

# BUILDING ROOTS

# IMPACT REPORT 2020



**Building Roots** enables people to create socially cohesive communities. We envision **vibrant, resilient neighbourhoods**

***...even in a pandemic.***



In 2020 we collaborated and navigated our social landscape in new ways. We made inspiring friends, furthered our reach to nourish whole communities, and fostered deep community-led relationships of support.

**All in connection with you- the community. Thank you**





## INTRODUCING OUR IMPACT

2020 was ripe with firsts, and it's not enough to say that we merely had to pivot or adapt to the new circumstances that COVID-19 threw our way.

We also **learned, created, thrived, enabled,** and **connected more deeply.**

We invite you to follow along with us as we highlight our impact during 2020, which includes our program highlights, community feats, mention of immense supporters, and stories of hope and vibrancy.

**Partners, friends, residents, community members, volunteers, donors,** and **supporters,** thank you for sharing in our mission and advocacy work in 2020.

You helped to enable **greater cohesion** in our community, with the goal to:

- **build connections among neighbours**
- **increase use of public space**
- **enable community members to participate in volunteer and leadership roles**
- **increase access to dignified foods**
- **enable environments for learning new skills and information, and creative expressions**
- **engage new community initiatives, organizations, and volunteers to come into the community**

This is our impact, and you are part of it. We made it happen together, through increased **connection.** This year's impact was packed with new obstacles and challenges, and we met those challenges side by side.

**Here's how ~~you~~ we did it...**





## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS: IT TAKES A VILLAGE COMMUNITY

Building Roots has always been committed to **cultivating vibrant and resilient communities**. In March of 2020, COVID-19 put our mission to the test. The **social cohesion** that emerged both swiftly and spontaneously has been awe-inspiring.

Amidst COVID-19 we quickly connected with residents, partner agencies, community leaders, as well as volunteers - working hard to provide food and other resources to folx who face **heightened vulnerabilities** and **barriers to access** within our community.

After a couple of months reinventing ourselves through 2020, we **re-imagined our programming**, and with the help of our community, created the following initiatives to carry us through 2020.

### FOOD BAG DELIVERY PROGRAM

#### 6000+ Food Bags

delivered to 500+ households filled with fresh and local produce, non perishable staples, and delicious meals and treats

We have connected with **over a dozen partners** who have been essential in providing food access and furthering **social cohesion** in the communities we work within,



We advised on community projects, providing support and donations in Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, as well as other downtown communities, in addition to Moss Park and downtown Toronto East. Some of these community partners who made this happen include:

**Houselink, Neighbourhood Food Hub, Regent Park Community Health Centre, Fred Victor, Timbercreek Communities, Seeds of Hope, Encampment Support Network, Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, East End Woodgreen, Overdose Prevention Site, Sunrise Towers Housing, Opening Today Toronto, Community Matters Toronto Sanctuary, 250 Davenport Road**



### MOSS PARK MARKET

#### 100+ Community Members

visiting our pay-what-you-can market each week, ensuring further individual empowerment through social cohesion in the Moss Park Community

#### 13,000 food bags distributed

with emphasis on dignified, nourishing, and affordable produce for all with the goal of effectively increasing the quality of food accessibility

We recognize **Moss Park Market** as a sort-of pop-up space that doesn't fit into any box, (except a shipping container) and also evades a lot of definitions while **recreating opportunity** in terms of our food supply, distribution capabilities, and **community 'hub'** feel.

It enables a safer space for **low barrier food access**, and is physically visible so community members can feel more welcome coming in, saying hi, and finding dignified food options.



## COMMUNITY LEADERS PROGRAM

Our Community Leaders program **enables residents** of a community to achieve collective goals and contribute to positive change in their neighbourhood.

First piloted in Moss Park, and with multiple years of demonstrated success, in 2020, we piloted the project in midtown in consultation with 250 Davenport Road's TCHC Revitalization Team. Community Leaders are **empowered** and **engaged** one-on-one to identify their interests and capacity.

Through this growth, we hope to support what may benefit their community most and achieve their independently desired outcomes for the program. Community Leaders participate in the program's **capacity building** and leadership training to further develop their strengths and skills.



### 9+ community leaders

leading positive change and working toward combating challenges in their own communities



## URBAN FARM AT ASHBRIDGE ESTATE

### 3+ Urban Farms

joined efforts alongside us in our newly launched **Growing Meals Together Program**, including Ryerson Urban Farm, Carrot Green Roof, and Edible Allan Gardens

### 800+ hours of love and labour

worked to make the gift of time and attention a key component of our urban farm's operations



A **dozen volunteers** came together to transform this challenging year to utter joy with a dash of growth & self-empowerment. They planted seedlings and harvested peppers, tomatoes, peas, beans, zucchini, bitter melon, turnips, kohlrabi, garlic, chard, mint, dill, thyme, basil, and more.

