

Building a Collaborative Rhythm Together

Rexdale Community Hub 2019-2020









As we marked the 7th anniversary of the Rexdale Community Hub (RCH), we continued to recognize that building a collaborative rhythm takes time, commitment, and engagement from all levels of the partner organizations.

I am pleased to share that 2019 was another remarkable year to compose this collaborative rhythm where together we: focused on developing a Hub-Wide Communication Strategy to share our collaborative stories though a video, signage, and newsletter; created a Collaborative Youth Makerspace to provide equipment, tools, and space in an engaging environment to foster collaboration for creative endeavors, hands-on learning, rapid prototyping, and innovation for youth aged 12-24; and we started conversations around developing a Collaborative Data Strategy to better achieve our mission, through improved data sharing, data collaboration, and data usage.

Also, during the year our STEM Club continued inspiring and empowering the next generation of STEM leaders through field trips, camps and "STEM Nights"; and our Collaborative Afterschool Food Program offered nutritional meals to local children and youth on an ongoing basis.

In reaching out to the wider community through our Northwest Toronto Neighbourhood Infrastructure Engagement Initiative, we were able to engage residents and diverse stakeholders. Together we began co-designing a space-based model that visualizes both local land developments and design solutions for the transformation of the physical environment and local infrastructure, with a view to improving the liveability of our communities.

Our welcoming Hub space and services attracted 202,403 community member visits. Inside this report, you will find some of our collaborative stories and our most cherished memories of 2019.

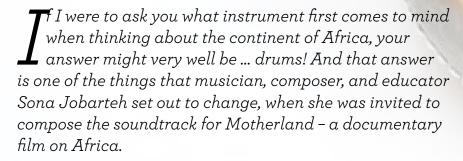
While we are reflecting back on the year, I would like to express my deepest respect and gratitude to our RCH and partner agencies staff and volunteers for their unwavering dedication to our community during the COVID-19 Pandemic. They demonstrated leadership, resilience, and compassion while working together to ensure that all members of our community are well protected and connected to essential services. It is a remarkable story of our collaborative work in the community!

Finally, our collaborative rhythm throughout the year marks the pulse and life, work and commitment of so many dedicated people. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the Hub Board of Directors, led by Safia Ahmed, for their experience, guidance, and compassion to move our Hub forward! Also, I sincerely express my gratitude to our RCH staff for their dedication and commitment to excellence. You are our true heroes; I greatly admire your personal integrity, strong work ethics, and looking out for the community during these challenging times. And a special thank you to our Hub partners, community partners, funders, and volunteers for your continued support and in maneuvering us through these tough times by strengthening our partnerships and collaborations. We at the Rexdale Community Hub are well prepared to play the rhythm of building resilient communities, and imagining a future for our families, that is brighter than ever!

Amra Munawar *Hub Director*

Collaboration: A Sound That Resonates

By Russ Mitchell



Sona grew up in London and was born into a Gambian West African Griot family. Griots are traditionally musicians and Kora players (Kora is an African harp-like stringed instrument), and Griots have a centuries long tradition of passing on their musical skill from father to sons. Only Sona is female ... and the first in her family to break with tradition!

As a very young child Sona began playing the Kora. By the time she went to university she was studying classical piano, cello, and orchestration. But she never lost her love for the Kora. Eventually, she came to a certain point where she didn't connect anymore with



Sona Jobarteh in concert

[classical] music. She said, "I wanted to feel fulfilled musically again and the only place I could find it was [back] at the beginning ...

I came back to the Kora." Not surprising then when she came to compose the Motherland score, she did so without reliance on western string instruments. She even invented a new stringed instrument called the Nkoni – a cross between a Kora (a 21 stringed harp) and a Donso Ngoni (a 6 string 'hunter's harp') producing a sound that is both distinct and different (just like the 150+ varieties of harps found across African).

Similarly, the Rexdale Community Hub is producing our own unique sound for our communities within the wide variety of cultures, languages, and peoples found in the north-west corner of Toronto. Over the course of this year, our 'sound' has been one that has been both diverse and inclusive; acknowledges collaborative preferences and contributions; enhances shared processes and practices; and one that strengthens the sense of connectivity and ownership among Hub users and partners. Like a skilled Kora player this has taken a lot of 'strings' being played together, but it has resulted in some impactful collaborative compositions focused on...

