-two privacy cubicles were added. Four of these are larger wheelchair accessible rooms equipped with their own showers.

The decision to build two universal change rooms at RPAC instead of just one was also an important design decision. Having two change rooms enables staff the ability to service or clean one of the change rooms, while the other remains open. With traditional change rooms, if one is closed down, whether it be in the men’s or women’s,
there usually is no alternative to fall back upon. Having two universal change rooms gives RPAC staff more flexibility; for example, on a particularly slow day, only one change room needs to be open which then saves on maintenance and cleaning costs.

Hair blow-dryers, a ubiquitous sight in most locker rooms are usually a planning after-thought; however, they have been made more accessible and user-friendly at RPAC. Blow-dryers have been mounted to the wall in a variation of five different heights. This seemingly small design decision allows swimmers of all heights, age, and those in a wheelchair a more pleasant experience of drying their hair. The universal change rooms also contain fully enclosed and accessible washrooms.

Moving from the universal change rooms to the aquatics hall, takes the visitor through the shower zone before stepping out onto the pool deck. Like the change rooms, these showers are used by everyone regardless of their gender, and as such bathers need to keep their swimming attire on. Signage reminds all swimmers that they must shower before entering the pools, and to not remove their swimming attire. Like the blow-dryers, the showerheads are set at different heights making the monotonous process of showering before and after swimming more personalized.

The shower zone is recessed from the pool deck, but is completely open to the aquatics hall. Nadia Marrella, the acting Community Recreation Programmer at RPAC, says that how the shower zone is situated forces everyone to shower prior to swimming. This ensures that the pools remain cleaner for longer, as there is less outside contaminants, such as dirt and hair products entering the pools. Having everyone shower before they enter the pool may not occur if the showers were hidden away in a locker room, instead of being open and visible to lifeguards and staff.

AQUATICS HALL

After leaving the shower zone, you step out onto the pool deck and into the aquatics hall. The hall is filled with natural light from a skylight that stretches the length of the building, and the floor to ceiling glass walls that nearly encircle the entire space. Along the lengths of the walls are continuous tiled benches that create plenty of space to sit and wait for a lesson, to stash a towel or water bottle while swimming, or for parents and caregivers to be closer to the action. The roof, slats of wood, folds down towards the western wall making the space feel intimate and comfortable. David Miller describes the effect as being in “an overturned canoe.”

In total there are three separate pools with different purposes, each has its own ramp access for those with mobility concerns. There is the leisure pool at the southern end of the hall that has been nicknamed ‘The Lily Pond’. On site visits to RPAC this warmer water pool has been full of toddlers with caregivers, and young children playing as the adults who accompanied them sat in shallow water and talked.

Cut into a corner of leisure pool is the conversation pool or hot tub. With bench seating in the hot water, on one of site visits, adults were sitting and relaxing after swimming in the lap pool. On the other site visits, the conversation pool was closed and being re-filled. Nadia Marrella has said that this sometimes occurs, to the disappointment of patrons, because at such a high water temperature, the chemical PH balance of the pool is easily thrown off and the strict health and safety standards cannot be ensured (Marrella, Personal Communication, Interview, February 12, 2014).

The largest and deepest pool is the lap pool, a 25 metre pool, with a depth of 3.1 metres at its deepest point. There are four diving blocks, as well as a 1 metre springboard diving board. During leisure swim drop-in programming...
Figure 8: The RPAC Aquatics Hall. Source: MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects
there is also a tarzan rope to swing off of a diving block and into the water. On site visits, there was a line of eager children waiting to take their turn to swing out and plunge into the pool.

There is also a water slide, an important element for youth to any aquatic centre. The slide is self-contained from the pool, as it terminates in its own splash basin. This means that there is only a height requirement to use the slide, and does not discriminate based on swim skill because there is no swimming required. For those who may not have the swimming skills to be able to use a slide that terminates in a deep pool, this feature allows them to participate in the fun. It has been observed on site visits, that the slide is very popular and is also a lot of fun.

For parents, caregivers, family or friends who are not participating in programming there is also viewing area right on the pool deck, with only a low transparent wall acting as a divider. This allows viewers to be part of the atmosphere of the aquatics hall, something that would not occur if they were behind a full glass wall like in most aquatic centres. Features such as this viewing area, and the water slide all add to the inclusive nature of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre.

City of Toronto Aquatic Facilities

*The City of Toronto has 31 city owned and operated indoor pools, 58 outdoor pools, as well as 33 municipally funded school pools*  
*(Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014)*.

VARIATIONS IN POOL DEPTHS

The Regent Park Aquatic Centre was designed so that its three pools had a variation in depths so as to accommodate the various ages and abilities of attendees. The leisure pool has two sections, each with their own depth range. The first section slopes from practically 0 cm to 75 cm, and the second ranges from 75 cm to 90 cm. This first section allows for a pre-school teaching area, where young swimmers are able to stand in the water unsupported. Often in the past, young children would have to stand on tables in deeper water, a practice that raises a number of safety concerns. The second slightly deeper area of the leisure pool works well for parent and tot programming, where young children and their caregivers can both comfortably interact in the warmer water (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014).

The lap pool, on the other hand is significantly deeper. At its shallow end the pool’s 90 cm (3ft) minimum depth allows less confident swimmers the ability to stand in the water, while the deep end can accommodate diving or synchronized swimming groups. This variation in depths within the same space means that individuals of various ages and swimming abilities can all make use of the aquatic centre at same time (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014). The variety of features within the aquatics hall, including the variation in pool depths makes RPAC useable and accessible for a wide range of people.
In an interview aired on CBC Radio’s program *Intersections* in June 2013, City Councilor Pam McConnell spoke about how the Regent Park Aquatic Centre accommodates the large Muslim community in Regent Park through the addition of privacy screens.

