



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**April 16, 2021**

## **Toronto Charity Stepping Up to Provide Vaccine Information and Support to Underserved Communities**

**Music charity Sistema Toronto is helping families navigate the vaccine system in Toronto hot spots.**

**TORONTO, ON** – Sistema Toronto, a non-profit providing free after-school music and social education to 300 kids in underserved neighbourhoods across Toronto, has received private funding to set up a vaccine support initiative.

In early April, it was found that 22 per cent of residents in the upscale St. Clair and Rosedale neighbourhood had at least one dose of the vaccine, [compared to only 5.5 per cent in the Jane and Finch area](#), despite COVID-19 hospitalization and death rates being significantly higher. According to [neighbourhood data from the City of Toronto](#), the Rosedale-Moore Park neighbourhood has a case rate of 282 cases per 100,000 while Black Creek (including the Jane-Finch neighbourhood) has a case rate of 1,182 cases per 100,000, over 4 times higher.

The Ontario government is attempting to address this issue by targeting priority neighbourhoods using mobile pop-up clinics in addition to mass vaccination clinics; however this does not address all of the systemic barriers in place in regards to booking and attending an appointment. These targeted areas are communities with many newcomers, low-income families, and essential workers. Sistema Toronto works in 3 of these priority neighbourhoods – Parkdale, Jane-Finch, and East Scarborough – and is aware of the barriers in place that make navigating the booking system and attending vaccine appointments challenging for many.

“There are many reasons that people might struggle with the current set up. Low-wage essential workers may not have the time to navigate the complicated systems, newcomers with limited English might struggle to understand the process, and anyone that isn’t technology savvy will certainly face challenges,” said Jordana de Bloeme, Director of Development at Sistema Toronto. “Thanks to funding from Sistema Toronto Founders Robert and Ellen Eisenberg, we are able to set up a support network of paid staff that will be reaching out to our communities and helping in any way we can.”

Sistema Toronto will use its network of teaching artists to take on this important work. Sistema teachers have undertaken Vulnerable Sector Screenings, are trained in working with vulnerable populations, and are a trusted and familiar voice in the communities. Staff will be reaching out over the phone to provide advice and information, walk people through the booking process or complete the process on their behalf, provide masks, and arrange for Uber/Taxi bookings paid for by Sistema Toronto to provide accessible transportation to and from appointments.

“At Sistema Toronto, we’re committed to raising awareness about the vast array of inequalities our communities face,” said Andres Tucci-Clarke, Managing Director of Sistema Toronto. “Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has only further exacerbated and highlighted issues that we have been aware of for many years now. As a community

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music program, we are not typically in the business of giving out health advice and support, but at this time the Government is failing these communities and we don't see any other option. Someone has to step up.”

### **About Sistema Toronto**

Social Change Through Music Education: Sistema Toronto provides free music and social development opportunities to children in underserved communities, with the goal of transformative social change. We build stronger communities by enabling children to grow and thrive as engaged citizens and future leaders. Sistema Toronto is first and foremost a social development program, using ensemble-based music education to transform the lives of children. Sistema Toronto students work together for 10 hours of weekly instruction. They learn strings (violin, viola, cello, or double bass), percussion, choir and Music & Movement while developing important life skills like problem solving, empathy, and self-advocacy. <https://www.sistema-toronto.ca/>.

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