

Six Degrees Muskoka Survey – Autumn 2009

Executive Summary



Don and Jen Skinner, founders of Six Degrees Muskoka, a not-for-profit pilot project supporting Muskoka's arts community and youth that ran from June to September 2009, were interested in collecting community feedback on the initiative. To that end they disseminated a survey on SurveyMonkey.com and invited anyone who wished to share their opinions and suggestions to do so. Here is an executive summary of the results, collected between September 15 and October 5, 2009.

General

One hundred and seventeen people participated in the survey, an invitation to participate in which was posted on the door at Six Degrees Muskoka at 63 Manitoba Street in Bracebridge, on the homepage of the Six Degrees Muskoka website (sixdegreesmuskoka.com), and in an email to the initiative's community arts and animation list of about 800 individuals and community groups.

- 85% of the survey's respondents are year-round Muskoka residents and 11% are cottagers
- 70% of the survey's respondents participated in the initiative
- Women made up 65.5% of respondents
- 63% of respondents were aged 35 to 64, 16% were aged 65 and older, 12% were aged 19 to 34 and 10% were 18 or under

The majority of respondents said Muskoka is in need of opportunities such as those provided by Six Degrees Muskoka "very much" or "quite a bit." (See Figure 1.)

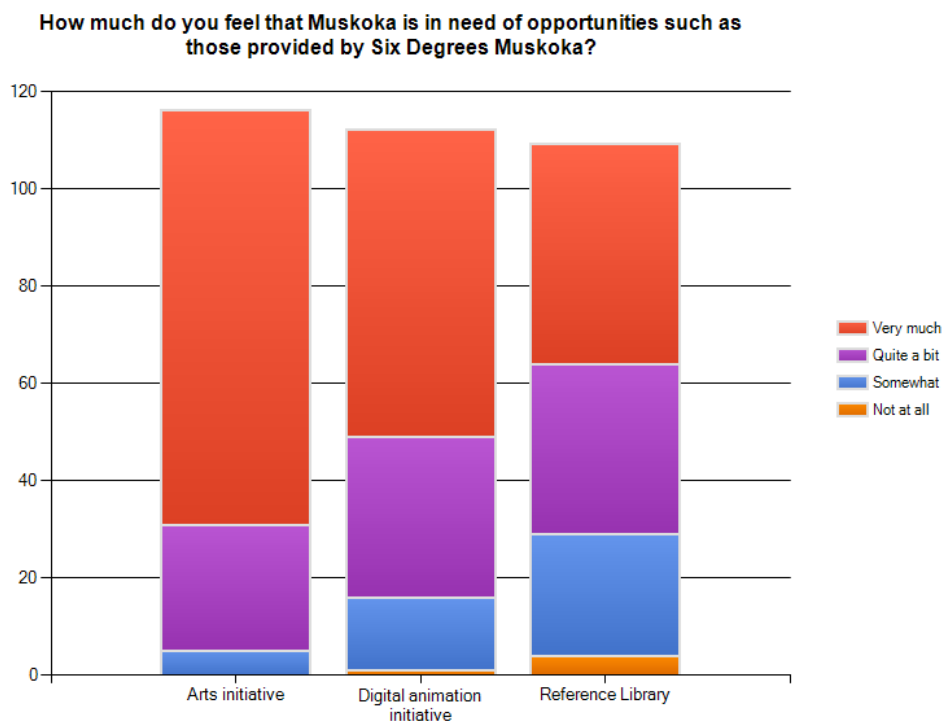


Figure 1.

Respondents were particularly enthusiastic in their comments about the Digital Animation initiative, "Pixels on the Parallel".

"The animation lessons are terrific for the kids, fostering creativity and fun and perhaps even opening the door to future careers. The artistic community, of course, always needs community support in whatever form is offered."

Digital Animation Participants

Eighty percent of digital animation participants found the initiative "very" enjoyable, and 20% found it "quite" enjoyable; 95% felt the classes were "very" or "quite" effective at providing students with constructive tools for using the computer in a positive manner. Close to 90% of respondents were satisfied with the classes' length (two hours in the morning for young kids and three hours in the afternoon for older kids) and duration of sessions (Monday to Friday). The remaining 10% felt both were too short.

Nearly 100% were "very" or "quite" satisfied with the quality of teaching, the Toon Boom software and value for the cost. All respondents said they would be interested in signing themselves or their children up if similar classes were to be offered again in future. (See Figure 2.)

"my mum says why don't you have a 6 degrees certificate that the kids can work towards and earn? like take so many classes about different types of art."

