

Welcome to Unison eVoice, a monthly bulletin that profiles programs and partners at Unison.

Program Profile **Community Gardens**



Staff Lead: Hannah Bontogon, Community Engagement Worker, Action for Neighbourhood Change Project

Hannah has experience in different areas of health promotion and community development. After her studies in Food and Nutrition, she worked for the Canadian Diabetes Association for some time before travelling abroad to East Africa where she did HIV/AIDS work. She returned to Toronto in 2008 and has since worked with Unison, Bathurst-Finch site. She coordinates *Action for Neighbourhood Change* - a community development project working with residents and groups in capacity building and implementing local projects. She has also led and supported food projects including two community gardens, and a Good Food Market.

Starting a community garden

A community garden is a shared space for community members to grow produce together. It is a wonderful way to connect individuals, reduce isolation, and build a strong vibrant community. Other benefits include: proven links to improving access to food and better nutrition; increase in physical activity; improvement in mental health, and according to a 2007 U of T study, decreased crime as community gardens have shown to improve security and safety in local communities (Wakefield et al, 2007).

According to Hannah, successful community gardens are dependent on strong community process and resident leadership. The process involves working with volunteer coordinators to do outreach, establish a steering committee, and organize a community consultation meeting. Residents of the surrounding area of the proposed site are notified of the meeting to voice their support and express any concerns they may have.

Once the community has given their approval, landscape architects start working on the garden's design and layout with the input from community members. With final approval from the City Councillor, and support from the City of Toronto Community Gardens Coordinator, and Parks, Forestry and Recreation Manager, an order for a dig-in is then arranged. In some cases, the City can also provide minimal resources, such as fencing, water access, or a tool shed.

Through *Action for Neighbourhood Change* and the *Food Action Team*, Unison has supported the development of two community gardens in Bathurst-Finch. The Rockford Park garden has 25 gardeners registered for plots. A second site near the Antibes Community Centre is now being explored to accommodate the growing interest. The Bathurst-Finch Community Hub will have its own garden that will be in bloom by next spring.

For more information, contact Hannah Bontogon at hannah.bontogon@unisonhcs.org or 647-436-0385.



Rockford Park Community Garden Group

Unison also supports the organic community garden in the Woolner/Jane area. For more information and to register, please contact Carmen Miloslavich at 416-828-9561.

Community Partner Profile

North York Harvest Food Bank

Food bank programs servicing Unison's catchment

Food bank programs provide a three-day supply of staple food items to households that require one-time or ongoing food assistance. It is important to confirm opening hours and address requirements before visiting a program. **To locate a program by address, please visit www.northyorkharvest.com and follow the "Find A Food Program" link to use an interactive map or call NYH directly at 416-635-7771.**

Community Action Resource Centre

416-652-2273

Lansing Food Bank

416-221-1722

Mount Zion Adventist Community Centre

647-688-6558

Patterson Food Bank

416-654-8072

Prayer Palace Food Bank

416-241-1100

St. Vincent de Paul, St. Thomas Aquinas Food Bank

416-782-8943 ext. 4

Toronto Adventist Food Bank

416-780-1697

Weston Area Emergency Support

416-247-3737

York Memorial Food Bank

416-653-7756

The North York Harvest Food Bank (NYH) is one of the largest food banks in Toronto, distributing 1.6 million pounds of food annually to a network of 60 community programs. This includes neighbourhood food banks as well as community kitchens, perinatal programs for expecting mothers and new parents, shelters for women and youth, and drop-in meal programs.

In working towards a vision of "a community where all members are able to meet their food needs," NYH is exploring new ways of addressing hunger and poverty issues in northern Toronto. NYH's relationships with its partners, including Unison, are an important part of this strategy. Presently, NYH delivers food for five programs operating at Unison sites. In addition to delivering food, NYH also supports community garden activities, coordinates trips to local pick-your-own farms and runs educational workshops for school groups.

NYH is also active around interagency coordinating tables in the Lawrence Heights and Bathurst-Finch neighbourhoods and contributes to committee work in both of them. It is also playing a lead role in articulating a vision for "food-friendly neighbourhoods." For example, in Lawrence Heights, NYH is investigating the feasibility of a Food and Distribution Hub as part of the neighbourhood's revitalization. In Bathurst-Finch, it is working closely with Unison to develop a coordinated approach to food programming at the forthcoming Community Hub.

For more information about North York Harvest, please visit www.northyorkharvest.com.



NYH supports Community Kitchen in Bathurst-Finch