This was originally a school pool with a few lanes. Muslim women wouldn’t be able to swim at all, because unless there was a curtained-off area, or you had a place for women, no they wouldn’t be able to swim in mixed company. So we went out into the community six years ago, and started to talk about what we really wanted in our pool. The Muslim women were front and center in this design because we had been doing a whole redevelopment in Regent Park, so we had been encouraging people to bring their voices forward, and so they immediately started to say that if we were to use this pool we can’t use it unless its closed off (McConnell, 2013).

As the building was going to feature a large amount of glass, the architects suggested pulling down blinds over the glass windows and walls, so that during female-only programming the whole facility could become the women’s area instead of just creating a segregated section. Motorized screens were installed on the glass windows in the aquatics hall and in the universal change rooms. This allows for what is normally a very open and transparent facility to become temporarily veiled in privacy during female-only programming.

In the interview, Councilor McConnell (2013) goes on to say that “when the blinds are down we know that the women are swimming.” Women in Regent Park, both Muslim and non-Muslim now have a space where they can get exercise, interact with their neighbours while being able to feel safe and comfortable. This would not be possible if female-only programming and the privacy screens were not in place. An easy infrastructure addition, the privacy screens enable a large segment of Regent Parks population, Muslim women and girls, to be able to access the facility and enjoy the public space.

Nadia Marrella also revealed that the privacy screens in the universal change rooms play a double role. When school groups come to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre, or when there are youth camps taking place, the change rooms can convert back into traditional male and female change rooms by simply lowering the blinds. This enables the change rooms to accommodate a large number of kids very quickly.

**4b. ii. programming**

There are two types of programming at the Regent Park Aquatic Centre: registered programs and drop-in programs. Registered programs require registration, and usually a registration fee. At RPAC, however, all registered programming is free of charge. Though this was not always the case though. When the aquatic centre first opened registered programs, like most other City of Toronto recreational facilities, required paying a fee. For example, at other indoor City of Toronto swimming pools, nine weeks of swimming lessons range from $37 for Guardian Swim (parent & tot) classes to $93 for Adult Swim classes. The fees go even higher if you opt for smaller class sizes, or private lessons, (FUN Guide, 2014). Despite having registration fees, low-income Toronto residents could apply for a fee subsidy, the Welcome Policy, to help subsidize the cost of recreation programs. In addition to the registered programs, RPAC also offers a number of drop-in programs. These programs, which do not require registration and are also free, and include lane swim, leisure swim and Aquafit classes.

After a few months of operating, the decision was made by Parks & Recreation to make RPAC a priority centre (Marrella, Personal Communication, Interview, February 12, 2014). Introduced in 1999, the Priority Centre
The City of Toronto’s Welcome Policy

The City of Toronto offers the Welcome Policy: a fee subsidy for Toronto’s recreation programs. The subsidy is meant to assist low-income residents of Toronto, families and individuals, access city recreation programs. In order to receive the subsidy, applicants need to complete a form, provide one form of documentation, proof of residency in Toronto, and proof of their income. To be eligible, applicants must have a before tax family income of less than Statistics Canada’s Low Income Cut-Off, which for a single person, is $23,298. If approved a Welcome Policy credit of $455 will be given to youth under 25, and $212 for those 25 and over. The credit can then be used when registering for any city recreation programming.

The program aims to increase access to recreation in low-income neighbourhoods by eliminating program fees. As of November 2013, there were 23 Priority Centres located across Toronto including RPAC. Priority Centres have 3 objectives:

1. Reduce barriers to recreation in communities with high levels of poverty by eliminating fees and reducing administrative hurdles;

2. Enhance community development through outreach and the mixing of community residents with different needs, cultures and incomes; and,

3. Provide opportunities to increase participation from the local community in recreation (General Manager, 2013).

According to Nadia Marrella, in order to accommodate registration for Regent Park residents, RPAC maintains in-person registration, something that is not usually done at other Priority Centres. There are three ways to register for city recreation programs, online, over the phone, and in person.

Ms. Marrella, explained that RPAC is better equipped to accommodate Regent Park patrons because of the three methods of registration:

Online registration is the fastest form of registration. Then comes phone registration, which is usually touch-tone phone. Well you need to have money to have a computer… and then you need to be able to speak English to get through a touch-tone registration or be able to communicate well enough over the phone to an operator to get your information across. Mamma’s are at that door at 3:00am lining up. I come in every registration day at 6:00am if we are open, and it is crazy. The line up goes from the front door down to Dundas. It’s amazing the we have the opportunity because we have swims [programming] going on, that we can open our doors to those people, because they would not be served otherwise, and we fill within thirty minutes of those registration lines being open.

Ms. Marrella explained that programming decisions are made in-house, noting: “We definitely listen to the needs of the community” (Marrella, Personal Communication, Interview, February 12, 2014). She identified however, that because programming at RPAC is free, the aquatic centre has a fixed operating budget. Since costs such a
staffing and hours of operation are somewhat inflexible, programming is gapped. This means that when there is a long waiting list for a particular class, the gap in the schedule allows for extra programming to be added here and there as demanded through registration numbers. Staff at RPAC also make an extra effort by calling patrons who have repeatedly missed classes to determine if they plan on returning. If they do not, people on the wait list can be added to the class. Marrella noted, “This is not a process that is followed in a lot of facilities, because a lot of facilities are not supported the way the aquatic centre [RPAC] is with two people at the front desk” (Marrella, Personal Communication, Interview, February 12, 2014). Birthday parties, pool rentals, and various swim clubs that take out permits, have also helped to supplement extra funds for staffing and other costs.

