



THE TALE OF A TOWN


# Project Evaluation 2015



PRODUCED BY FIXT POINT  
[WWW.FIXTPOINT.COM](http://WWW.FIXTPOINT.COM)

Celebrating stories  
one neighbourhood at a time.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



The Project	03
Our Evaluation Approach	04
Our Impact Areas	05
Storytelling	06
Performance Installations	08
Presenting & Community Partners	10
Local & National Artists	12
Oral History	14
Looking Forward	16
Our Supporters & Partners	17

Co-Creators of The Tale of a Town, Charles Ketchabaw & Lisa Marie DiLiberto

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Evaluation strategy and report content by program evaluation consultant Meredith Davis, with significant input from Lisa Marie DiLiberto, Creative Director of FIXT POINT, Charles Ketchabaw, Managing Director of FIXT POINT and Christina Palassio.

Report design and data visualization by Laurence MacSween.

# THE PROJECT



The Tale of a Town – Canada is an innovative storygathering and storytelling project that aims to capture the collective community memory of main streets and downtowns across the country.

We are two years into an epic three-year-long road trip leading up to Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017. Over the past two years, our Storymobile has been making its way across Canada from east to west gathering stories from people about the communities where they are proud to live. So far, we have visited Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Meanwhile, a second Storymobile has been touring Ontario communities such as Collingwood, Kincardine and Kirkland Lake, sticking around for extended two- to three-week residencies in each place to delve deep into the living memory of these main streets.

After a winter's break to rest and fuel up, the Ontario Storymobile will tour to eight new communities in the province, while the national Storymobile will continue on the final leg of its journey next spring through British Columbia, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, completing our tour of each province and territory in Canada.

By asking people to share their personal memories of their community's main street and to reflect on what makes their downtown unique, we hope to increase their sense of community belonging, local pride and appreciation of local history.

Once interviews have been conducted in each place we visit, we compile the stories and use them as inspiration for the creation of a performance installation that is presented back to the wider community. We work with local artists, theatre organizations and community partners to develop and deliver the performances. The recorded stories form the basis of the installation, allowing audience

members to hear local tales told in the voices of the people who they know and care about, while actors, designers and musicians help bring the memories to life.

In every place we visit, the performance installations are different, just as the stories of each community are unique. However, there are common threads running throughout. We have heard across the country that we risk losing the vibrant main streets in our towns and cities to the big box stores and trends that prioritize convenience over community. But there is still so much to be proud of downtown in the way of vibrant local businesses, community organizations and dedicated citizens. It is our hope that the performances will inspire people to head back downtown, support their community and create new main street memories.

The project also works with local theatre organizations, helping them target a wider audience and increase public engagement. We provide local community partners a unique opportunity to capture and share their community's collective memory, while encouraging local artists to build skills, make new connections and engage more deeply with their own communities.

We believe in the power of the arts to address important issues such as the decline of our downtown main streets. Ultimately, The Tale of a Town aims to create a brighter future for Canadian downtowns through the celebration of stories that reveal what makes each of them unique and vital.

52 25,000+

Number of  
communities  
visited in 2015

Number of  
kilometres  
travelled



# OUR EVALUATION APPROACH

Our 2015 evaluation activities captured the reach of The Tale of a Town — Canada project through numbers as well as the outcomes experienced by different groups, including storytellers, audience members at performance installations, presenting partners, local artists and the wider community. The evaluation also gathered practical suggestions for improving how we carry out the project in the future.



We worked with an external consultant to design the evaluation in a way that would allow us to gather useful information but not overburden our already very busy producers. Using a mixed methods approach, we gathered numbers as well as quotes, anecdotes and other qualitative information. We tailored a variety of tools to different groups in order to gather the information most effectively, including the use of an online survey for storytellers, a hand-written survey and audio interviews for audience members, phone interviews for partners and a focus group for artists. Various project statistics were captured throughout the year, including the number of interviews conducted, number of audience members at performance installations and number of kilometres travelled.

This report shares the combined results of all of these evaluation activities, including the impact that the project has had for various groups and the valuable suggestions we received for improving our activities going forward.