- 1. Finding our Rhythm. It's like when Sona was working on her new album. She didn't rush it. It was more important to try and consider everything she'd received concerning the Kora and bringing it all together in a new creation, and, a new sound. Likewise, to scale our work at the Hub has meant taking the time needed for richer conversations with community members and Hub partners, resulting in a fresh sound and clearer rhythm about who we are, and what steps help to strengthen our mission. In practise this year it looked like ...
 - Hub partners providing in-kind contributions of volunteer staff to improve delivery and ownership of 4 quarterly TOGETHER events
 - Introducing a simple shared template process for communicating Hub agency Open Houses, and in doing so deepening relationships and improving networking among partners
 - Supporting local food vendors where we could, such as sitting down with a local butcher/restaurant owner who has a passion to serve the Hub community, and together creating a 'new taste' for our Canada Day Celebration
 - Or recognizing and acknowledging the added value a local balloon artist/face painter brings to community events, by including her helpers – local Rexdale youth – who were being trained in button making, face painting and other similar activities
- 2. Knowing who it takes to make 'music'. It took more than simply learning a technique for Sona to play Griot music (which is based on an oral tradition). She also needed to learn and understand the meaning and history of the songs ... all of which took time and happened through her interaction with family members and other stakeholders committed to her success. In a similar fashion, this year's success at the Rexdale Hub did not happen by chance. For we too enlisted the contribution of others to support our culture of collaboration. For example ...











- We worked with a local artist to support our Collaborative Art
 Circle. Together we developed outdoor signage and indoor
 wayfinding markers, in order to provide better information about
 what services are offered at the Hub, and how to find one's way
 around the Hub when visiting. In addition, local artists and designers colourfully decorated our new Youth Makerspace space
- Through our Summer Food Collaborative we were able to partner as a Hub (through the support of the Rexdale Community Health Centre) with Summer Lunch+ who prepared food for all the Hub's summer programs
- Summer saw a partnership with Parks People where we shared an Etobicoke Summer Parks Coordinator. This work allowed us to support current and new park programming in Rexdale, see the beginnings of a "Rexdale Park Guide", and have someone on-site at the Hub weekly to provide information and advice to residents and agencies about local parks and green spaces
- Local youth who are part of our STEM club were able to draw upon outside stakeholders with their Summer of Innovation 2019. PageDuty Inc, Google Canada, and the University of Toronto were 3 of the purposeful destinations for the Hub's collaborative youth trips and tours for shaping the future of our youth in Rexdale

- Instead of individual "Back to School Events', residents and members of the Panorama Garden Group took the lead and, with the support of Hub partners, distributed backpacks and school supplies at an end-of-the-summer event
- 3. Being committed to 'those instruments' that will improve people's lives in our community. Sona Jobarteh was originally inspired to preserve the history, music and culture of the kora for young people in Gambia. In her early 30s, she took her concept to a whole new level, establishing The Gambia Academy of Music and Culture. The 'much younger' Rexdale Hub has also in this year been asking a "what's next?' question. How do we take our culture of collaboration to a new level? The answer in part has resulted the beginning of several long-term initiatives taking shape. Below are several of our 'instruments' that we've taken up ...
 - Our *Hub-Wide Communication Strategy* will encompass both a protocol and tools based on our internal and external communication priorities. This year we launched our Hub Story video part of our new RCH website. Newly created with the idea that the Hub can be a place for realizing one's dreams, the Hub Story video is connecting the lives of Hub partners, residents, and other stakeholders collaboratively, and is at the same time strengthening individual identities, capturing resident interests,

This year we've been able to make an impactful sound, thanks to the nearly 6,000 Hub and community partners and friends, funders, and visitors who have taken up the Hub as their 'instrument' – contributing to or participated in over 36 collaborative Hub initiatives throughout the year. Yes, together we are helping to fulfill the mission of 'enriching every aspect of our community's life'!