4d. iii. Access and Equity Concerns

FEMALE-ONLY PROGRAMMING

Female-only programming was first implemented at a City of Toronto swimming pool in Scarborough in 1986. Anne Jackson, the city’s former aquatic manager, who also oversaw the planning and opening of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre, implemented these first female-only classes and drop-in programs. For RPAC, Ms. Jackson acknowledged that female programming was a must have, and that it was always her intention to include it within the new aquatic centre. During these times, the motorized privacy screens are lowered, making the windows into the aquatics hall and change rooms opaque. This allows complete privacy from the outside for the women who participate in female-only programming (Jackson, 2014).

Ms. Jackson notes that female-only programming is referred to as such, and not as women-only programming, because it is meant to be for women of all ages including youth. The word ‘female’ is thought to be more inclusive than the word ‘women’ in respect to age. The female-only programming is very popular with the public, and RPAC has the best turnout for this type of programming than any other City of Toronto aquatic facility (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014). To better accommodate the popularity of female-only programming more time was allotted for it in RPAC’s schedule.

Sureya Ibrahim, a mother and resident of Regent Park, who also works as a community engagement worker in the community, spoke about the popularity of female-only programming at RPAC. She said that two hundred women showed up for the first female-only session. Herself a Muslim women, Sureya, stated, “having the swimming pool… we are so happy about it. And in terms of having the programs, the female-only makes a huge difference in a lot of the Muslim communities.” (Ibrahim, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014).

CULTURAL + RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS

Sureya Ibrahim, a Regent Park community engagement worker, highlighted how the female-only programming and privacy screens at RPAC enable some women to make use of this aquatic facility and that they would not be able to access the centre without them (Ibrahim, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014). She also acknowledged, however, that other barriers needed to be addressed at RPAC in order to better meet the needs of Regent Park’s diverse group of residents.

When the Regent Park Aquatic Centre first opened, Sureya, herself a participant in the first female-programming session, revealed that staff and lifeguards were caught off-guard by the large number of women who showed up, many of whom had never been in a pool before. Sureya explains:

I don’t know how to swim, and we just went into the pool and stood there, and you couldn’t move around
because it was packed. Then the lifeguard panicked, everyone had to come out and no one knew the proper procedures. And they [the women] were stressed out, and the lifeguard was yelling. The women were not used to this yelling and because there was so many people you could not hear. Most of the women did not know how to follow the rules of the pool.

Sureya identified a number of potential concerns. Although RPAC’s physical infrastructure was in place to handle the female-only programming, RPAC was not properly equipped in terms of user education and staffing for hosting such a large group of women who had little or no experience with the protocols and culture of swimming. Factors such as appropriate dress code, and the knowledge to shower before entering a pool were simply not known or fully understood by the women. Additionally, lifeguards had difficulty communicating with the women, as many of them had limited experience with English.

In order to equip the linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse group of women with some swimming culture education, and reduce any trepidation they may have to making use of RPAC and its programming, Sureya, and the community organization she works at, organized an informational meeting. They were able to find a Muslim woman who teaches swimming lessons. She volunteered to come and speak to the women at the Regent Park Learning Centre. Astonishingly, eighty-five women attended and learnt helpful information such as what they should wear while swimming, where they could buy inexpensive chlorine resistant leggings, and other important tips relating to swimming at a public facility.

Though organized through an independent community organization, RPAC was very willing to collaborate, says Sureya, “the pool manager worked with the community to come up with accommodations. She was willing to listen and work with us.” (Ibrahim, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014). Community members and RPAC staff discussed how safety should be paramount over religious or cultural traditions. For example, it was discussed how head scarves such as the hijab can pose a serious safety risk while swimming. Swim caps were suggested as an alternative. Though, because of the privacy screens prevented men, or anyone else, from being able to look in on the women swimming, there was really no need for the women to wear headscarves at all (Ibrahim, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014).

ACCESS TO PROGRAMMING + REGISTRATION

Sureya identified another concern that existed within the community regarding access to programming at RPAC. Many Regent Park residents do not have easy access to a computer, and thus registering for programming online is not accessible. Many residents are also not familiar, and thus not comfortable with registration over the phone. A large group of community members therefore rely on the ability to register in person. As Nadia Marrella discussed, it is important the RPAC continues to offer in-person registration. However, as Sureya recounts the experience of registering her own children, there is such a demand from within the Regent Park community for RPAC programming, that at times the registration line would stretch from the building’s entrance down to Dundas Street. Between online and over the phone registration from non-Regent Park residents, and the lineup for in-person registration, classes become full very quickly. Sureya knows of people who have waited in line and who have been unable to secure spots in programming for either themselves or their children.

Many residents, including a long-term Regent Park resident and community development worker whom the researcher spoke with, are concerned that Regent Park residents, and particularly children, are unable to register for programming because residents from outside of the community are filling the spots. It is important to note, that any city of Toronto resident can register for programs at the Regent Park Aquatic Centre. The City does not restrict registrants to a particular catchment area (Marrella, Personal Communication, Interview, February
This means that a person in Scarborough could register for a swimming class at RPAC. Also, given that RPAC is a brand new facility that has received a lot of positive attention in the media, it is no surprise that residents from all over Toronto would flock to use it.

However, this troubles Gina (not her real name), the Regent Park community development worker who the researcher spoke with. She believes that either registration should open to Regent Park residents first, or that there should be reserved spaces in programming for those residents. There is general agreement among Regent Park residents, that they should have a priority in accessing services at RPAC over other Toronto residents (Smith, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014). Sureya agrees that this is a big concern, and that a system should be put in place that protects community members. Both women are concerned that Regent Park residents are unable to access programming because of the popularity of the facility with residents from other parts of Toronto. Sureya says, “We don’t have access to the pool, our kids should be priority” (Ibrahim, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014).