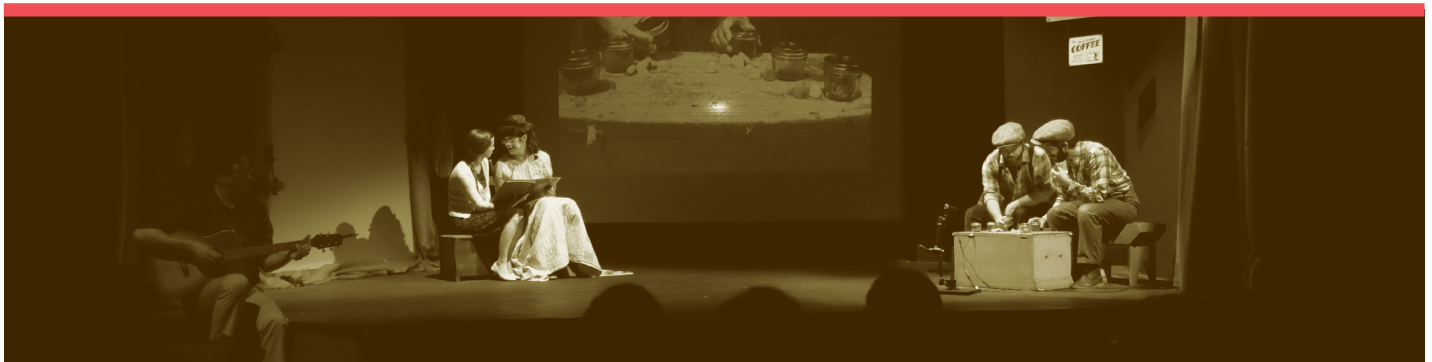
- 86** Number of storyteller surveys completed
- 82** Number of written performance installation surveys filled out
- 33** Number of audio interviews conducted with audience members
- 6** Number of phone interviews conducted with community and presenting partners
- 7** Number of people who took part in the artist focus group





# OUR IMPACT AREAS

Our evaluation results capture outcomes and suggestions for improvement relating to the following five project impact areas, each detailed in its own report section.



# STORYTELLING



## WHAT WE BELIEVE

IF community members are engaged in a positive experience as storytellers to recount their own living memory of their community's main street ... THEN they will experience an increased sense of community belonging and be motivated to contribute to making the downtown a vibrant place.

## WHAT WE HEARD

We asked storytellers to complete an online survey to share how they enjoyed their storytelling experience and what was most important about the experience for them. In total, 86 surveys were completed. Here's what we heard.

*"Sense of belonging" is one of the well-being indicators used by Statistics Canada. A strong sense of belonging to a country, region or local community is positively associated with individual and community well-being, physical and mental health and community participation.*

*(Statistics Canada, 2015)*

# 70%

of storytellers surveyed felt that telling their story

had increased their motivation to support downtown businesses. Many of the others reported that they were already avid downtown supporters.

# 88%

of storytellers surveyed reported that telling their story had made them feel more connected to their local community.

Storytellers told us in their own words how sharing their story changed the way that they feel about their community's downtown ...

"Sharing my story encouraged me to share the same story with other members of the community and evoked other memories I had forgotten. As a result, my community pride was increased."

– Hamilton, ON

"It was interesting to share my memories with friends. It gave us an opportunity to compare memories. It made me want to somehow bring back the vibrancy of past years."

– Sault Ste. Marie, ON

"I felt it brought back my sense to gather there as a community."

– Timmins, ON

"Me sentir fier de ma ville et ses commerçants."

– Hearst, ON

"I feel more like ambassador for my community now. I feel I have an obligation to help accomplish the goals for my area that you asked me about."

– Concession St, Hamilton, ON

"As a storyteller once remarked, a place isn't quite real unless someone tells its story. Such sharing inspires community. And a community lives through its heart. That heart beats most vibrantly for me downtown."

