

# A STORY OF HOPE

AN UPDATE ON OUR IMPACT DURING COVID-19



## INTRODUCTION

On March 20th, 2020, Building Roots began a new initiative, **Community Helping Community**, after making the difficult decision to temporarily close many of our gatherings and programming to keep our community safe. Building Roots has always been committed to cultivating vibrant and resilient communities. COVID-19 put that mission to the test. The social cohesion that emerged swiftly and spontaneously has been nothing short of awe-inspiring. We're overjoyed to have participated in this remarkable community. Amidst COVID-19, we quickly and creatively connected with residents, partner agencies, community leaders, and volunteers, working hard to provide food and other resources to the most vulnerable in our community.



We began our **food bag delivery program** out of Moss Park Market, ensuring that seniors, community members living with emotional or mobility barriers, and those in self-isolation, would not be left behind in accessing fresh, healthy, and nutritious food. We focused on providing **educational resources and activity kits** for children home from school. We worked to keep vulnerable residents safe at home with **information about COVID-19** and government supports they would not otherwise have received. We have **reached new folks** in and around our community- many of whom experience food insecurity and injustice. We've **discovered new vulnerabilities** with informed visibility in Moss Park and surrounding neighbourhoods and have worked to meet those challenges with compassion and kindness, endeavouring to listen and navigate in innovative ways. We've worked to ensure collaboration with numerous old and new friends, discovering the true power of connection and unleashing the **cohesion in our community**.

*"I'm so grateful for these food bags. Everything inside them is just wonderful. It's like a medicine to my body. Please don't ever forget me!"*  
- Senior recipient

**It is with gratitude, great learning, and even greater collaborations, that after the first 25 weeks of Community Helping Community, together we were able to accomplish:**

**6000+  
Food Bags**

distributed to 300 households filled with fresh and local produce, non perishable staples, and delicious meals and treats.

**500+  
Activity Kits**

procured and distributed to children and families, working with Children's Book Bank of Canada, DAREarts, Pokemon, Harvey Kalles Real Estate, and engaged community members.

**100+ Community  
Members**

visiting our non-profit pay what you can market each week, a substantial increase from last year, ensuring access to resources and social togetherness in a time of social isolation.

# How Did We Do It?

## A STORY OF CONNECTION AND COLLABORATION

*"The small and mighty ships are sailing together" -DAREarts*

To keep up with the increased need for access to fresh food, educational and recreational resources for kids at home, and essential informational resources, we were blessed to connect with **over 40** new, dedicated and passionate **volunteers!** Between the Moss Park Market, our food bag deliveries, and our Urban Farm at Ashbridge Estate, we would not be able to reach as many folks in our community, or connect as deeply and meaningfully without our inspiring team.



*"This partnership was essential in helping our organization to alleviate some of the suffering our clients were experiencing during a very uncertain and volatile time."*

**-Nadia, RD, Regent Park Community Health Centre**

*"You are all doing such amazing work... a ray of sunshine during this terrible time!" - Florence, Mental Health Supported Housing Worker, Houselink*



Within a matter of weeks, we started receiving numerous donations and offerings from **over 30** new and old **friends and partners** in our community including contributions from Dundas Park Kitchen, Kindness Kitchen, Second Harvest, Joshna Maharaj, Animal Liberation Kitchen, TC Tibetan Momo, Cherry Bomb Cafe, Robin Hood Army, Sweets from the Earth, Lush, Mystical Unicorn, Rabba Fine Foods, and more!

We have connected with **over a dozen partners** who are integral in providing **food access** and social cohesion, including Houselink, Neighbourhood Food Hub, Regent Park Community Health Centre, Fred Victor, Timmercreek Communities, Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, East End Woodgreen, Sunrise Towers, Housing Opening Today Toronto, Community Matters Toronto, Sanctuary, and more! We advised on community projects, providing support and donations in Etobicoke, North York, and Scarborough, as well as downtown.