One of the original objectives for the revitalization of the Regent Park community was to open up the neighbourhood to the rest of Toronto by making it safe and inviting for people from other parts of the city, as a way to end Regent Park’s decades of social isolation (Agostino, 2013). The popularity and success of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre is a sign that this objective has, to an extent, been achieved; however, as Regent Park and RPAC received positive media attention and grew in popularity, it also has created some tension between the original residents of the community and other City of Toronto residents over access to recreation and services (Smith, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014). Both Gina and Sureya acknowledged that the City, and the TCHC needs to address this tension and partner with the community in order to come up with solutions that address the concerns of Regent Park residents, while also allowing the rest of the city to enjoy everything Regent Park has to offer. Gina believes the City should sponsor “more purposeful community cohesion activities” like a ‘meet your neighbours pool party’ at RPAC so that everyone can “use those facilities in the light we intended [them for], creating those common spaces” (Smith, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014).

THE IMPORTANCE OF FREE PROGRAMMING

Both Gina and Sureya stressed how important it was that RPAC became a Priority Centre. Sureya acknowledged that many families within Regent Park are impoverished and living in TCHC housing. Additionally, many Asian and African families have more than two or three children. Recreation for these families becomes secondary to securing food, shelter and education. Sureya notes, “many of these families have 5,6,7, kids, you choose to buy food or you go swimming” (Ibrahim, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014).

Gina acknowledges that because of the free programming, RPAC centre is open for everyone. Parents are not forced to decide between buying groceries or sending their kids to swim at the pool. If RPAC were to lose its Priority Centre status, the monetary cost of accessing programming would be a significant socio-economic barrier to many in the community (Smith, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014).

SIGNAGE + COMMUNICATION

With any public recreation facility, equitable access is dependent on whether participants are able to effectively communicate their concerns or questions to staff, and for rules and other pertinent information to be easily understood. Signage plays an important part of this communication. Nadia Marrella explained that in addition to English, signage at RPAC is displayed in Cantonese and Mandarin. However, Gina pointed out that Regent Park is a very diverse community with many distinct cultural and ethnic communities. Furthermore, many of
these residents are new Canadians and are only beginning to learn English. She explained that Regent Park has significant Bengali, Somali, Tamil, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, Urdu, Punjabi, and French African communities.

People from these linguistic communities may experience barriers to participating at RPAC because of issues relating to miscommunication, or apprehension due to signage being in an unknown language. Communication challenges between patrons and staff is another potential barrier. Ms. Marrella says that staff does their best communicating with the public at RPAC and will sometimes facilitate communication through other residents who can interpret, saying “we all come together to help each other out” (Marrella, Personal Communication, Interview, February 12, 2014).
5 | LESSONS FROM THE REGENT PARK AQUATIC CENTRE

Every Canadian regardless of religion, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, or economic status should be able access the public aquatic recreation facilities in their communities. Planners, community activists and municipal governments across Canada should be paying attention to Regent Park Aquatic Centre and the overall positive effect it is having on its community and patrons. Just as physical accessibility elements are incorporated into public recreation facilities, consideration must also be given to socio-economic and cultural accessibility. As Canadian communities become more diverse and reflect increasing numbers of cultural, religious, and linguistic communities, it is important that public recreational facilities also reflect this shift. For example, it should be possible for a Muslim woman to be able to access her neighbourhood aquatic centre just as equitably as her Caucasian Christian neighbours do. Or a transgender person ought to be able to feel comfortable swimming in his or her neighbourhood pool, just as their cisgendered friend may. Aquatic recreation has a myriad of positive benefits for individuals and families, and everyone should be able to access those benefits. RPAC has made significant ground in becoming a facility that is accessible and equitable for everyone.

The Regent Park Aquatic Centre is a product of its environment within the City of Toronto and the Regent Park neighbourhood. For example the progressive ambitions of Parks & Recreation, the determination of City Councilor McConnell, the expertise of MJMA, and the resilient outspoken residents of Regent Park have all come together to build an aquatic centre that brings pride to the community. However, although RPAC is the result of some very specific conditions in a particular setting, this does not mean that its strengths cannot be replicated in communities across Canada. Grounded in an understanding of the benefits of aquatic recreation, but also of the barriers that prevent equitable access, the following are the five most important lessons or pieces of advice that should be considered when building or renovating a public aquatic centre. These lessons are the culmination of existing literature, conversations with key informants, and research site visits to RPAC.
i. the need for extensive public consultation

Simply put, a public recreation facility is meant to serve the public, and as such, it is paramount that the planning process includes meaningful public consultation. Additionally, it is important that public consultation is used to discover the needs and wants of the community early on during the planning process. Presenting plans, as ‘for your information’ to the public should be avoided. Instead, the public ought to have the opportunity to take part in drafting those plans through visioning workshops and other forms of meaningful public consultation. In order for the future aquatic or recreation facility to be accessible to everyone, it is crucial that as many people as possible, and from various communities, are given the opportunity to take part in the visioning and planning process of the future centre. “In order to develop public recreation spaces that can accommodate the needs of diverse user groups, such as Muslim women, more inclusive participation of these user groups must occur from the start of the design phase” (Tynan, 2005, pg 118).

The planning process for RPAC included several town hall meetings, and stakeholder workshops. Local residents, including youth, seniors, and multiple cultural groups were all targeted. Interpretation services in seven languages other than English also enabled more of Regent Park’s diverse population to actively participate. Parks & Recreation were also wise to consult with staff at various other city agencies and recreation centres. The local city councilor also acted as excellent resource in terms of making connections with people who were beneficial to involve in the planning process. In regards to the town hall meetings, David Miller, the architect at MJMA responsible for the RPAC’s design, said, “the city goes to great lengths to invite people to these things, and targeted all the community groups in the neighbourhood” (Miller, Personal Communication, Interview, January 17, 2014).