– Kingston, ON



“There are things that you just enjoy but when you actually start talking about it and sharing it with someone who enjoys what you are sharing, it just escalates an already great feeling. That was my experience and I have rekindled the bond with my community beyond what I actually spoke about in the story shared.”  
– Sudbury, ON

“Even though I have lived here for 19 years, I still am not an original. In telling my story and afterwards, I realized that I knew and have been a big part of our town. So thank you!”  
– Kincardine, ON

“It’s a ray of hope that my part of the story helps it blossom back in to the thriving downtown it used to be.”  
– Medicine Hat, AB

“I’d say it’s enhanced my feelings about downtown. I’ve been part of this community for my whole life...it’s exciting to think that communities across Canada share similar feelings and commitment to their homes and their downtown core. Story telling is a timeless form of passing down information to others for more than just entertainment.”  
– Medicine Hat, AB

**93%** of storytellers surveyed enjoyed their storytelling experience “very much.”

We asked storytellers to share their thoughts on how their experience could have been improved. Of the 72 respondents who answered the question:

- 33 people could not think of anything that they would have changed about the experience;
- 14 people would have liked to have received the interview questions in advance to be able to come better prepared;
- 12 people would have changed things about their own responses (e.g., been more articulate, tried to remember more, brought in photos or a poem for inspiration);
- 7 people would have changed something about the location or the conditions in which the interview took place (e.g., have it in an air-conditioned building, at the storyteller’s home or in a larger trailer);
- 5 people would have liked more time during the actual interview;
- 1 person would have preferred it to be a group format to facilitate shared reflection; and
- 1 person found the questions too specific and didn’t feel like they accessed all of the stories he/she wanted to share.



**1031**

Number of  
interviews conducted  
(871 in English,  
160 in French)

**1900+**

Number of  
community members  
engaged  
through storytelling



# PERFORMANCE INSTALLATIONS



## WHAT WE BELIEVE

IF community members are engaged as audience members at performance installations where stories of their community's main street are presented in their own voices, combined with theatre and music in a way that is celebratory, light-hearted and nostalgic ... THEN they will experience an increased sense of community belonging, a greater appreciation for the arts and be motivated to contribute to making their downtown a vibrant place.

## WHAT WE HEARD

At the end of a number of performance installations, we asked audience members to fill out a written survey or do an in-person interview to share their reactions to what they had seen and how it had impacted them. In total, 82 written surveys were completed and 33 verbal interviews were conducted. Here's what we learned.

*According to the Canadian Urban Institute (2014), a vibrant downtown is an incredibly valuable asset to a community worth investing in. Downtowns are inherently mixed use and denser in development, which is positive from a sustainability lens; contain more accessible and walkable neighbourhoods; provide a central meeting place for social and cultural activities; contain a higher number of key heritage assets; and can generate significant tax revenues while only taking up as little as 1% of a city's land area.*

90%

of audience members surveyed felt that attending the performance installation had increased their motivation to support downtown businesses.

94%

of audience members surveyed reported that attending the performance installation had made them feel more connected to their local community.

93%

of audience members had learned new things about their community through the performance installation.



According to the Creative City Network of Canada (2005), "the arts can help foster a sense of ownership, belonging and pride within a community ... [and] help to preserve a collective memory and foster a continuing dialogue about the past."

# 95%

of audience members told us that their appreciation for the arts to solve greater issues, such as the decline of downtown main streets, had increased as a result of seeing the performance installation.



# 44

Number of performance installations

# 1642

Number of audience members reached

Audience members also told us how attending the performance installation had changed the way that they feel about their community's downtown ...

"It makes me feel more responsible (on an individual basis) to ensure the revitalization of the downtown area. Keeping it alive, keeps our history and connection to the past - the past residents of Medicine Hat alive."  
- Medicine Hat, AB

"Was nice to hear there are people of all generations feeling the need to reconnect as a community."  
- Regina, SK

"Caused me to reflect critically on my own feelings about Windsor - its strengths and weaknesses. Created a sense of pride and renewed awareness about its strengths and interconnectedness."  
- Windsor, ON

"As a very young person, I have only experienced Regina in its current stigmatized state. Hearing this beautiful history gives me hope (and inspiration) for it to be better."  
- Regina, SK

"Saw possibility to knit together shared parts of the city through shared vision, pride and arts... To repair hurts through education and resurgence, and support of local art initiatives. Thank you!"  
- Windsor, ON

"I feel like there is a strong habit of devaluing local and Prairie culture, and dismissing it. I think this installation brought to light the narrative that is present in our local community."  
- Regina, SK