**If Six Degrees Muskoka were to offer digital animation classes in future, would you consider ...?
(Click all that apply.)**

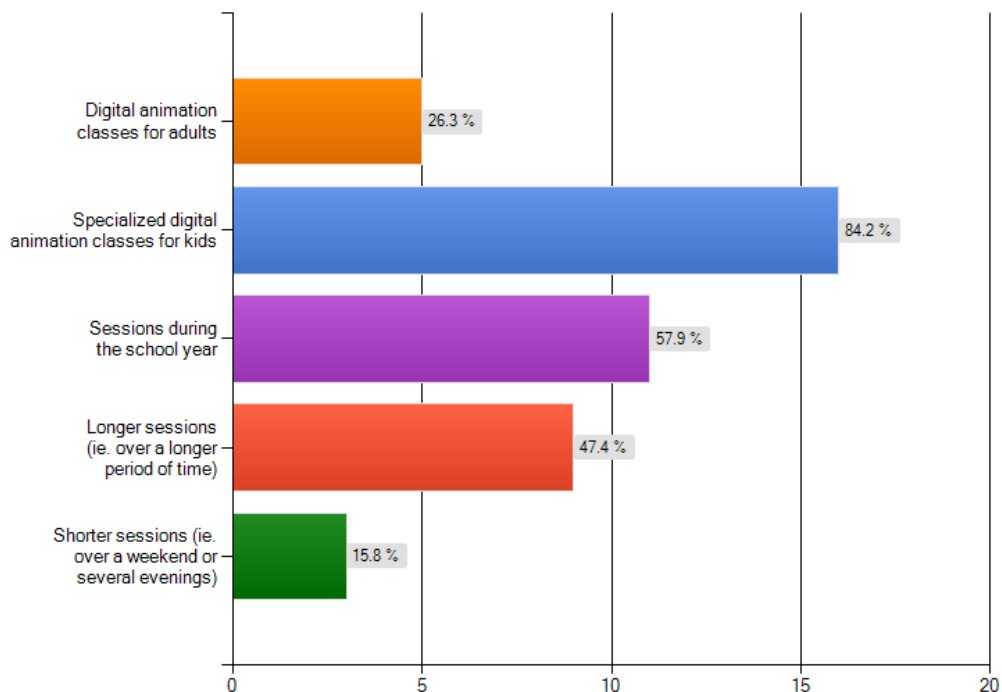


Figure 2.

Art Participants

About half of those respondents who identified as artists participated in one-to-two themed exhibitions. About a third participated in more than two shows, held an event or demonstrated there, or helped set up/tear down one or more shows.

Ninety percent of artists who participated in the Six Degrees Muskoka initiative reported that their experience was either “very worthwhile” (45%) or “quite worthwhile” (45%). (See Figure 3.)

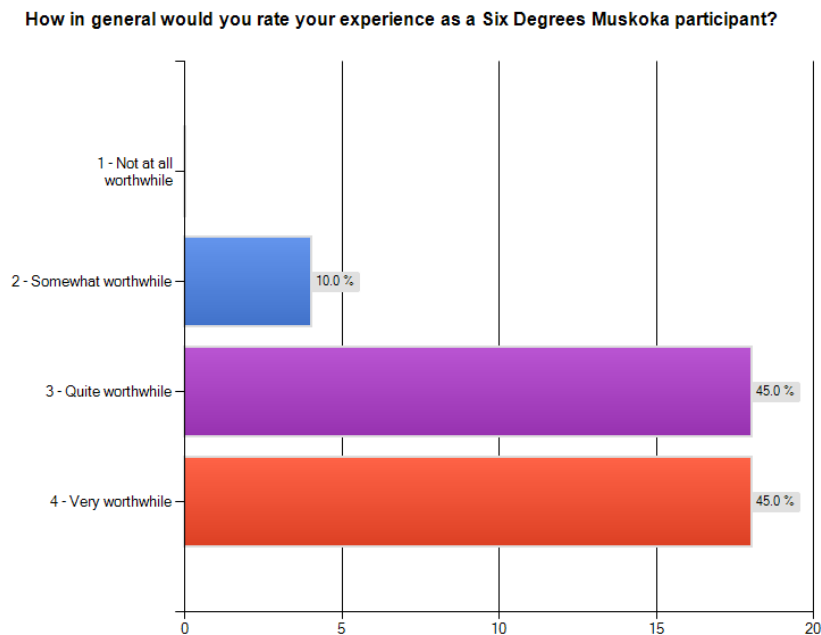


Figure 3.