However, as identified by Doug Giles, the Project Manager for RPAC’s planning and construction, attendance at these meetings was limited. Town hall meetings, and informational sessions are often the only form of public consultation utilized by planners. In reality though, many members of the public are too busy, or do not feel comfortable in these types of meetings. For future projects, the City of Toronto and other municipalities should explore other ways to consult with the public. Depending on the circumstances and context of the project being planned, roundtables, workshops, and advisory committees are all good ways of actively collaborating with the public (The City of Waterloo). Another option is for planners to seek out existing community organizations, clubs, or associations so as to directly target their membership. In the case of RPAC’s planning process, staff at local daycare were invited to a stakeholder workshop. Another option would have been for planners to go to the daycare itself, so as to engage with the staff and caregivers of children in a comfortable and familiar setting. If public attendance is routinely low at City hosted public consultation meetings, then the City should instead consider going out to the public.

Additionally, Gina, a community development worker, identified that the City could have done a better job of consulting with youth and children. She notes, “They [the City] did not talk to children, they spoke to adults. They totally overlooked the major stakeholder of the pool.” Gina raises an interesting point, that often, children are overlooked by planners and officials in the planning process; however, they too should be given the opportunity to contribute their thoughts and ideas. A possible solution for future planning processes is to work with local school boards to set up visioning workshops with youth and caregivers in nearby schools. The youth will get the opportunity to learn about how planning process works, and planners may be surprised to find that they receive valuable ideas and insights from the youth and their caregivers.

Planners and municipal decisions makers have been trained to view the city and the planning process in standard ways. While still valuable, these normative approaches to civic engagement may stifle innovative solutions which
could make a planning project more socio-economically and culturally accessible. In order to develop new ways of looking at existing and future planning challenges, specifically barriers to participation in aquatic centres, it is vital to involve new points of view, such as those of a child, teenager, or a parent. When children and youth are actively involved in community planning projects they are provided with excellent learning opportunities, which allows them to develop solutions for real world problems. Notably, “[t]hrough hands-on, action based activities that connect children and youth with their immediate surroundings, planners can provide meaningful planning initiatives that can develop the capacity of young people for community planning and that can increase their level of social responsibility” (Mullahey, Susskind, & Checkoway, 1999, pg 7).

Involving youth is an important aspect with any planning process for a public space or facility. With an aquatic centre or other recreational facility, however, it is even more crucial, as youth will become a large proportion of the future users of the particular facility.

**ii. understand the community context**

This second lesson stems from knowledge attained through public consultation, and through further research done by officials. It is important that the planners behind an aquatic centre, or any recreational facility, understand the community context in which the future centre will be situated. In order for planners to design and build an aquatic centre that does not create socio-economic or cultural barriers for the public, it is important to understand what those barriers may be. To do so, planners must have an understanding of the various socio-economic, and cultural conditions within the neighbourhood the aquatic centre will serve.

The planners behind the Regent Park Aquatic Centre understood that there was a large Muslim population within Regent Park. Knowing this, and wanting to include Muslim women, privacy screens were added to the buildings design (Jackson, Personal Communication, Interview, February 11, 2014). Additionally, it was recognized by the City that RPAC should become a Priority Centre, and program fees eliminated, because of the community’s high proportion of residents with low or no incomes.

**iii. programming should be free of barriers to participation**

The fact that programming at RPAC is free, is one of the greatest assets of the aquatic centre in that it helps to remove economic barriers to participation. Free programming across the board is much more equitable and accessible than fee waiving or subsidies. In conversation, Sureya, a community engagement worker within Regent Park, identified that applying for the city’s Welcome Policy subsidies can be a stressful and unnerving experience for some. Families and individuals essentially have to fill out forms admitting that they are poor. Instead, offering free programming for everyone, reduces the stigma, and enhances participation. This way, regardless of a person’s socio-economic status, everyone is treated equitably with both dignity and respect.

As revealed in the literature review, women of all ages, and especially young girls benefit enormously from aquatic recreation and the physical activity that it provides. There are a multitude of barriers that women face to being able to participate however. “Women face societal pressures regarding body image, resulting in low self-esteem and because of this, some do not feel comfortable in bathing suits” (Millar & Rappaport, 2009, pg. 26). Having blocks of programming that are only open to women, and staffed only by women, minimizes some of the barriers for women participating at RPAC. Additionally, female-only programming enables Muslim women to swim, given that because of religious reasons, they are not permitted to swim in mix-gendered spaces. RPAC has been made a much more women-friendly aquatic centre for these reasons. It is important, as RPAC does, to
offer both drop-in leisure swim programming, and registered swimming classes that is female-only. Also, having a variety of female-only programming allows even more women to participate more fully.

iv. inclusive physical design

The City of Toronto could have saved millions by building a smaller, and more utilitarian structure. Instead they built an architecturally stunning world-class aquatic centre that incorporates many accessible design features. RPAC is a recreational amenity that, through smart architecture and design, is taken to a whole new level of breaking down barriers to accessibility.

The decision to include universal change rooms creates a safe, comfortable space for everyone to change in. This is a bold move, which shifts our thinking from, ‘everyone needs to be categorized’ into male or female, and nothing in between, to ‘lets accommodate everyone.’ This change may require some convincing on the part of officials to the public and municipal councils; however, universal change rooms should be the new standard for public aquatic recreation facilities.