The farm is volunteer-powered, raising this food not for themselves, but for the Building Roots' **food bags distributed at the Moss Park Market**. The kindness of people to each other is magic, one of the greatest there is.

We are engaged in numerous **collaborative projects** with the warm-hearted staff: the Ontario Heritage Trust, Ojibiikaan's Indigenous Three-Sisters planter, and another dozen small businesses and organizations that were generous to the farm. Some of these are Miceli's Seasonals, Lazy Daisy Café, FoodShare through CAMh, Not Far From The Tree, and Manning Canning, to name just a few!

This otherwise difficult year paradoxically grew six months of **laughter, abundance, and delight**.





@girlfrompaninna

## SUMMER MARKET ANIMATION

It's hard to sum up a summer that filled the city sky with light and love, **Creating social togetherness** in a time of social isolation. We enabled **vibrancy in Moss Park** through unique & innovative performances as well as recreational/educational kits for kids,

**200+ Veg2Grow kits** donated by our partner Kartine enabled children to learn to grow food safely from home, and over **1000 colouring books** filled with the beautiful works of **local artists** were distributed.

Our summer market animation cultivated community through the opportunity to come together to celebrate and find joy. It also provided performers and artists important paid opportunities during COVID-19, and additionally, gifted them a food bag.

## 1000+ Kids Kits 30+ Performers & Artists

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

that are exclusively Black, Indigenous, women, people of colour, Trans, Non-Binary and/or LGBTQQIP2SAA+ provided with important opportunities to perform



## ENCAMPMENT SUPPORT

### 200+ Warm Meals

distributed directly to our neighbours in the encampments, with support from Tiffinday and Animal Liberation Kitchen, and the helping hands of a dozen volunteers

### 100+ Sleeping Bags

and emergency sleeping blankets distributed to the Moss Park Encampments during our Winter Warmth Action Day



Through our Encampment Support in 2020, we reached over **100 new community members** through the 'simple' act of breaking bread and sharing a meal.

We work directly with the **Encampment Support Network (ESN)** - a volunteer-run initiative in Toronto - in order to discern what may benefit Moss Park Encampment residents the most. Through outreach, we distribute warm meals, fresh fruit, winterized sleeping bags, and emergency blankets.

We launched **our fundraising campaign, Support Our Unhoused Neighbours**, and also advocate strongly alongside **ESN's demands** for adequate housing and support from the city, and against encampment evictions, which you can read more about [here](#).





## WE GET BY WITH A ~~LITTLE~~ LOT OF HELP FROM FRIENDS



### 45+ New and Established Friends

We received an overwhelming amount of support in **donations and offerings** from over 45 new & established friends and partners in our community, including contributions from:

**Dundas Park Kitchen, Second Harvest, FoodShare, Joshna Maharaj and her #Soupandsweets crew, Animal Liberation Kitchen, TC Tibetan Momo, Cherry Bomb Cafe, Mad Maple, Ozery Bakery, Robin Hood Army, Sweets from the Earth, Lush, Mystical Unicorn, Rabba Fine Foods, Miceli's Seasonals, Manning Canning, and more!**

### 50+ Volunteers Engaged



We are grateful to have connected with **over 50 volunteers** during 2020. Volunteers help to support our mission through the Moss Park Market, our food bag deliveries, our Urban Farm at Ashbridge Estate, our community outreach in the Encampments, and beyond.

Volunteers ensure we are able to **deepen our reach** while **connecting more meaningfully**, and we would not be able to reach as many folx in our community without their commitment!



### 10+ Partnerships Forged

We forged **10+ new partnerships** allowing us to expand both our outreach and capabilities. We **collaborated with established friends** committed to our vision of **promoting vibrant and resilient neighbourhoods**, including:

**Pathways to Education, Yea!, Tiffinday, Farmhouse Fresh Food, Fitin Live, SummerLunch+, Jamii, Rightsleeve, Kindness Kitchen, Works-in-Progress, 250 Davenport Road, Creative Works Studio, The Textile Museum, and more.**

all of whom have acted with generosity in embracing our mission and supporting the communities in which we work.





## THE PROOF IS IN THE DATA PUDDING

Our initial evaluations indicate an alignment with our primary objectives: from increased access to dignified foods, to building connections among neighbours. With this, we feel the goals outlined in our introduction were achieved.

