



# Impact Report

2023



# Table of Contents

Land Acknowledgement	1
Impact at a Glance	2
Message from the Board	3
Moss Park Market	4
Coffee & Conversations	5
Ashbridge Urban Farm	6
Community Engagement	7
Community Leaders Program	10
Staff and Volunteers	11
Financials	12
Our Supporters and Partners	13



# Land Acknowledgement

Inspired by the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Addresses, we aim to embrace the full intention behind land acknowledgements, recognizing all of creation. Our acknowledgement states we are on Treaty 13 land with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, home to the Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, and many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. This land has sustained life for millions of years, providing water, flora, and fauna, teaching us how to live with the seasons.

We express gratitude to the First People of this land and their sacred teachings. We honour the wisdom of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples, whose cultures reflect a deep relationship with "all our relations." We are committed to learning from and celebrating the land-based knowledge of all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.

We pledge to transform our role from ally to accomplice, acknowledging our privileges and using them to challenge colonial and racial injustices. Our commitments include formal learning, fostering informal connections, and collaborating meaningfully with Indigenous organizations and communities.

Building Roots is committed to actions that honour our relationships with Indigenous organizations and communities. Our land acknowledgment will continue to evolve as our commitments deepen. We encourage everyone to join us on this journey of healing the land and our relationships.



# Our Impact at a Glance

**2,300+**

**fresh produce bags**

were distributed monthly to community members at our market

**2,600+**

bags in 2023 were delivered directly to the doors of vulnerable residents who are unable to leave their homes

**22,000 lbs+**  
**of rescued food**

was distributed in partnership with Second Harvest

**500 lbs**

**of apples, pears and**

**other fruit** grown in Toronto homes were donated to the market by Not Far From the Tree

**400+**

**harm reduction kits**

and community care kits were given out by Coffee & Conversations

**600 books**

were shared weekly with community members through a Bookshare program supported by Children's Book Bank

**900 hot meals**

were sourced from local small businesses to distribute, contributing close to \$5000 to the local economy

**48 new volunteers**

joined in 2023, with a total volunteer roster of 112 amazing folks!

**40+ types of plants**

were grown at the Ashbridge Urban Farm, including herbs, edible flowers, greens, vegetables and fruits

**1,000+ volunteer hours**

were dedicated to growing produce for the Moss Park Market at the Ashbridge Urban Farm

"A commitment from the Urban Farm at TMU is to ensure the food grown on the rooftop farms is shared with as many people in the community as possible, by donating no less than 1/3 of weekly harvests. This goal wouldn't be achieved without the dedication and hard work of the amazing team at Building Roots, who we have collaborated with for more than 4 years now. We know that once the produce leaves the rooftop farms, that the Building Roots team will honour that harvest through their inspiring community programming and positive impact they have on local residents."

- Jess, Urban Farm Manager,  
Toronto Metropolitan University

"The impact of Building Roots extends beyond the provision of essential resources; it is a catalyst for positive change. The nourishment provided to the community by The Building Roots has left an indelible mark on countless lives, creating a bridge to vital services like counseling and Harm Reduction supplies. [..]"

- Equitable Action for Change



**2023**



# Message from our Executive Director & Board Chair



2023 marked another record year for Building Roots, with an unprecedented number of participants in our services and programs. The continued growing attendance at our market highlights the deepening food security crisis. Rising costs of fresh produce have made it increasingly inaccessible for many, and have also strained our resources as food costs climbed.

Despite these challenges, 2023 was also a year with wonderful connections in many ways. There was an incredible outpouring of support from the community, with a record number of volunteers contributing their time and resources. As a small grassroots organization, we deeply appreciate the invaluable contributions of our volunteers. We also enjoyed many community events from a mending fair, to summertime live music, to hosting listening circles and much more.

It's a privilege for us to be part of such a vibrant, connected community. We are continually grateful for our wonderful staff who work tirelessly and passionately for the community, and for our volunteer Board, which supported many initiatives throughout the year including drafting a new strategic plan.