Specific features, including the variation in pool depths, different heights of showerheads and blow-dryers, and the swimming-free waterslide, make RPAC a public aquatic facility that offers something for everyone. There is space for young and old, spaces to play, spaces to exercise, and spaces for those with beginner to advanced swimming skills (Marrella, Personal Communication, Interview, February 12, 2014; Miller, Personal Communication, Interview, January 17, 2014). Essentially, the Regent Park Aquatic Centre offers something for just about everyone. MJMA, and Parks & Recreation have brought out the best in what an aquatic centre can be. While other municipalities may have smaller or ever larger budgets than that of RPAC, it is paramount that the design program caters to as many people in the community as possible. This ensures that no one is left out, and that residents and visitors alike can access and make use of the facility regardless of their socio-economic or cultural status.

v. the importance of swim culture education

Swimming and aquatic recreation, as seen in the literature, offers a myriad of benefits from improved physical health to increased self-esteem (Boys and Girls Club, 2007; CPRA, 2001; Mulholland, 2008; Totten, 2004). Swimming is a life-long skill that everyone should have the opportunity to practice in one form or another (The Heart and Stroke Foundation, Parks and Recreation Ontario, 2008). However, many people, from various social-economic, cultural, or religious groups, have never been exposed to public swimming facilities. For those with little or no swimming experience, going to an aquatic centre can be an uncomfortable and nerve-wracking event (Marrella, Personal Communication, Interview, February 12, 2014). The women who attended RPAC’s first female-only session are a great example. Many of these women did not know ‘the rules of the pool’ so to speak, and as a result did not have a very positive experience (Ibrahim, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014).

Thus it is imperative that aquatic centres incorporate a swimming culture educational component into their programming, and not just through traditional swimming lessons. There ought to be swimming open houses, where members of the public who have little or no swimming experience can attend, tour the facility, and learn all the helpful information they need in order to become future users of the facility. Another opportunity lies with partnering with various community groups in order to conduct swimming educational outreach programs. This would allow members of the public, who may have never considered swimming, the opportunity to learn...
about the benefits of swimming, and how they can take part. When the Regent Park Learning Centre brought in a Muslim volunteer to speak about swimming culture, the Muslim women present were given a more comprehensive introduction to the entire experience of swimming at the aquatic centre. As a result, many of these women, including Sureya, continue to swim at RPAC (Ibrahim, Personal Communication, Interview, January 31, 2014).

As aquatic facilities incorporate more unconventional elements, such as universal change rooms, teaching swimming culture becomes even more important. It should be the goal of all aquatic centres to get out in the community, and encourage as many people as possible to learn to swim.
Based on the reviewed literature, discussing both the benefits of participating in recreation and the numerous barriers which prevent access to it, in addition to conversations with key informants and the personal experiences of the researcher through site visits, it is evident that the Regent Park Aquatic Centre is a valuable community asset. The Regent Park Aquatic Centre (RPAC) offers accessible aquatic recreation to Regent Park and the surrounding neighbourhoods. Despite some areas of concern, as identified in section 4d. iii. ‘Access and Equity Concerns’, RPAC has become a community hub, bringing together numerous groups of residents from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This has been made possible by design and programming features that have accommodated the various socio-economic and cultural groups present within Regent Park and Toronto.

This report sought to learn how the Regent Park Aquatic Centre accommodates persons from all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. In terms of physical design, principles of accommodation and inclusion were achieved through the universal change rooms, privacy screens, and the variation amongst pools and their features, such as the self-contained water slide. Regarding programming, accommodations including free programming, female-only programming, and enabling in-person registration help to enhance accessibility for pool patrons. Regarding the second aspect of the research question, “what can planners learn from the process that created this aquatic centre?”, the key lessons from RPAC presented in this report can act as guide when planning for more equitable recreation spaces and improved accessibility to existing and future aquatic centres.

Further research into equitable and accessible aquatic recreation, and recreation in general, ought to be completed that can complement the work presented within this report. For example, the inclusion of additional case studies from across Canada, including the worst aquatic centres in terms of equitable accessibility, will draw a clearer picture on how future aquatic centres can be improved. Regarding the Regent Park Aquatic Centre, the collection of oral histories from RPAC users could shed more light on the effect that the aquatic centre is having within
Regent Park, and how users feel about it. The added benefit of collecting these stories is that others can listen and learn from the diverse personal experiences of community members and pool users.

The Regent Park Aquatic Centre represents a significant shift in the design and operation of public recreational facilities. The designers, architects, planners, and community members involved made the conscious decision to build an aquatic centre that caters to more than just the general public and actively seeks to accommodate the diverse group of residents within Regent Park. RPAC provides families and individuals with a safe, welcoming, and accessible aquatic centre where they can partake in aquatic recreation and leisure activities. This centre goes further, however, by contributing to the redevelopment of the Regent Park community through positive community development.

This report calls on planners and municipal decision makers to incorporate these lessons into the planning, building, and renovation of municipal aquatic centres, so that social, economic, and cultural barriers are removed allowing everyone to comfortably make use of them. Every community in Canada, like Regent Park, deserves an aquatic centre where people of all backgrounds can meet, talk, exchange ideas, play and swim. The wellbeing of Canadians, and the health of our communities depend on everyone being able to get in the pool.


October 4, 2013, from CBC Toronto: http://www.cbc.ca/toronto/features/crimemap/


General Manager. (2013). *Designating community centres where programs are free* (Priority Centres). City of Toronto, Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division, Toronto.

Giles, D. Personal Communication, e-mail, April 20, 2014.


Marrella, N. Personal Communication, Interview, February 12, 2014.


REFERENCES


Hello my name is Michael Rac, and I am currently completing my Master’s in Planning from the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Queen’s University. I am conducting a research study on Aquatic centres that are designed and operated based on principles of access and equity for all user groups. My master’s report will focus on the newly built Regent Park Aquatic Centre within the Regent Park neighbourhood of Toronto.

I received your contact information through _______, and am contacting you because I would like to ask you some questions about the Regent Park Aquatic Centre and how you were/are involved in its design/operation.

At a time and location that is most convenient to you, it would be greatly appreciated if I could sit down with you in person or over Skype for an interview. The interview would take between 30 to 45 minutes.

I have attached a Letter of Information that will provide you with the information that will help you in deciding whether or not you wish to participate in this research project.

If you have any questions or concerns they can be directed to myself, Michael Rac, or to my research supervisor, Dr. Leela Viswanathan.