When asked what they liked best about participating in the initiative, respondents commented that they liked the venue, appreciated the opportunity to show their work there, and enjoyed interacting with other artists, meeting the public, and receiving feedback. They liked the feeling of community and the sense of being part of something “new and exciting.” One commented that it was gratifying to see “the potential around us,...youth and aged side by side...” Most enjoyed demonstrating, though a few expressed disappointment if they demonstrated on slow days.

When asked what they liked least about participating in the initiative, the majority of respondents said they were disappointed in the number of sales, their own lack of time to participate more, the travel distance, found the hanging material difficult to work with or felt there was too much work cluttering the space at times.

Respondents’ suggestions included more outdoor signage, offering more ways for artists to volunteer, lowering commissions, more distinct and better-elaborated art show themes, longer timelines, and being more discerning in the jurying process.

While close to 80% of respondents said that their participation in the Six Degrees Muskoka art initiative was either “very” or “quite” worthwhile overall, more than half of respondents said that in financial

terms, the initiative was “not at all” worthwhile, and another 36% said it was “somewhat” worthwhile financially. Sixty-two percent of respondents said that the experience helped their professional development “somewhat.” About a third reported that it was either quite or very helpful, while 5% said it was “not at all” helpful with regards to their professional development.

When asked what was most helpful, about two-thirds of respondents reported that they liked networking with other artists and the sense of community the initiative provided. (See Figure 4.)

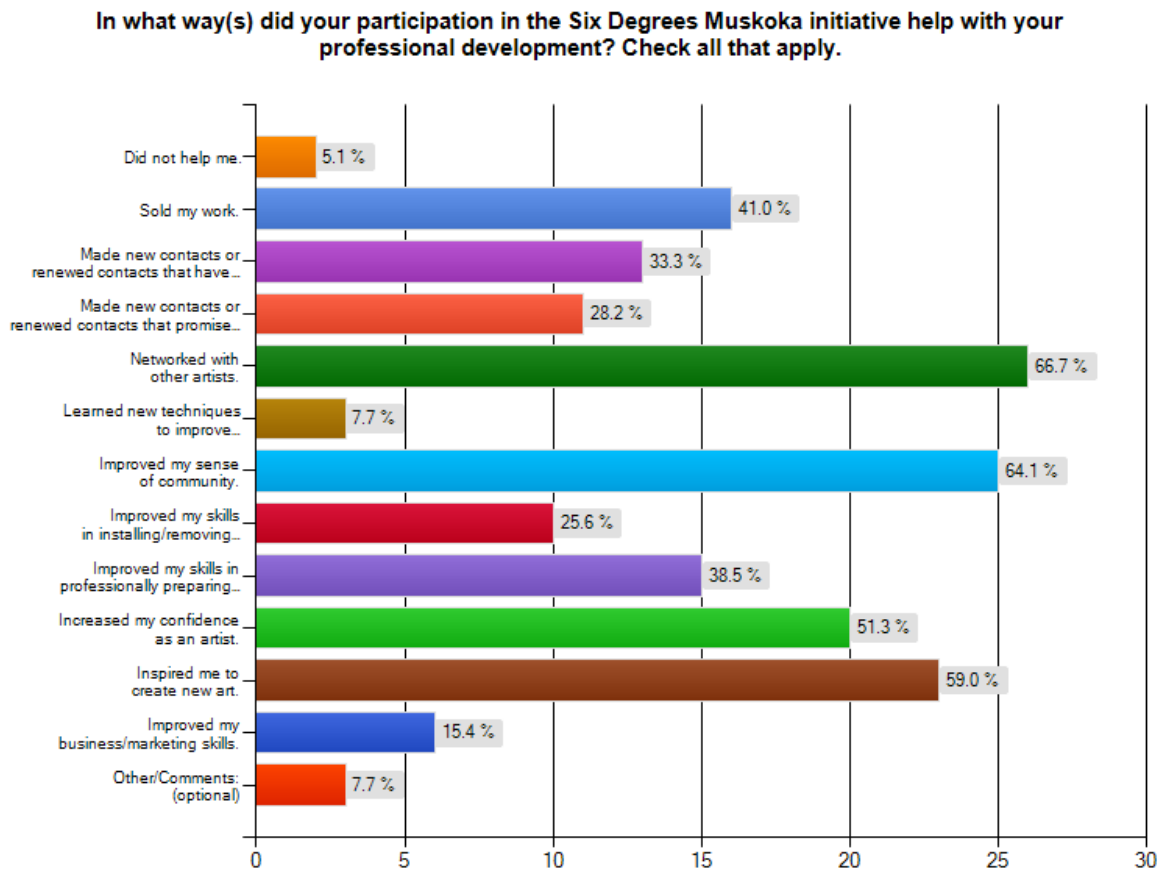


Figure 4.