Times continue to challenge us with rising needs and costs, but we are very thankful to everyone who supports us. In 2024, the new 3-year strategic plan will be released, we are building a new community garden in Moss Park, and many more community connections will be made.

Our deepest gratitude to everyone who helped make a challenging 2023 also fun and heartwarming.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Caroline Clair".

**Caroline Clair, Executive Director**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Monique Kavanagh".

**Monique Kavanagh, Board Chair**

# Moss Park Market

Our weekly Give-What-You-Can fresh produce market



Our market food program ensures weekly access to fresh produce and staple food items for community members, using a Give-What-You-Can model that promotes choice and dignity without turning anyone away. By the end of 2023, over 25,000 fresh produce bags were distributed to individuals and families. This number includes over 3,000 food bags delivered door-to-door to housebound residents in TCHC buildings nearby and as well as folks in the St. James Town through Community Matters Toronto and Toronto Council Fire. Additionally, Toronto Metropolitan University's rooftop urban farm donated 37 crates, totaling 436 lbs of ecologically grown produce over four months.

Did you know we purchase most of the food we provide? To more closely align our values with our purchasing, in spring 2023 we began to order our food from FoodShare Toronto, a food justice organization advocating for the right to food.

During the Ontario growing season, FoodShare sources from BIPOC-owned or led operations. Our purchases now have a dual value; the produce we provide at our market, and what we pay is invested into FoodShare's diverse programming including community markets, gardens, school programs and much more.

We recognize and acknowledge the diversity of the Moss Park community, so we carried out many meaningful dialogues with market participants to learn about their backgrounds, needs, and food preferences to inform the types of produce we have available at the market to ensure culturally appropriate food offerings are provided. We also made interpreters of Chinese and Arabic languages (the two most commonly spoken by market participants) available during each market day.



# Coffee & Conversations

Community outreach and resource sharing along with complimentary snacks and refreshments

---



Our Coffee & Conversations program continued to provide a welcoming and safe space for community members to connect meaningfully, as well as share resources and support. Each Saturday, next to our bustling Moss Park Market, team members and volunteers listen to the voices of the community to better understand their needs, while serving over 15,000 cold and warm drinks and snacks. In the fall, we started introducing more robust food offerings including handheld meals.

We also connected and purchased from local businesses including Esra's, Meza Group Catering, Moss Park Espresso and Umi's Kitchen to increase access to nutritious and culturally significant meals while supporting local community-building and development.

**Looking Forward:** In 2024, we plan to expand our immediate food offerings. Nutritious handheld meals and snacks will be provided weekly to support community members who do not have access to a kitchen or cannot cook for themselves, and thus cannot benefit from our fresh produce program.





# Ashbridge Urban Farm

Over seven years our small urban farm has grown and thrived, graciously hosted by the Ontario Heritage Trust at the Ashbridge Estate. We set up a table of our produce to share at the Moss Park market throughout the growing season, enjoying dynamic conversations about gardening and food with local residents.

We operate a tiny orchard including such pollinator delights as red currants, rhubarb and beebalm. Our herb garden includes thymes, sages, lavenders and many more. Six raised beds are given to perennial greens and in the main vegetable beds we grow produce including tomatoes, swiss chard, okra and callaloo. We add edible flowers like marigold and calendula wherever possible as well.

Last year more than 1000 volunteer hours contributed to the project of growing produce for Moss Park, growing our skills, and growing in the community. We also added 14 new participants to our robust volunteer group.

We were thankful in 2023 for the heavy lifting done by corporate volunteers from TELUS and, for a second year, from the Gruvi beverage company who joined us three times this season.

We also facilitated a relationship with Not Far From The Tree that delivered 500 pounds of apples and pears to the market. The American Community Garden Association published an [article about the Ashbridge Urban Farm](#).

