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Shaw Street School reopens as Artscape Youngplace

The opening of Artscape Youngplace is a reinvigoration of the long-closed Shaw Street School as a creative community hub.



RICHARD LAUTENS / TORONTO STAR

Artscape opened the largest project in its history, the 75,000-square-foot Youngplace, on Tuesday night. The old Shaw Street School has been converted into studios and gallery spaces.

By: **Murray Whyte** Visual arts, Published on Wed Nov 20 2013

The hallways echoed with chatter, the classrooms crackled with activity, and for the first time in more than a decade, the Shaw Street School came to life Tuesday night as it reopened as [Artscape Youngplace](#), a brand-new community arts hub reanimated by the not-for-profit developer Artscape.

"I can't tell you how happy we are to welcome you all here tonight," said Artscape president and CEO Tim Jones, speaking to the crowd. He gestured to a crest painted on the wall just below where he was speaking, of a bulldog festooned with a word, in bright neon-pink letters: Tenacity. "When we first uncovered that crest in the archive, we thought, what better symbol for what's happened here?"

Indeed, the conversion of the school, from abandoned brick husk to vibrant public space, has been a long process. The Shaw Street School had been closed since 2000, when the then-Conservative provincial government under premier Mike Harris had it closed for failing to meet a student-per-square-foot threshold.

The school stood silent for half a dozen years until Artscape, attending a community meeting on its possible futures, proposed a feasibility study for its redevelopment as a community arts hub. Seven years and more than \$17 million later, Artscape Youngplace opened Tuesday, to an air of jubilant triumphalism.

Earlier in the day, long-silent hallways echoed for the first time in a dozen years with the squeals of excited children from the [Givins-Shaw Jr. Public School](#) next door. "We thought it was only fair that

they get the first look,” said Jones.

The night before, the [Koffler Gallery](#), for most of its existence tucked into the Koffler Centre at Bathurst and Finch, had a private opening in its new space on the main floor. Tuesday, though, the doors opened wide for the first time to Artscape Youngplace as it was intended: A public space open to all.

Aside from the Koffler Gallery, one of the building's anchor tenants, Youngplace houses an array of community arts organizations, galleries, individual artists and one very large public arts institution, the Luminato Festival, taking up much of the third floor.

Some own their studios, some rent. In either case, pricing is geared to be below market level as a bulwark to the skyrocketing rents in the surrounding neighbourhood that have scattered all but a few artists and arts organizations farther afield.

The area's civic designation as the “Art and Design District” had started to seem like something of a misnomer. Youngplace, said Jones, is intended to permanently establish a cultural hub in the neighbourhood.