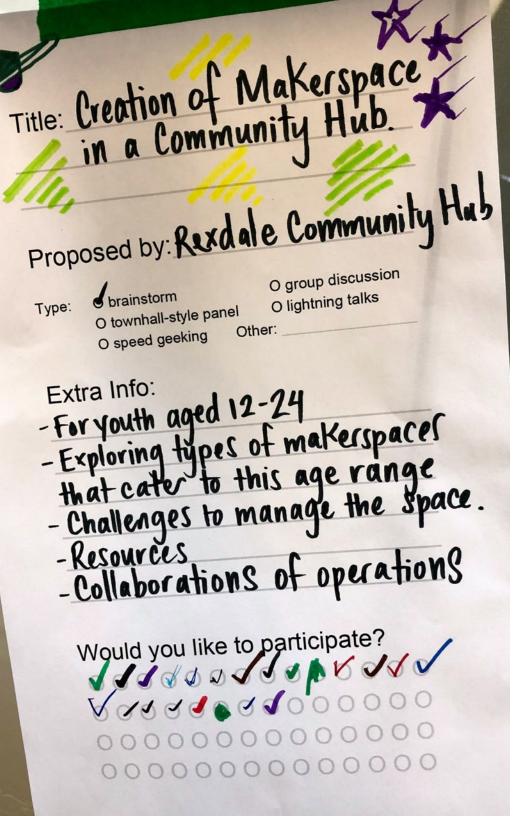
and creating a sense of belonging. The Hub Story has come about through the participation of Hub community members - seniors, youth and children of mixed age and culture – and has strengthened the connection to the numerous stories of the 500-700 individuals that come through our doors each day.

- Our new Collaborative Youth Makerspace a creativity-based multi-program makerspace for youth aged 12-24 years – will provide youth and organizations with space and equipment to enhance opportunities for creative expression. The Collaborative Youth Makerspace Agreement establishes a way for delivering collaborative youth programming, beginning with the 6 Hub partners assuming responsibilities and roles in connection with youth coordinators collaboration and the management of the youth collaborative space.
- And finally, a Collaborative Data Strategy: One of the goals
 emerging from our Change Labs has focused on how to better
 achieve the Hub mission through improved data sharing,
 data collaboration and data usage (i.e. metrics analytics).
 Subsequently, a working group of internal and external partners
 including residents, has been established to consider how as
 a collaboration we might over time implement a more formal
 and comprehensive data sharing strategy. The idea is to bring

together stakeholders on how to use both "data for action" and "data for impact". In doing so we hope to understand the impact we are making in the community as a result of collaboratively working within a shared space, but also to establish that our interventions lead to lasting change. In addition, it is hoped that through our collaborative data strategy we can demonstrate it as one of the key components for stability in Hub operations, and a prototype for other Ontario hubs.

For over seven centuries, certain Griot families like Sona's have taken care of the music for their society's royal courts. Of course, Griot families today have both a new audience and a new sound. But what hasn't changed, is both the need to be a good player, and to pass it on to the next generation. The Rexdale Hub family also seeks to be a good player in the community. This year we've been able to make an impactful sound thanks to the nearly 6,000 Hub and community partners and friends, funders, and visitors who have taken up the Hub as their 'instrument' – contributing to or participated in over 36 collaborative Hub initiatives throughout the year. Yes, together we are helping to fulfill the mission of 'enriching every aspect of our community's life'!





My exciting first year with RCH STEM

By Shriranga Raje

On a late summer evening five years ago, as my flight landed on Canadian soil glowing with tiny coloured lights on the runway, I was totally engrossed looking out of the plane window at this new land and the possibilities it held in store for me.

Like any young person, I was amused with everything that came my way as I settled into my new environment, but at the same time there was a sense of loneliness. A Saturday afternoon in February 2019 became a turning point to ending that sense when I visited the Rexdale Community Hub with my parents for a big community event.

I joined the RCH STEM Club during that visit and my story as a member of this club has unfolded with discovering the awe-inspiring and unbelievable mysteries of STEM throughout the year, starting with the amazing March Break Camp.

On the first day of **March Break Camp**, two school buses carrying 68 Youths from STEM Club arrived at Sidewalk Labs Toronto's state-of-the-art facility at 307 Lake Shore Boulevard East, Toronto.

The ride to downtown (first ever for me) was full of excitement and thrill. It was a trip I had never experienced before and I made friends with many of the youth on the trip.

Maximum City conducted the half-day "Urban Innovation Lab Workshop". Divided into two modules, the workshop focused on a unique *Inquiry Walk*, brainstorming ideas in real time on future innovation and urban design and the *Design Challenge* – putting these ideas to help shape the future face of Toronto onto paper.

We were inspired by how design and jobs that innovate function. Creating a new idea or becoming an innovator takes a lot of hard work and determination! But with technology, a new idea/invention can come very easily to life! We learned about how we need to think of ideas that include saving space (apparently we waste a lot of it) and using it more wisely.

We concluded the March Break with a third module conducted at the Hub a few days later. I happily shared the highlights of my STEM Club outing with my classmates and family afterwards.

