

# THE RIPPLE EFFECT

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*Like a handful of pebbles tossed into the water, 100 sculptures mindfully placed for anyone to see create myriad ripple effects across Chicago.*

**THE FACTS ABOUT TEN THOUSAND RIPPLES (TTR)**—the who, what, when, where, and how many of its planning and implementation—reveal the breadth of this ambitious two-year community art project. TTR materials also record thoughts and ideas, feelings and experiences of individuals and communities and tell us how a public art project can attract participation and galvanize awareness and action at the local level.

Each of the nine TTR communities has its own distinctive composition and dynamics. Poverty and its effects pervade parts of or entire TTR communities. Whether the community is predominantly African American, Latino, or multi-racial and multi-ethnic, all have vibrant and vital local organizations. That local organizations embraced an activist art project is all the more proof of their vision and commitment, especially since they face chronic underfunding and understaffing and acute community need. TTR would not have been possible without the organizations that welcomed the project into their communities.

Nothing is virtual about violence when it's on your block or in your neighborhood. From feeling unsafe and fearful to mourning slain children, chronic violence causes suffering and hardship. TTR sculptures give artistic form to ideas about peace and nonviolence and offer aesthetic experiences of these ideas. Communities used the project as a vehicle for children and adults to express feelings about painful experiences and envision new ways of being.

Viewers report the TTR sculptures evoke feelings of calm, peace, and well-being. One community worker said students told him that “walking past the TTR sculpture to get to classes had a calming effect on them.” An art teacher said that one student whose pregnant mother was killed by gun violence found the Buddha reminded him of her, “calm and peaceful.” An artist working with elementary school students recounted how the “group discussed ways to approach the Buddha sculpture as a symbol of peace and a platform for discussion. Guided



by the belief that art starts from an idea, they explored concepts of contemplation and aggression.”

TTR communities responded enthusiastically and imaginatively to the invitation to use the sculpture and artistic thinking to trigger creativity. For example, one community organized a Love Train for Peace parade; another offered a bike tour of local sculptures. Schools got involved, asking for sculptures to promote peace and incorporating TTR into art classes. Other communities used sculptures as stopping points in a

peace procession or made plans to place them in vacant lots, creating Peace Parks.

TTR doesn't naively propose that art is a one-stop solution to violence and poverty. Instead, it shows how artistic thinking and creativity can clarify problems and contribute to solutions. In the words of one community leader: “The impact of Ten Thousand Ripples is invaluable. We have experienced ripple effects of creativity and community engagement. Our youth have written and performed plays about searching for peace, our seniors have been dancing in the streets for peace, and our community gardener has been driving around with a Buddha sculpture on his truck, educating the community about what we are doing for peace.” The ripple effects of using art to open eyes and minds will continue to spread across TTR communities long after the last sculpture fades from sight.