**Looking forward:** In 2024, we are excited to bring all of our learnings from Ashbridge to create a brand new community garden in Moss Park, just east of our Market. The garden will be up and operating by June 2024.

## What we grew in 2023:

### Herbs

- Beergarten sage, garden sage
- 3 kinds of parsley
- Cilantro
- Dill
- Bronze fennel
- Lemon thyme & garden thyme
- Oregano
- Rue
- Lovage (a celery substitute that is a perennial)
- Sweet cicely
- Sweet woodruff
- Lemon balm
- Catnip
- Beebalm / Bergamot
- Anise hyssop
- Stevia

- Rosemary
- Hops (lovely to flavour salt or sugar)
- Chives & garlic chives
- Perilla

### Vegetables & greens

- Callaloo (a nutritious & favoured green for Caribbean & Mediterranean dishes)
- A variety of hot peppers
- Tomatoes (several kinds)
- Garden sorrel

- Good King Henry
- Beans
- Garlic (4 kinds)
- Garlic scapes
- Broccoli
- Okra
- Cucumbers

### Fruit & edible flowers

- Rhubarb
- Red currants
- Tart cherries
- Elderberry flowers
- Clove pinks
- Chive flowers
- Roses
- Calendula
- Marigolds





# Community Engagement

In addition to our market and food offerings, we prioritize direct community engagement through a holistic, 360°-lens

## Other ways we connected with community members in 2023 include:

Distributed harm reduction kits, female hygiene products, safe sex supplies, Covid test kits, and a variety of community care kits for our unhoused/homeless neighbours



Held a Repair Fair where folks came by to have clothes mended, bikes repaired, jewelry fixed and appliances revived

Shared 480+ weekly resource in areas such as, housing support, health, legal, mental health, and more to enhance information-sharing among community organizations and residents

Hosted a mock voting booth to help residents learn about the voting process in the lead up to the municipal elections



Had a social service student table on market days

*"Being able to do my placement at Building Roots has helped me gain more confidence when helping people of the community! I felt a part of something bigger than myself and I'm forever grateful for my time there. I hope to volunteer in the summer again!"*

- Ocean, Social Service Student



# Community Engagement

## Continued...

In addition many organizations in the neighbourhood took part in tabling with us to share their resources and offer services:

- **Sherbourne Health** had pop-up visits providing cancer screening, diabetes education, mobile vaccinations and health referrals.
- **Charlie's FreeWheels** provided free bicycle check-ups & repairs during the summer months
- **Metrolinx** tabled several times throughout the year to listen to community concerns about the transit work taking place in the area and answer questions
- **Equitable Action for Change** tabled regularly to provide harm reduction supplies and community care kits
- **Moss Park Coalition** visited several times to share with the community about their advocacy work for Moss Park



## Opera Makers



*"Everyone wants an emotional connection,  
Everyone has a gift worth sharing,  
Everyone has a story worth telling,  
Knowing the small things add up to  
Something bigger than us all,  
And we can share it with the world!"*

*- Writer's Block, Opera Makers 2023  
original composition*

We supported Regent Park Youth Enrichment Academy and the Canadian Opera Company on an 8-week program with 25 students aged 11-14, during which the students created and performed their very own original short opera.

The Opera Makers program aims to make opera more accessible to all kinds of communities, offering the opportunity for creative exploration and meaningful learning opportunities that explore every element of the art form. Participants are centered as the ultimate directors of the program, and the facilitators provided support to help them to tell their stories.



# Community Engagement

Continued...

## Summer Saturdays

Each summer, we set up additional ways the community can come together to interact with us and each other.

Local community member, Tracey Lacroix, kindly led weekly children's activities, alongside our BookShare where a steady supply of children's books was made available thanks to our local partners, The Children's Book Bank.



Music for Climate Change ran puppet-making workshops, each week involving different community members in their construction, all leading up to a parade and party of the giant puppets.