Michael Rac  
Masters of Planning Candidate  
School of Urban and Regional Planning  
Queen’s University  
Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
613-5839596  
michael.rac@queensu.ca

Dr. Leela Viswanathan  
Research Supervisor  
School of Urban and Regional Planning  
Queen’s University  
Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
613-533-6000 x 75038  
leela.viswanathan@queensu.ca

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Michael Rac
Is Everyone in the Pool?
Lessons on Access & Equity from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre

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ABOUT THIS LETTER

In reading this letter, you will be provided with a complete overview of the Master’s research project being conducted by Michael Rac under the supervision of Dr. Leela Viswanathan of the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Queen’s University in Kingston Ontario, Canada. The provided information will assist you in deciding whether or not you wish to participate in the research project.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore how principles of cultural and socio-economic equity have been incorporated into the physical design and the programs offered at the Regent Park Aquatic Centre. Through interviews with the architects of the facility, and programmers/municipal decision makers involved, a better understanding of planning behind the aquatic centre and what other municipalities can learn from it will be achieved.

PROCEDURES & PRIVACY

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be asked to participate in one interview session with myself, the student researcher. During this interview you will be asked a set of questions directed at learning more about your opinions and experiences in relation to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded so that it may be transcribed at a later time by the researcher.

The interview will take approximately forty-five minutes to an hour to complete and will be conducted at a time and place that is most convenient for you. Upon completion of the research project a copy of the final document will be provided in electronic or hard copy form to any participants who would like one.

Upon the completion of each interview the audio recording of the interview will be kept in the researchers locked office at Queen’s University. Electronic versions of the transcribed interviews will be kept under password protection on the researchers personal laptop, and any hard copies will also be kept in the locked office. Upon completion of the research report all copies of the transcribed interviews will be destroyed. Only the researcher and research supervisor will have access listening to the recorded interview. At the end of the project the recordings will also be destroyed.
POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is minimal risk that you may find some of the interview questions too personal to respond to. At any point if there is a question that you do not wish to answer you are free to refrain from responding. Participants may request to be anonymized within the report and be referred to only by their professional title. There are no foreseeable physical or psychological risks to the participants. At any point during the research process participants have the right to terminate their involvement in the study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING

As a participant in this study you may benefit directly or indirectly from this research. In your professional role this study will afford you the opportunity to reflect on past practices, as well as learn more about equitable access to recreation that may contribute to improved future practices. You will also have an opportunity to voice your thoughts and opinions on the success and ongoing challenges of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre.

Through developing a better understanding of the principles of access and equity and how they play a role in the design and operation of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre, this report may lead to the creation of more accessible and equitable aquatic centre facilities and programs. By drawing attention to the relationship between recreation spaces and user groups, this research will give planners and municipal decision makers more tools for improving access to recreation for the diverse needs of people in their municipalities. This will also contribute to healthier individuals and communities.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You have the choice whether you would like to be in this study or not. If you do volunteer to be in this study you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. You may also choose not to answer any interview question and still remain in the study. The student researcher may withdraw you from this study if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

Upon completion of this research a copy of the student researcher’s final master’s report will be available through QSpace, Queen’s Research & Learning Repository at https://qspace.library.queensu.ca. The student researcher will also provide a copy of the report to any participants who request it.

USE OF DATA

The data collected in this study may be used in the future research of the student researcher. Only with permission from the interviewee on the consent form can this data be used in the future.

CONCERNS OR QUESTIONS

Any questions or concerns can be direct to the research, Michael Rac, or to the research supervisor, Dr. Leela Viswanathan. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081. Thank you. Your interest in participating in this research is very much appreciated.
Sincerely,

Michael Rac

Michael Rac
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Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
613-5839596
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This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board
8c. consent forms
8c. i. in-person interview consent form

Is Everyone in the Pool?
Lessons on Access & Equity from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Michael Rac, from the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Queen’s University, towards the completion of a master’s report. This project is being sponsored by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

1. I have read and understand the information about the study entitled, Is Everyone in the Pool? Lessons on Access & Equity from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre, being conducted by Michael Rac and supervised by Dr. Leela Viswanathan, of Queen’s University.

2. I understand this means that I will be asked to participate in an interview that will be approximately 45-60 min long.

3. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about participating in this study and have received the additional details I requested.

4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

5. I understand that if I have concerns or complaints, I may contact:

Michael Rac  
Masters of Planning Candidate  
School of Urban and Regional Planning  
Queen’s University  
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613-5839596  
michael.rac@queensu.ca

Dr. Leela Viswanathan  
Research Supervisor  
School of Urban and Regional Planning  
Queen’s University  
Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
613-533-6000 x 75038  
leela.viswanathan@queensu.ca
By placing my initials in this box, I give permission to the researcher to record the interview with a digital voice-recording device.

By placing my initials in this box, I request the final copy of the study’s results to be emailed to me at the following address.

By placing my initials in this box, I request to be anonymized and referred to only by my professional title. I understand that this may not keep my identity confidential.

I agree to be contacted about follow-up questions. I understand that I may decline these requests.

By initialing, I give consent that the information collected in this study may be used in the future research of the student researcher.

I have read the above statements and the provided Letter of Information and fully consent to participate in this research:

Name of participant (printed): ___________________________________________________________

Signature: __________________________________________________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________________________________________
8c. consent forms
8c. i. email interview consent form

Is Everyone in the Pool?
Lessons on Access & Equity from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Michael Rac, from the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Queen’s University, towards the completion of a master’s report. This project is being sponsored by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

1. I understand this means that I will be asked to answer questions relating to the study.

2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about participating in this study and have received the additional details I requested.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

4. I understand that if I have concerns or complaints, I may contact:

   **Michael Rac**
   Masters of Planning Candidate
   School of Urban and Regional Planning
   Queen’s University
   Kingston, Ontario, Canada
   613-5839596
   michael.rac@queensu.ca

   **Dr. Leela Viswanathan**
   Research Supervisor
   School of Urban and Regional Planning
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   leela.viswanathan@queensu.ca

   By placing my initials in this box, I request the final copy of the study’s results to be emailed to me at the following address.