We know it is difficult to measure a year of smiles, love, passion, dedication, generosity, gifts of food and friendship, and a community coming together to **connect with care** but here we go.

**100%**

of **volunteers** surveyed claimed that engaging with Building Roots **improved** their **mental health** during COVID-19

**100%**

of **artists and performers** surveyed reported feeling an **increased connection** to neighbours, their local community, and the music community through participating in the live concert series this past summer

**75%**

of **partners & friends** reported engaging with Building Roots **fostered greater connection** between them and other community members, organizations, partners, agencies, and donors during COVID-19

**87%**

of **food bag recipients** reported that receiving services from Building Roots has provided them with **increased access to information, resources**, and masks during COVID-19

**100%**

of **community leaders** reported an interest in **continuing** in their role as part of the community leader program in 2021

**100%**

of **Moss Park Market visitors** reported that receiving services from Building Roots **improved** their **access to food** during COVID-19



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*TO BUILDING ROOTS. WITH LOVE*

"Everyone should have the right to eat healthy food. The passion and dedication of the staff and volunteers [at Building Roots] is inspiring" -Rachel, Food Delivery Support

"The small and mighty ships are sailing together" -DAREarts, Community Partner

Last Saturday I was able to come and pick up food for myself and for my Mother, to bring to her, she's nearly 78 and can't get out. She has health issues: diabetes, high blood pressure. She needs these fresh foods. I can't tell you how much it helps. God bless you, God bless you"  
-Community Member

"Thank you again for this week's delivery. It is truly the highlight of my entire week" -Community Member

"I received my vegetables, fruit, soup, and so much more! I am so thankful for this gift which I will never forget. It has been a struggle for me to keep all the balls in the air. I am overwhelmed with the generosity and the kindness. I was a nurse and I know that I never asked for any thanks but this gesture is not going unrecognized. I want to thank you and your organization ever so much" -Senior Recipient

"Thank you to our hidden frontline workers for all you've done"- Community Member

The residents of St. James Town benefited enormously from the contribution of weekly food baskets. This was especially true for those who are isolated and particularly vulnerable. Building Roots supplied an array of quality fresh fruit and vegetables. The delivery was a special event in the week that they looked forward to receiving. Building Roots provided valuable access to good food which would not otherwise have been available to us. -"Surabhi, Project Coordinator, Community Matters Toronto"

When we think about 'Essential Services' we often think about grocery stores and medical professionals. There are often the 'forgotten' grassroots agencies and people behind supporting the most vulnerable during unprecedented times. At the beginning of COVID, Building Roots immediately took action, and connected and expanded support to local community" -Sandra, Engagement and Services Coordinator, Fred Victor

DJing this event was so heart-opening and joyful. Thank you for the work you are all doing in this vibrant community"-  
Eirka Williams, Artist

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## MEET OUR TEAM FAMILY

Our dedicated and passionate family at Building Roots, alongside our Community Leaders, Volunteers, Partners, Contributors, and Donors, connected more deeply than ever in 2020. We feel grateful to work alongside such a vibrant and capable community in Moss Park and Downtown Toronto East. We feel inspired and pulled toward evermore creative and collaborative projects moving forward into 2021!



**LISA**  
FOUNDER



**DARCY**  
FOUNDER



**DUSTIN**  
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS



**HANNAH**  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY  
OUTREACH



**TOOBA**  
MOSS PARK MARKET  
MANAGER



**KATE**  
URBAN FARM MANAGER



**CHEYENNE**  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
COORDINATOR



**BAYLEY**  
COMMUNICATIONS  
MANAGER

THANK YOU ALSO TO **DANIELLE**, OUR SUMMER ANIMATION COORDINATOR, **MARIEL**, OUR CREATIVE COORDINATOR, **UBAH**, OUR MEDIA ASSISTANT, AND **RUCHIKA**, OUR ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, FOR SUPPORTING OUR MISSION IN 2020!

## Thank you from all of us at Building Roots

This year was both challenging and beautiful, and we are so thankful to everyone who supported us, funded our projects, volunteered, donated, or advocated boldly alongside us in supporting our mission. We're grateful to have coordinated with The City of Toronto, United Way Greater Toronto, and Government of Canada. The profundity of collaboration you've shown to support the communities we work with during these difficult times inspires and enables us. It will continue to hold us and push us forward as we move further into 2021 with love. Thank you for connecting more deeply with us during 2020. It made **ALL** the impact.

Follow us @BuildingRootsTO on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) to stay connected and go to [www.buildingroots.ca](http://www.buildingroots.ca) to learn how you can [Get Involved](#).