



2017 Annual Report



We seek, collect, and share stories of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Every story helps us learn more about the people who live in Canada. Through our projects, we share these stories in the hopes of creating a nation of empathetic citizens, public services, and policies.

Stories are the key to challenging assumptions, nurturing and fostering creativity, and giving rise to citizen voices.

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Jennifer Venelainen, Educator

2017 was the start of an incredible journey for us all.

As the inaugural Board of Directors for the Department of Imaginary Affairs, we have been tasked with helping the leadership build up a newly incorporated not-for-profit into an organization that reaches beyond its physical home in Toronto. We all come from different backgrounds and understandings of the not-for-profit world, but we all are eager and curious and excited by the prospects put forth by the leadership.

The plans are ambitious. There is a lot of groundwork to be laid and a lot of networking to be done. We have hit the ground running and are forging ahead with some very exciting projects that will create new awareness around what and who a citizen is. Of course, any newly minted organization will go through some growing pains, but in the end, those growing pains make for a stronger and more viable structure to work from.

Design thinking is the foundation of all of our projects. The process of iterating, designing, researching, deploying – these are practices all of us, the leadership especially, are undergoing as the organization takes shape. It is an important and necessary part of the development of this organization.

What makes the DIA unique is its responsiveness to any community that faces a design challenge around new and developing citizens. Our approach is to not impose ideals or design on a community but rather work with our design champions who are our translators of a community.

As we reflect on what we have already accomplished, we are all eager to see how the DIA flourishes in 2018.

Sincerely,
The DIA Board of Directors

Sometimes you just have to do it.

In 2015, we sat down at the café in the MaRS Centre to catch up over coffee. Blair had recently completed my Masters at Goldsmiths in London and she was in the process of completing hers at OCADU in Toronto. Both our programs were based in design thinking which sparked a conversation about what we wanted to do with these newly acquired skills.


I had spent some time volunteering at the Ministry of Stories in London, a not-for-profit organization geared towards giving at-risk youth a space to be creative writers. It was a life-changing experience to be a part of and something Blair wanted to replicate in some capacity upon returning to Toronto. As there was already an organization doing something similar in Toronto, Blair turned to my interest in urban design, city politics, and civic engagement and a potential avenue to work in. We mulled over the idea and came up with the idea of a design thinking centered organization focused on projects to help citizens engage in their community. The Department of Imaginary Affairs was born.

Jenn had spearheaded an installation at Nuit Blanche the previous year and suggested it might be a good avenue to use as a launch pad. The best way to get anything done is to sign up to a large, all-night art installation. We were lucky enough to have Linda Phuong join us as an intern from the Ryerson University Tri-Mentoring program. She also became the first paid employee of the DIA. The East Side Story Project became the title of the project. The aim of the project was to create a physical artifact of stories collected from residents of the East side of Toronto, an area going through a development transformation. For six months we put up posters in shops and attended various outdoor events such as the Leslieville Flea Market where we set up a booth and invited passerbys to share their stories. We worked with 4 different classes at local schools and even had one entire school bring their 300+ students through workstations we had set up in the gymnasium giving the students a chance to tell us their views of their community today and what the future might look like.

On a cool October eve in 2015, we rolled out the 12 foot by 10 foot vinyl book containing 144 curated stories (from over 500 collected stories) in the gazebo at St. James park in downtown Toronto. CityTV noted our installation as one of the 7 things to see at Nuit Blanche that year. An estimated 500 people came through the gazebo that night to read the stories of their fellow citizens and add their own thoughts on an additional page we had set up. It was an incredible start.

Fast forward to 2017. We have been taking time to regroup and rethink what it was we wanted to do with the DIA. We pulled together an incredible group of people to form what is now our Board of Directors and Advisory Board. We decided to legitimize the organization and incorporated as a not for profit on July 31, 2017. We developed new programs that we wanted to pursue and broadened our scope from the East side of Toronto to the entire country. We presented our giant storybook at the United Church of Canada's annual conference in Paris, Ontario in July 2017 and added a new chapter to the book from those who attended. We had a Board retreat to allow our new Board members to become acquainted with one another but also with what it was we were actually doing at the DIA and our aspirations for the future of the organization.

This is just the beginning for us. We cannot wait to see what 2018 brings for us and are incredibly excited to be working with such a wonderful group of people to move the DIA forward in its goals in creating a place for new and developing citizens to flourish.



Blair Francey
Executive Director



Jennifer Chan
Director of Programming



Story Stitching Project

We began moving forward full-steam with this project in 2017 ending the year with a pilot of our program started with a local adult ESL group.

The Story Stitching Project was born out of the need for ESL books that are written by and for newcomers to learn English. We want to engage newcomers and provide them with the opportunity to feel like they belong here by giving them a platform to tell us about their journey to Canada. We see this as not only an opportunity to create a library of ESL books specifically geared towards newcomers written by newcomers but also as an opportunity for us long-term Canadians to hear first-hand experiences of those who have chosen Canada as their home. What makes this project so unique is the inclusion of both the native language of the speaker and English in the same book. Multiple versions of each book may also be made according to the Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) so that a reader could start at a lower level and eventually work their way up to the full translation of the text.