   By placing my initials in this box, I request to be anonymized and referred to only by my professional title. I understand that this may not keep my identity confidential.

   I agree to be contacted about follow-up questions. I understand that I may decline these requests.

   By initialing, I give consent that the information collected in this study may be used in the future research of the student researcher.
I have read the above statements and the provided Letter of Information and fully consent to participate in this research:

Name of participant (printed): ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________________
8d. interview questions
8d. i. type a: aquatic centre architects

1. Could you comment on how your position and firm is related to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre?

2. How many swimming pools have you been involved in the design of? How many has the firm you work for been involved in?

3. What was your role as architect in the design process of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre?

4. Who were the key organizations or individuals that you worked with during the design process? How was communication amongst these various groups facilitated?

5. Were there any user groups that were particularly vocal about their needs in a new facility? Did this influence the final outcome of the design?

6. Can you talk about some of the particular design features that make the Regent Park Aquatic Centre accessible for everyone in the community?

7. How does this facility differ from standard swimming pool designs?

8. How did you and your colleagues research the community’s needs for this facility?

9. What were the primary design objectives for this public swimming pool?

10. When you are designing a public facility that will be used by various groups of people, how do you envision the needs of these groups?

11. How successful were you in achieving the original design objectives?

12. Were there any government polices or professional guidelines that you followed during the design process?

13. As an architect, what were the greatest challenges in making the Regent Park Aquatic Centre universally accessible?

14. Is there a growing trend within Canada for cultural and socio-economic equitable swimming pools? Or is Regent Park the exception?

15. What can other municipalities learn from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre?
8d. interview questions
8d. ii. type b: community development workers

PLANNING PROCESS

1. Could you comment on how your position or organization is related to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre?

2. Were you, or your organization, consulted during the planning of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre? If so, how would you describe your role in the planning process?

3. Were there other organizations or individuals that also worked with you during the planning process? Who were they, and how was communication amongst these various groups facilitated?

4. How did you and your colleagues get an understanding of what the community wanted or needed from this facility?

5. Were there any user groups that were particularly vocal about their needs in the new facility? Who were theses groups, and what did they say they wanted? Did this influence the final outcome of the centre?

ACCESSIBILITY + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

6. In what ways was this facility needed in the community? Or was it needed at all?

7. How has the community reacted to the Regent Park Aquatic Centre?

8. Can you comment on how the Regent Park Aquatic Centre fulfills principles relating to access for various cultural or socio-economic groups of people?

9. Are cultural or language barriers addressed in the building design or programming?

10. Has there been any feedback, both positive or negative, about the design or operation of the facility?

11. What type of programs are offered at the Regent Park Aquatic Centre? Are any of these programs only possible to offer because of the design of the facility?

12. Are there any additional programs, or changes to the facility, that you would like to see? Can you describe some of these programs or changes?

13. Does the Regent Park Aquatic Centre positively contribute to the community development of Regent Park? If so, how?

14. What do you think are the important lessons from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre that should be shared with other communities?
8d. interview questions
8d. iii. type c: municipal decision makers

PLANNING PROCESS

1. How would you describe your role in the design process/operation of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre?

2. What were the primary design objectives for the facility?

3. Who were the key organizations or individuals that you worked with during the design process? How was communication amongst these various groups facilitated?

4. How did you and your colleagues research the community’s needs for the Regent Park Aquatic Centre?

5. Were there any user groups that were particularly vocal about their needs in the new facility? Who were these groups, and what did they say they wanted? Did this influence the final outcome of the centre?

6. Did you encounter any challenges during the planning phases of the facility? What were these challenges?

7. Were there any government policies of professional guidelines that you followed during the design process?

ACCESSIBILITY + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

8. Can you comment on how the Regent Park Aquatic Centre fulfills principles relating to access for various cultural or socio-economic groups of people?

9. Are cultural or language barriers addressed in the building design or programming?

10. Has there been any feedback, either positive or negative, about the design or operation of the facility?

11. What type of programs are offered at the Regent Park Aquatic Centre? Are any of these programs only possible to offer because of the design of the facility?

12. Are there any additional programs, or changes to the facility, that you would like to see? Can you describe some of these programs or changes?

13. Does the Regent Park Aquatic Centre positively contribute to the community development of Regent Park? If so, how?

14. Were there any steps taken to assess the success of the centre since it has been opened?

15. What can other municipalities learn from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre?
8d. interview questions
8d. iv. type d: recreational programmers

PLANNING PROCESS

1. How would you describe your role in the operation of the Regent Park Aquatic Centre?

4. How do you and your colleagues research the community’s needs for the Regent Park Aquatic Centre when deciding on programming?

5. Are there any user groups that are particularly vocal about their needs in the new facility? Who are these groups, and what do they say they want? Does this influence the programming offered at the centre?

6. Can you talk about some of the particular design features that make the Regent Park Aquatic Centre accessible for everyone in the community?

7. Are there any government polices or professional guidelines that the Regent Park Aquatic Centre must follow? What are they?

ACCESSIBILITY + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

8. Can you comment on how the Regent Park Aquatic Centre fulfills principles relating to access for various cultural or socio-economic groups of people?

9. Are cultural or language barriers addressed in the building design or programming?

10. Has there been any feedback, either positive or negative, about the design or operation of the facility?

11. What type of programs are offered at the Regent Park Aquatic Centre? Are any of these programs only possible to offer because of the design of the facility?

12. Are there any additional programs, or changes to the facility, that you would like to see? Can you describe some of these programs or changes?

13. Were there any steps taken to assess the success of the centre since it has been opened?

14. What can other aquatic centres learn from the Regent Park Aquatic Centre?