We hosted a Queer Wellness Fair where with the help of community partners and our lovely board member Verlia Stephens, information and resources for 2SLGBTQ+ identifying folks was made available, with an extra focus on racialized community members and newcomers who identify as 2SLGBTQ+. This support was offered alongside fun, lovely music and delicious food offerings from the Newcomer Kitchen.



We also co-hosted the 4th Annual Café Caribbean with our long-time collaborator Grace Cameron, founder of the JamaicanEats Magazine. Food vendors representing the diversity of Caribbean cuisine attended, as well as local artists sharing singing and dancing with the community.



# Community Leaders Program

Provides professional development and skill-building opportunities toward their goals while supporting the community

---

In 2023, five Community Leaders took part in community initiatives that included resource-sharing, harm reduction, skill-building and outreach. Community Leaders contributed directly to neighbourhood goals such as increasing social cohesion and local partnership, strengthening our culture of collaboration, and activating the use of public space through community projects and programming.

We formed a partnership with the University of Toronto's Multidisciplinary Urban Capstone Project, which connected us with 5 undergraduate students from different disciplines to work through a creative, iterative, and open-ended design process to create interventions that met our needs of community-building and leadership for community members. They supported the development of the Community Leaders Program, from recruitment through execution.

**Looking forward:** The program is going through a transformation where we will focus on holistic approaches to advance community-building and increase opportunities in the Moss Park neighbourhood. Community Leaders will receive unique training opportunities to better tackle the complex challenges that we are trying to address. Our Community Leaders are focusing on acute areas of community engagement, local collaboration and representation to achieve common community goals amongst residents, small businesses and agencies.





# Staff and Volunteers

## Ongoing investment in our staff and volunteers:

We are committed to a continuous learning environment for our staff and volunteers.

In 2023, we had folks receive training on de-escalation, harm reduction and conflict intervention skills with the Toronto Drop-In Network and the Toronto Hostels Training Centre. The entire team received first aid training, and supported community care through building harm reduction kits alongside local agencies.

Our team engages in continual learning through check-ins and debrief practices that support us in adapting and collaborating through challenges and change.

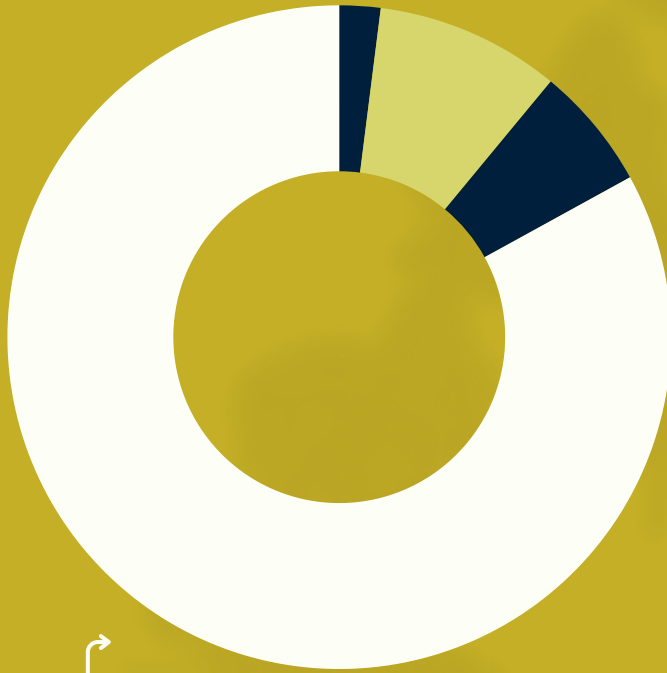


## A big thank you to those who make it happen

Our staff and volunteers radiate kindness, and their efforts throughout 2023 made all our programs possible. We are eternally grateful for all that was possible because of such a wonderful team.