"We are new here and to see the three towns presented like this gave us a sense of the history and challenges that have brought Wellington, Bloomfield and Picton to their present state. We recognize and love the sense of community here and that was a constant thread throughout this most enjoyable performance. Fabulous!"  
- Prince Edward County, ON

"There are deep stories here, and there are a great number. The telling of them with the beautiful music as well has the potential to inspire the spirit of community - and we need that as a people. It cultivates our good nature and fosters kindness in recognition of our common time together, here."  
- Regina, SK

"It definitely instilled a sense of pride in me, which I was kind of surprised cause I've never been a huge civic pride person, so that was interesting, like a very genuine one. And it was just really interesting hearing the stories, cause I'm not from Regina originally, I'm from Weyburn originally so everything here, it's all kind of different ... and I've heard bits and pieces from people or their stories I've been told, but to hear it collectively and curated and presented in such a creative way was very effective and I really, really enjoyed it."  
- Regina, SK

"A great reminder of the richness of the core of the community and, therefore, the need to preserve, enhance, and participate in its activities."  
- Medicine Hat, AB

# PRESENTING & COMMUNITY PARTNERS



## WHAT WE BELIEVE

IF local theatre organizations are involved fully as presenting partners and in the creation and delivery of the performance installations ... THEN the organization overall will experience increased capacity and have an improved ability to target a wider audience.

IF local community organizations (e.g., BIAs, municipalities) are involved as community partners in this community engaged arts project ... THEN they will benefit through the effective capturing and sharing of their community's collective memory and an increased appreciation of the downtown by community members.

## WHAT WE HEARD

We conducted interviews with six partners who we have worked with over the past two years – four presenting partners and two community partners. We asked questions about outcomes of the project for their staff, organizations and communities more widely as well as suggestions around how partnerships in the future could be strengthened. Here is what we heard.



There were many project outcomes discussed during the interviews and many that were shared between partners. Positive outcomes mentioned included:

- Increased credibility of the organization in the eyes of prominent community members and, as a result, doors opened to potential new funding opportunities;
- Engagement of audiences in a different way and improved ability to reach new audiences due to the accessibility of The Tale of a Town performance;
- New partnerships formed with other groups in the community;
- Improved skills for staff of presenting partner organizations, in particular, communications skills;
- A renewed appreciation for the realities faced by theatre groups by traditional presenters who temporarily stepped into a more creative role of co-producer for The Tale of a Town piece;
- Increased excitement around local main street revitalization and heritage efforts;
- Important stories of older community members captured in recorded form;
- Strengthened awareness of the potential of the arts to contribute to important issues;
- Heightened sense of community pride and celebration; and
- Local economic development benefit of the dollars spent in town related to the project.





"I have to say, this project inspired the city to look at its own narratives and be interested in making art that springs from its unique history.

That happened profoundly for a large range of people, from people who lived on the street to the millionaire developers of the city. It became a true unification of disparate groups. For a small company like ours, that was enormously profound to be at the centre of that."

– Joey Tremblay, presenting partner, Artistic Director, Curtain Razors Theatre, Regina, SK

"It was just such a community-oriented show. It let us be a part of the community in a different way and let them engage with us in a different way, which was quite valuable. Our patrons really enjoyed the experience. It was something quite different for them."

– Valerie Hillier, presenting partner, Director of Programming, The Fredericton Playhouse, NB



"I was truly impressed with this project and there is a political message here that people might not have been initially aware of: to support small businesses and a certain way of life where people are connected. When you have big box stores on the outside of town, there isn't a communal space anymore. You destroy the downtown and people become less connected and it's more impersonal. You lose that vibrancy and that diversity. And I think that people became aware of that message because there's been closure of different businesses and by talking about how things used to be, I think people are now more aware of what has been lost."

– Ann Keys, community partner, Branch Head, Mimico Centennial Library, Mimico, ON

"There was interest brewing in the community about heritage and saving buildings and collecting stories before people passed on and I think we gave that a lot more credibility and strength. I think now that's going to live on and it will be stronger and move forward."