Based on this great experience, I was excited to receive an invite from the STEM Club to learn about the **Geographical Information**System (GIS) at a STEM night held by Prof. Michael Widener of University of Toronto. Part of the evening included a chance for us to make our own customized subway lines! The facilitator provided handouts containing instructions on how to select the map of Toronto and put additional stuff to emphasize it even more and the steps on how we could draw our ideal subway line. This specific activity challenged our understanding in following instructions. Fortunately, we finished the task well!







Then in June, there was an event that I could not wait to get into! The "Repair Cafe STEM Workshop".

Broken items - what should we do with them? Toss them in the garbage? It seems to be the only appropriate and logical next step. Right?

Maybe not! Sometimes they can be repaired and at the Repair Cafe STEM workshop we learned how to fix many broken items. Overall, I had a great experience. I got to learn the basics of troubleshooting and got tips on how to work through similar problems in the future. This opportunity provided my problem-solving skills with the boost they needed. I was fascinated by the entire process, despite my item being beyond repair. I would like to thank our wonderful presenter, Paul Magder, for his dedication and enthusiasm that evening.

The summer brought even more excitement to my life with the RCH Summer of Innovation Camp 2019 involving three major trips during July and August 2019. The first field trip on July 26, 2019 was to Pager Duty Inc. with 45 students at their downtown Toronto premises. We learned about PagerDuty's business, geography, talent, types of departments and jobs that exist at the Toronto office and globally. Volunteers shared their work experience and gave advice to youth interested in a career in technology.

A testimonial was written on the way back home by "Shivang":

"Going to PagerDuty was eye-opening. I got to experience the work environment many professionals in the STEM industry get to work in. I also got to meet many senior professionals such as managers and directors who gave great advice on how to increase my knowledge in the tech industry and learned about programming and computer science. I'm grateful to the Rexdale Community Hub STEM Club for this amazing opportunity."

The second trip was my "dream trip" on August 13, 2019 to Google Canada Headquarters, Kitchener with 33 other students and 8 supervisors. We got to learn some basic coding exercises with Google engineers and our group really enjoyed touring the facility and the vast services Google offered. Most of the youth had the best time of their lives and many decided instantly to make Google as their career goal.

I remember how people expressed their testimonials to the STEM Club, including:

"I like how we were programming and making games. I learned about how Google helps people around the world and the things they are currently working on..." - Stephanie

The summer camp's third and final field trip was to the University of Toronto (UoT) on August 15, where 22 youth learned how to make customized geographical maps, how to use Google maps efficiently and effectively, and statistically analyse map usage by users in real-time in the workshop laboratory. And that was just the morning!

Post-lunch, we took a tour of various UoT departments and then ended with two interactive information sessions from Engineering and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences respectively, covering career choices available for youth at the University.

The Summer of Innovation 2019 was a real kaleidoscope for me and brought some great memories to share for discussion when school started up in September.

The thrill of STEM continued when I joined a group of 20 or so youth on the "Rexdale Mission to Mars" for two consecutive weeks in December. I got the opportunity to see a very interesting presentation Professor Paul Delaney of York University about the planet Mars.

250 Youth Participated In STEM Club

We learned about this red rocky planet, the Rover mission and the likelihood of future human habitat. We learned that Mars is covered in rust and that in 1965 humankind finally made contact with Mars.

We were given the challenge to make small projects and make a brief presentation on some of the aspects of the possibility of life on the planet, including establishing human colonies, farming and harvesting produce on the Martian surface. Our group presented about transportation and establishing housing on Mars. The Professor kindly gave space-related gifts and souvenirs and extended a warm invitation to the group to join his team to gaze at the evening sky in January through a powerful telescope at the University.

I would like to profusely thank the Rexdale STEM Club team for this year-long engagement with informative presentations and educational trips as well as for piquing the interest of our youth.

As for me, I have received a deep sense of fulfillment for being part of such an enriching experience. Above all, I thank our numerous sponsors, the United Way Greater Toronto, and of course, our very own Hub director, Amra Munawar whom I consistently met at all the STEM events.











Building Our Neighbourhood's Rhythm

By Warda Sharmeen

This past year, we worked with the North Etobicoke Resident Council (NERC) and Panorama Community Garden Group, as they continued to showcase their leadership in the community.

With the Neighbourhood Grants from the City of Toronto, the NERC and Panorama Community Garden Group planned their second "Back to School Event" at the Hub. Over 600 community members dropped by for the celebrations, hosted by former resident of Rexdale – Rapper 7even 2wenty 8ight. Together we enjoyed delicious food and distributed 1200 backpacks and school supplies for our community's future leaders.