We forged **10+ new partnerships** committed to promoting **vibrant and resilient neighbourhoods**, including Pathways to Education, Tiffinday, Farmhouse Fresh Food, Fitin Live, SummerLunch+, Jamii, Rightsleeve, and more, all of whom have acted with generosity in embracing our mission and supporting the communities in which we work.

## 1000+ Books and Colouring Books

with works of local artists, and a focus on promoting positive mental health. We are focusing on getting these books and colouring books to folks in social isolation and who may have limited access to these resources.

## 200 Veg2Grow Kits for Kids

were distributed with the help of Katrine, an engaged community member, to children and families in Downtown East Toronto, so children could learn how to grow food safely from their homes.

## 4 New Urban Farms

joined efforts alongside our newly launched Growing Meals Together program and our Urban Farm at Ashbridge Estate, including Carrot Green Roof, Edible Allan Gardens, and Ryerson Urban Farm.



# Enabling Change

## MEASURING MOMENTS AND MOVEMENTS



*"Building Roots has shaped our Toronto experience having just moved here recently. From workshops, to Moss Park Market and grocery deliveries, to Ashbridge Farm, it has connected us to people of all walks of life and helped us make meaningful connections to people in our community right away. Thank you Building Roots!"*  
- Sara & Fil, Volunteers

Our initial evaluations indicate that our **partners have reported** several positive outcomes as a result of engaging with Building Roots during COVID-19:

**Increased access to food, information, supplies (hygiene products, educational materials, kids activities), mental health support, model building support, knowledge sharing, and a greater connection with community members and/or organizations, partners, agencies, and donors.**



Our initial evaluations for our **Urban Farm at Ashbridge Estate** during COVID-19 have demonstrated that **participation and volunteering** enable increased community connection, neighbourhood health, physical activity and mental wellbeing, partnership building, increased comfort in gardening, cooking, learning new food skills, and an increased commitment to ecological resilience. Folks have remarked on the rarity and importance of getting outside and getting together during this difficult time.

# 100%

of those receiving services from Building Roots have reported improved access to food during COVID-19.

# 84%

individuals and families receiving services from Building Roots have reported increased access to information, resources, and masks during COVID-19.

# 100%

volunteers and **92% of recipients** engaged with Building Roots have reported improved mental health during COVID-19.

# Vibrant Summer in Downtown East

A SUMMER OF JOY

Since June, we've been animating the Moss Park Market through a socially distanced Fun Zone activity area for children with weekly giveaways and special surprises (such as toy packs from Pokémon), as well as diverse live music and entertainment for all ages. Our Saturday concerts featured **over 25 musical artists and dance performers** that are exclusively Black, Indigenous, women, people of colour, Trans, Non-Binary and/or LGBTQIP2SAA+, providing important paid opportunities for artists during this time, and additionally offering all performers a fresh food bag. The community, in turn, got the gift of art and the opportunity to come together safely for some fun.



@girlfromipanina

*"We all deserve the richness and full spectrum of musical experience. This summer Building Roots booked exclusively women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIP2SAA artists and performers for our weekly Concert Series... Starting small can seem insignificant, but to some it is immeasurable"- Danielle Collrin, Market Animator, Building Roots*



@joshuabest\_photos

*"It was deeply nourishing for the soul getting to co-create an experience deeply rooted in community. Indeed both food and music have the power to bring people together."*  
- Musical Artist, Me Time



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## Final Thank You from Building Roots...



Thank you to everyone who supported us, funded our projects, volunteered, donated, or otherwise cheered us on through this incredible showing of community spirit the past few months. We're grateful to have coordinated with The City of Toronto, United Way Greater Toronto, and Government of Canada. It's inspiring that in the face of COVID-19, and all its accompanying challenges, we've seen a heightened level of social cohesion. The amount of innovation, collaboration, and fundamental drive to help our broader communities during these difficult times truly inspires us. These have not been easy times for anyone... thank you for being part of our story of hope.

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