– Randy Follett, presenting partner, Manager, Cultural Development, The Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat, AB



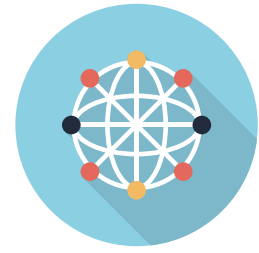
Partners described strengths of the project from their perspective, including:

- Ease of working with FIXT POINT directors on the budget and that there was a real give and take;
- Having FIXT POINT directors help to build bridges with community members on behalf of the local organization;
- High level of professionalism;
- Strong social media and marketing;
- Creativity of the team;
- Efficient use of resources; and
- An organized, well-oiled machine with helpful templates, including form letters, schedules and press releases.

Finally, partners provided very helpful suggestions for program improvement (again, with similar suggestions voiced by multiple partners), including:

- Clearly communicate partnership expectations (e.g. provide general guidelines and suggestions in advance about the type of venue/space needed for the performance installation and about technical needs);
- Include a culminating theatrical event or other type of presentation of material collected in each community;
- Work with partners to find continued ways to make good use of the stories collected beyond the performance installation and ensure that they are easy to access; and
- Get in touch asap about details for 2017 as theatres are already starting to book this far in advance for that season.

# LOCAL & NATIONAL ARTISTS



## WHAT WE BELIEVE

IF local artists, FIXT POINT story producers, associate artists and summer students are trained thoroughly in the organization's unique oral history approach and are provided with the opportunity to practice storygathering and production through the project ... THEN they will gain new skills, learn more about their community's history, feel an increased sense of community belonging, make new connections with other artists and be exposed to new employment opportunities.

## WHAT WE HEARD

On an afternoon in November, seven artists gathered together at the FIXT POINT studio to reflect on the year's activities, share stories about their time in the field (both great memories and some bloopers), describe personal outcomes they had experienced as a result of being part of the project, and provide their feedback on what worked well, what presented a challenge and offer concrete suggestions for what can be improved upon next year. Here is a summary of all of the rich information that was shared.

Lots of funny stories were shared about artists' time out in the field: interviewing for hours on end in the Storymobile in the heat of summer with a broken fan; trying to catch a bite to eat before leaving town and being hounded by community members with more stories to tell. Other stories were emotional and full of powerful memories.

Artists also described the outcomes that they had experienced as a result of their participation in the project, including increased confidence, feelings of pride to be a part of this initiative, a sense of connectedness to the local community, new skills and professional development opportunities.

The artists also put their heads together and reflected on the strengths of the project, some challenges from the past year



and some practical and concrete suggestions for next year that would build upon strengths and address the challenges. Here is a summary of the common themes that arose. There were many other suggestions as well that will be incorporated into project planning but space does not permit them all to be shared in this report.

“I took on this project as a type of professional development, and I feel there was a tremendous amount of personal growth, artistic stretch, and I felt supported in every way. It was a pleasure to work with everyone involved.”  
– Sherry Campeau,  
Windsor Storygathering Artist

“The most valuable thing for me was establishing a connection with people in my community and letting them feel a part of something important and meaningful. Giving people a platform for their stories to be woven into a collective portrait of their community.”  
– Mariel Marshall,  
Kincardine Storygathering Artist

“Most valuable thing is I think I can approach almost anyone about almost anything and I used to be scared of people.”  
– Katie Swift, Francophone Storygathering Artist

“The most valuable part, for me, with this project was feeling extremely engaged with community in theatre-making. Feeling the satisfaction of having people who don’t normally go to the theatre participating and enjoying themselves. And I learned a lot about producing indie theatre – something I want to develop in my career.”  
– Charlotte Gowdy, Kingston Storygathering Artist

“I learned so much working on Tale of a Town this summer, and boosted many skills – driving, audio editing, producing live events, problem-solving, working under pressure, communicating and dealing with people. Overall, despite a sometimes very steep learning curve, I feel much more confident and capable than I did six months ago.”  
– Alison Broverman, Ontario Story Producer

#### PROJECT STRENGTHS

- Storygathering worked well as a result of well-trained and well-qualified staff;
- The make up of the artist field teams was helpful (having someone with local knowledge, efficient division of roles, complimentary skills and backgrounds);
- The hashtag system of logging made it easier to create podcasts and performance installations and helped to focus later interviews;
- Taking a personal approach (e.g., picking up the phone to schedule an interview instead of emailing and going down to the local paper to drum up press);
- Pre-scheduling the first day or two with interviews and media but then remaining flexible and leaving some time for things to develop organically;
- Having local ambassadors to build support for the project and recruit storytellers;
- Having a permanent location in communities to park the Storymobile;
- Strategic use of social media; and
- Professional, timely and open communication between the directors and artists.