Everyone who responded (100%) said they would like to see a similar initiative again in the future, and that they would be willing to help out.

Timing

Fifty-eight percent of respondents felt the two-week duration of themed art shows was appropriate, while 42.5% felt it was too short. While acknowledging that shorter shows “keep the name in the papers,” some noted that the quick turnover was labour intensive did not allow enough time for artists to prepare. Three weeks to a month was suggested as a more appropriate time frame. Some respondents asked for more lead time in the issuing of calls to artists.

Jurying, Themes and the Hanging of Shows

Many of the artists who participated in the survey expressed their appreciation for having their work accepted into one or more shows. Some respondents commented, however, that Six Degrees Muskoka's inclusive jurying policy and the acceptance of some less-professional or lower-priced work may have detracted from the overall quality of the space and the experience of the visitor. Several respondents commented that some of the themes were either confusing, crowded, or too loosely-adhered to, and suggested that more definitive and experienced leadership during set-up would be beneficial. The Animals & Habitat show (July 23 to August 4) drew the most criticism. One respondent suggested grouping the work by quality, medium and/or price.

"I would like to see a little bit of curatorial selection as some art really had little to do with themes. Also consider how this may impact on the interest level of viewers: a little selectivity may help distinguish between art as craft and art or between plainly bad art (no offense intended) and art with potential or good art. I realize this requires a certain amount of ruthlessness or maybe a little more detailing of the access to the space. It is the eternal debate between a centre for the people - by the people, and the centre that aims to generate some income so it can survive. business vs charity (in the best sense of the word.) There is always some hope that things can be shaped organically with time..."

"I think that there was too much setting up and taking down time. At least 3 weeks and perhaps eliminating the somewhat confusing themes that were confusing and not really adhered too. There was far too much in the Animals and Habitat show and mixing photography and paintings side by side is confusing. I think photos should be in an area together and if an artist has say 4 paintings, they should be shown together, not scattered throughout the show. The hanging of a show is extremely important and can make it or break it. To designate a wall for you and a wall for me to hang a show is not acceptable. Someone experienced should be in charge of the set up. Pricing originals, framed and matted with glass, should not be selling for \$75. Makes the rest of us look greedy and cheapens the show."

Art Attendance & Sales

More than 90% of respondents visited the space to look at the art exhibitions, and 57% attended one or more opening receptions. The majority reported that their experience as a visitor was “excellent” or “good.” (See Figure 5.)