As far as we know, this is the first of its kind in Canada.

We also started a database of volunteers of people who are fluent in at least one other language other than English to assist us in translating our workbooks and the stories we collect. To date, we have translated our workbooks into French, Arabic, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish. Just before the holidays we collected a few stories from our adult ESL class and are looking forward to translating them to 'publish' the first books in our ESL library.



Future Happens Here

Future Happens Here is a facilitation tool brought to the Department of Imaginary Affairs by our Director of Programming. Through her Masters research, she developed a prototype and has continued to refine the design as a project of the DIA. Future Happens Here is designed to stimulate conversations about the future and how we participate in shaping our own futures and policies related to alternative futures. Future Happens Here is part card game, part strategy tool, part facilitated conversation, and part uncertainty. Future Happens Here is a game of ever-changing rules and goals and therefore no two sessions can ever be exactly the same.

We took 2017 as a year to incubate and grow Future Happens Here and to gain confidence in the potential impact, we are lucky to have had a series of game design, business and social impact advisors offer feedback and we are feeling stronger as we gear up for to relaunch the tool. We are staying true to the roots of the game to be a tool for co-designing and working with playtesters to co-design content and offer feedback on card design to help shape and take ownership of the final tool.

In 2017, Future Happens Here successfully became an incubated project of the Ryerson University Social VenturesZone and earned a learning grant from the School for Social Entrepreneurs. These two accolades help fuel the learning we are planning for 2018. We will be playtesting, redesigning the card designs, and looking for “Future Of” Partners to host workshops in their own communities.



Project Potato

In May we had the opportunity to pilot Project potaTO (People of Totally Awesome Toronto) - a program we began developing to allow youth to reflect on their role as a citizen in Toronto.

The DIA was invited to participate in the Toronto Youth Cabinet as part of their Summit during Toronto Youth Week. We attended the workshop where we hosted two hour-long sessions. The participants were asked to think about Toronto today and write down what works, what needs improvement and what isn't working from a citizens perspective. We then drilled down a bit further and asked them to think about the communities they live in and do the same exercise. They were then asked to think of how they live in the city given everything they had just said. This informed the second half of the workshop: re-imagining their community to make it a place they could be their best self. We talked about how by affecting change in their neighbourhoods, they are changing the landscape of the entire city making it a better place to live.

Having the opportunity to work with youth on this project was a wonderful experience. There was a lot of discussion about how the city functions, all of which is documented on our website.

We are looking forward to 2018 to expand on our experiences at the Summit and find a way to bring this project into the classroom.



The Storybook Project

The Storybook Project is the evolution of the very first project we created as an organization, The East Side Story Project. Initially the project was created as an art installation for the 2015 Nuit Blanche; a cumulation of months of story collecting from citizens on the East side of Toronto curated down to 144 stories in a 12 foot by 10 foot book.

It became apparent after our success at Nuit Blanche that this book could live on as a larger installation for the DIA, both printed and digitally. Upon the decision to expand the scope of the DIA beyond Toronto, we decided to rename the project The Storybook Project.

This past year we were invited by the United Church of Canada's EDGE program, a social innovation branch of the Church, to join them at their annual Skylight Festival in Paris, Ontario. They wanted to add another chapter to the book and to display the original one at the festival for participants to see. We had a wonderful time meeting the conference-goers and hearing the stories from all walks of life.

Our plan is to continually collect stories from across the country and bring the book to different communities for all to read.

2017 Financial Statements

ASSETS	2017
Revenue	
Investments – Interest	\$ 0.64
Direct Public Grants	3,000.00
Program Income	12.55
Individual Donations	392.45
Total Revenue	<u>3,405.64</u>
GROSS PROFIT	<u>\$ 3,405.64</u>
OPERATING EXPENSES	
Computer – Software	\$ 150.29
Computer – Hosting	165
Bank Service Charges	11.01
Office Supplies	17.33
Printing and Reproduction	71.19
Legal Fees	1,294.98
Marketing Expense	50.85
Total Operating Expenses	<u>1,760.65</u>
NET PROFIT	<u>\$ 1,644.99</u>

Donors

A heartfelt thank you to those who supported us in 2017:

Peter and Jeannette Francey
Jennifer Green
Trevor Haldenby

Volunteers

As we get ourselves up and running, we have had the pleasure of working with some wonderful volunteers who have donated their time to help our cause:

Toujan B. Atari
Louisa Yue-Chan
Horace Kim



People
Who Share
Connections

Independent
Shops, families
helping families,
Open Communication
Municipal + local
politicians listening
to their constituents,
arts + music galore.

The overlap
between
space + people
space people

TOGETHER

Community
is a group
of people
who share
either geography
or values.

establish
a of
- sense of pride
- accountability
- shared space
(literally +
metaphorically)
- connections

To me “community” means...

Being open to
others, having
space to work,
play, and learn
together. My
family is
valued.

• people connecting
with each other
• “human scale
design”
• supportive
systems
(large + small)

The overlap
part between

Family
+
Strong sense
of place
+
Commitment
to making change

- The people
places
feelings
+ opportunities
that surround
me.



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