#### PROJECT CHALLENGES

- Not enough time or people to meet all the deliverables (e.g., performance would take precedence over the podcast);
- Budget to pay local artists and support felt limited;
- Lack of clarity around roles and expectations of national artists, local artists (e.g., local videographer) and local partners; and
- Not having the supplies on hand needed for the performance installation.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT YEAR

- Develop a clearer and more realistic project schedule in order to meet all the deliverables, including the podcast and the performance installation;
- Create standardized templates for partners, performances and materials required; and
- Secure more human resources, including a dedicated and centralized project coordinator to handle logistics, marketing and more, along with an audio support person.



# 45

Number of local and national artists engaged

# \$2000

Average dollar amount invested in each artist. Artists gained new skills, connections, knowledge and more.



# ORAL HISTORY



## WHAT WE BELIEVE

IF experiential accounts of main streets from across Canada are captured in the voices of real community members (including their personal descriptions, the sound of their voices, the words they use, their dialect, etc.) and shared through performance installations and online via our Story Hub ... THEN valuable history of Canadian main streets will be preserved, shared and appreciated.

## WHAT WE HEARD

Storytellers, audience members and partners made it clear that they valued the collection of stories for history's sake and as an important end unto itself.



*According to Kathryn Walbert at the University of North Carolina, the value of oral history includes the ability to learn about the perspective of individuals who normally would not be present in mainstream historical records and about more personal experiences such as hopes, feelings and aspirations of individuals.*

“A number of the folks who were able to come out and share their stories are getting older and the story is a moment in time. It is maybe created over a number of years, but the telling the story is a performance. If you don't capture it and record it, it's gone into the wind. So capturing them in the recorded form helps us to be able to access them in the future.”

– Michelle Jorgensen, community partner,  
Heritage Advisor,  
Town of Olds, AB

“There were other people telling their story and it just seemed a connection was made about how important it is to tell stories to keep the village from forgetting it's past.”