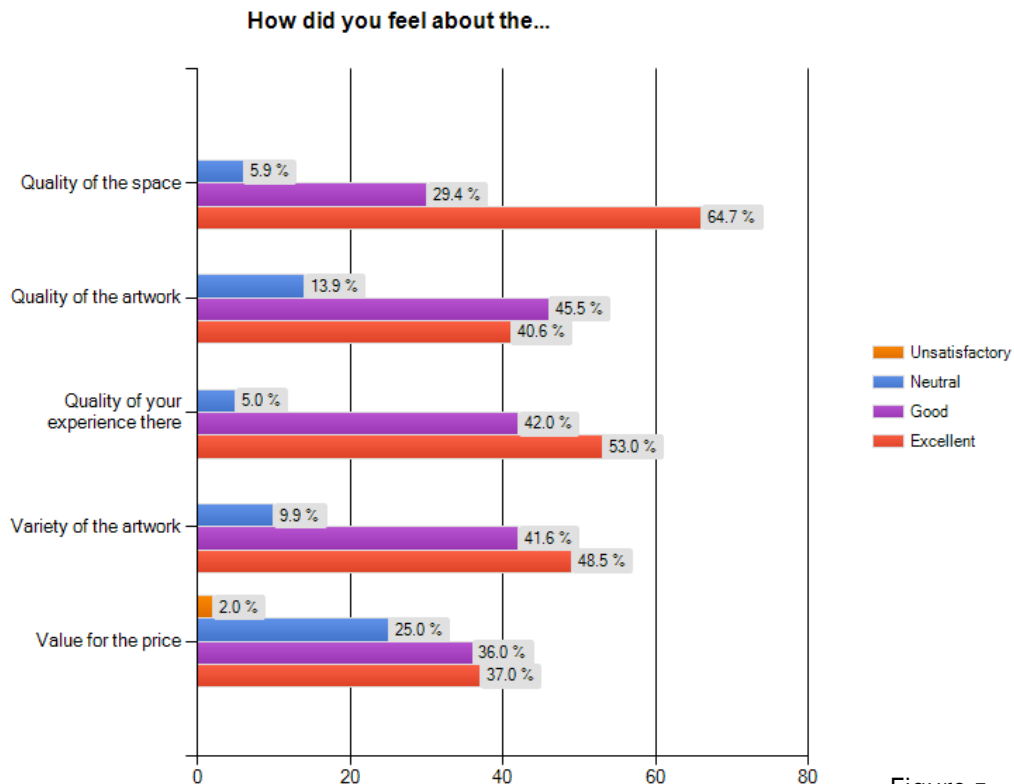


Figure 5.

Just 14% of respondents made purchases, however, and greeting cards and literature were the most common items sold.

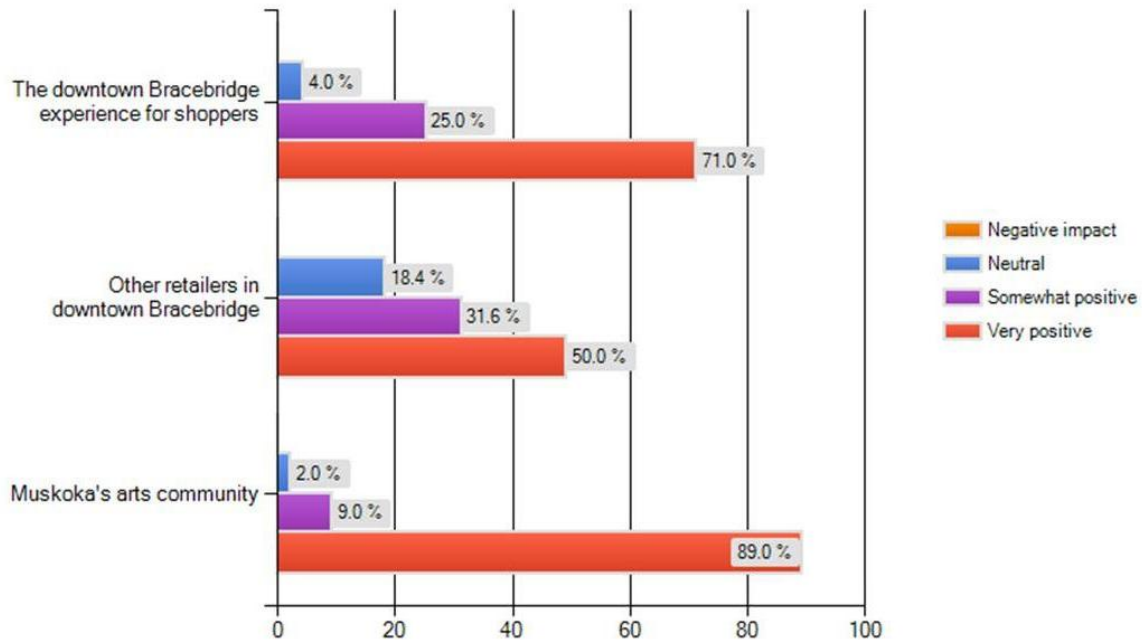
"At the time I was not aware of the great variety of materials you offered and though not a big spender, would visit next time with a thought to purchasing gifts if smaller objects (under thirty dollars) were also available."

Effect on the Community

Ninety-six percent of respondents felt that the effect of Six Degrees Muskoka on the downtown Bracebridge shopping experience was "very positive" (71%) or "somewhat positive." (Figure 6.)

"Anything that contributes to the ambiance of the town benefits all businesses."

How do you feel the Six Degrees Muskoka Initiative has affected;



Ninety three percent of respondents said they have recommended Six Degrees Muskoka to others.

"The message was to go and view some excellent talented LOCAL artists."

"A wonderful environment to learn in (animation) and a very good exhibition space."

"Recommended it to other artists who have great work, but have never showed publicly, said it was a great place to start, and to friends, saying they must check out some of the talent that exists that one does not normally get to see."

Thank you for your interest. Please contact us directly if you would like to discuss the initiative or to see the survey and comments in their entirety. Tamsen@sixdegreesmuskoka.com or (705) 645.6313.