# Financials

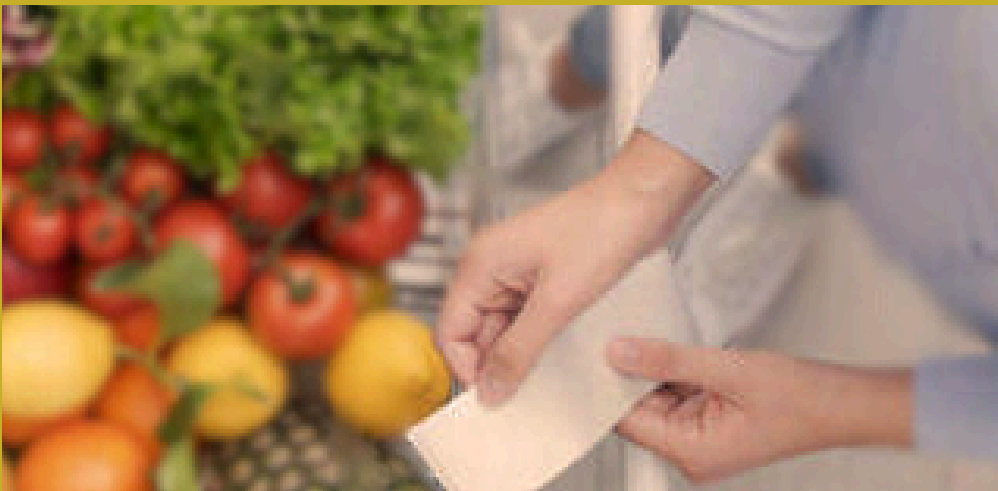


## Total Revenues in 2023: \$746,412

- 83% - Foundations
- 9% - Government Grants
- 6% - Individual Donations
- 2% - Corporate Donations

## Total Expenditures in 2023: \$877,509

- 51% - Moss Park Market
- 16% - Coffee & Conversations
- 14% - Community Programming
- 9% - Urban Agriculture
- 9% - Marketing, Communications & Admin





# Our Supporters and Partners

Our work would not be possible without the steadfast support of our community of funders, partners, local businesses, and a team of dedicated volunteers. Our deepest gratitude goes to them.

## the SPROTT FOUNDATION

They have been generously supporting our work annually since 2020 and are dedicated to addressing homelessness and hunger in Canada by supporting initiatives that enable self-sufficiency and dignity for those in need.

## BALSAM FOUNDATION

The Balsam Foundation enables and galvanizes the well-being and potential of communities, committing to a future where all Canadians benefit from a high standard of health and well-being. They have been our annual supporter since 2022.

## P&L Odette Charitable Foundation

The P&L Odette Charitable Foundation is an immensely important contributor to our ability to run our programs and services. Its multi-year commitment to the Moss Park community is vital for our continued stability.

### Donors

The Peter Gilgan Foundation, The J.P. Bickell Foundation, Mackenzie Investment, The Elephant Shoes Foundation, The Andre Rheame & Robert Fitzhenry Family Foundation, Jewish Foundation of Greater Toronto. Ozery Bakery

**33 Monthly Donors and numerous individual donors**

### Local Business Partners

Moss Park Espresso, Esra's Market, Meza Catering, Above Food Brands, Primetime Paper & Paint, Patagonia Toronto, Lowes Toronto Danforth, Home Depot Toronto Gerrard Square

### Community Partners

The Big Carrot, Charlie's FreeWheels, Canadian Opera Company, Community Fridges TO, Community Matters Toronto, Equitable Action for Change, Endeavour Consulting, FoodShare TO, Club Sandwich, Johnson Family Bakery, Brick Street Bakery, Market City TO, Moss Park Coalition, Metrolinx, Music for Climate Justice, Ontario Heritage Trust, Period Purse, Rooster Post Production, Second Harvest, Sherbourne Health, Sojourn House, Story Planet, The Children's Book Bank, TMU Urban Farm, Toronto Community Housing, Toronto Public Library - Parliament Street Branch, YEA! Youth Enrichment Academy

**And of course our incredible team of volunteers!**