– Storyteller, Wellington,  
Prince Edward County,  
ON



8

Age of youngest  
storyteller

47

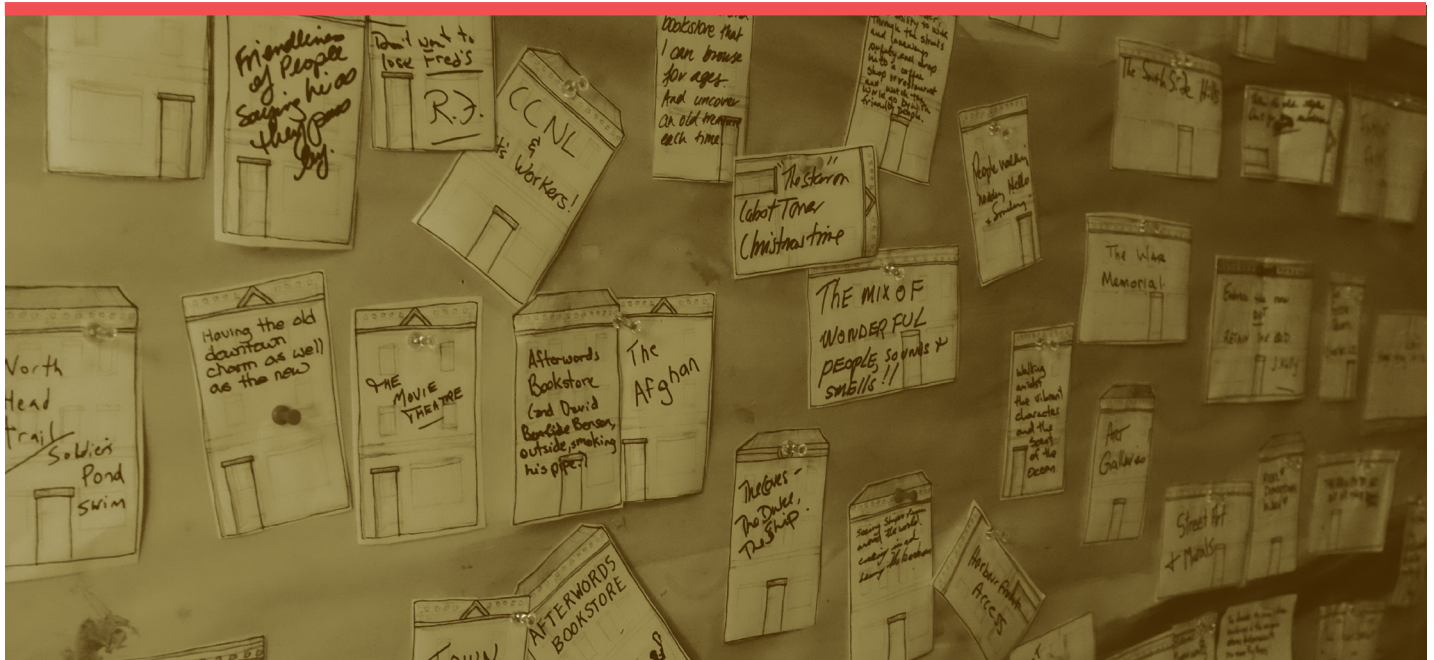
Average age of  
storytellers



103

Age of oldest  
storyteller





In 2016, FIXT POINT will create The Tale of a Town in Prince George, B.C. with Theatre NorthWest, and then open the season at the Yukon Arts Centre, before making our way across the Northwest Territories in collaboration with The Northern Arts Cultural Centre. Plans are in the works to join Adventure Canada in Nunavut, completing our tour of The Tale of a Town to every province and territory in Canada in time for Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017!

to gather stories and create performance installations in collaboration with local artists and community presenting partners.

Based on the helpful feedback we received, we commit to making the following changes next year...

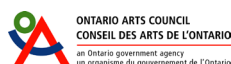
- Expand our human resources to help better support our story producers, touring and local artists;
- Create template partner resources with clearly outlined expectations;
- Create an updated schedule of project deliverables that is well supported and manageable; and
- Work with partners to make good use of the stories collected beyond the performance installation and podcast.





# OUR SUPPORTERS & PARTNERS

We would like to acknowledge and give our thanks to the following project supporters and partners for their generous contributions. Without you this project would not be possible.



Canada Council  
for the Arts  
Conseil des arts  
du Canada

THE WALRUS



NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE  
CENTRE NATIONAL DES ARTS  
Canada is our stage. Le Canada en scène.



Ontario  
Trillium  
Foundation



Fondation  
Trillium  
de l'Ontario

## Project Supporters:

Canada Council for the Arts  
Heritage Canada The National Trust  
The National Arts Centre  
Ontario 400 Celebrations  
Ontario Arts Council  
Toronto Arts Council  
The Walrus Magazine

## Manitoba Partners:

Arts and Cultural Industries Association of Manitoba  
City of Dauphin  
Flin Flon Arts Council  
Le Cercle Moliere (St. Boniface)  
Morden Public Library  
Thompson Public Library

## Ontario Partners:

City of Windsor  
Cobalt Connects (Hamilton, ON)  
Downtown Collingwood Association  
Downtown North Bay  
Downtown Sault Ste. Marie Association  
Downtown Sudbury Association  
Festival Players (Prince Edward County, ON)  
Kick and Push Festival (Kingston, ON)  
Kincardine Tourism  
Le Centre Culturel - Les Compagnons des francs loisirs  
The Corporation of the Township of Tiny  
Town of Cochrane  
Windsor Arts Council

## Saskatchewan Partners:

Common Weal (Prince Albert)  
Curtain Razors Theatre (Regina)  
Moose Jaw Farmer's Market  
The Prince Albert Downtown Business Improvement District  
The Broadway Business Improvement District (Saskatoon)  
Yorkton Public Library

## Alberta Partners:

Alberta Community Initiatives Program  
Banff Centre for the Arts  
Old Strathcona Foundation (Edmonton)  
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo  
The Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre (Medicine Hat)  
Town of Olds  
Town of Camrose



**#ReMainSt**  
**@thetaleofatown**  
**[www.thetaleofatown.com](http://www.thetaleofatown.com)**