The rhythm of the neighbourhood's cheerfulness and appreciation continued well into the autumn of 2019, with Panorama Community Garden Group's "Fall Harvest Gathering Event" in October. Together we celebrated another successful year of the Garden, with a Volunteer Appreciation Ceremony followed by a delicious and hearty dinner at the Hub – the perfect way to honour the hard work our volunteers and the Panorama Community Garden Group continue to put in.



This year, the **Neighbourhood Engagement Initiative** began the orchestra of the Our Strong Neigbourhood, funded by United Way of Greater Toronto, by working together to find design solutions for the physical environment of our neighbourhood.

The public places in Rexdale are the ones that we encounter in our daily lives. No matter how old or new, big or small – these are the places we come to build relationships, hold community events, and share laughs with our friends and family. By identifying what we love about these places and where they hold opportunities for improvement, we contribute to a healthy neighbourhood, a healthy society, and healthy people.

We began this orchestra by forming a Place-based Neighbourhood Infrastructure Committee (PBNIC) – a group of community leaders and stakeholders, each playing an important instrument in the symphony of the PBNIC that oversees this project.

We started by showcasing the revitalizations made to our neighbourhood's infrastructure in the past – celebrating the successes and impact of these changes and started conversations about the struggles of making these changes. Together we learned about a collective desire to engage our communities in programming that brings them together, and better access to parks and greenspaces.

We continued this journey with resident Community Animators to map the places in our neighbourhood that mean a lot to the community – where they go shopping, to spend time with their families, or even places that are not used by anyone at the moment. Every place in our neighbourhood counts, and they hold thousands of unique stories. Together we continue to learn how the characteristics of these places can help shape our stories.

We worked with PBNIC and NERC to brainstorm what features of each place means the most to them. The places in our neighbourhood play a role in our wellbeing when they are in rhythm with our communities. But when they aren't – we brainstorm ideas and work together to bring them back into harmony with our communities and values.

Community design workshops gave us an opportunity to pinpoint the areas we love and visit on a map, and brainstorm design opportunities for reimagining these places. Resident leaders of the NERC shared their expertise of the neighbourhood in the workshops and helped us with event planning and outreach.

"Art is how you decorate space, music is how you decorate time." - Jean-Michel Basquiat.

In the same way that the individual strings of a harp when played together provide the perfect rhythm, the work done in the past year has helped us learn so much about neighbourhood infrastructure and what about the places in our neighbourhoods hold the most value to us. In the next year we will be working with residents and design experts to co-design a model of this neighbourhood.

If you want to go fast, do it yourself, if you want to go far, do it with everyone else. - African Proverb

We have quite a way to go, but we have the right instruments in this orchestra and we are all set to flow into the rhythm!













"Food is music to the body, music is food to the heart"

- Gregory David Roberts

I conjoyed the food,

I would like to
eat it again.



12,184

healthy meals served to children and youth



Hi

I really want to Thanks the Snack Program for providing all the families with all the food groups and nutriants at 21 Panorama Cit. We go to Delta Family Early ON centre at 21 Panorama Cit. and got to eat the healthy food on Tuesday mornings through Snack program. We really appriciate this snack program as my Child starts trying all the different food groups. And as a mother we are learning new recipes to cook the food.

Thanks

Our 2019-2020 Journey to Collaborative Impact

Over the course of this year, our 'sound' has been one that strengthens the sense of connectivity and ownership among Hub users and partners. Like a skilled Kora player this has taken a lot of 'strings' being played together, but it has resulted in some impactful collaborative compositions.







We at Rexdale Community Hub are privileged to work with our Hub partners and a wide range of dedicated caring staff and volunteers to offer much-needed services and programs to our communities in North Etobicoke.

This has been a very busy and productive year for us; our main objective for this year was to foster collaborations and the long-term sustainability of our work around the mission and vision. In the spring we were planning to start our strategic visioning process for the next five years; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we changed our plans and focused on supporting our communities during the pandemic. Suffice it to say that I am proud of what we have collectively accomplished and acknowledge the immense work that has been involved over the years to carry out our collective vision and mission.

I would like to thank our Board of Directors, partners, funders, Hub staff, volunteers and community members for the important role you play; ensuring that Rexdale Community Hub remains dynamic, community-driven, sustainable, and firmly focused on creating a healthy and sustainable community where residents are empowered and engaged. This is the hope of our community and the goal of our collaborative work. The Board extends our deepest appreciation to Hub Director, Amra Munawar for her incredible leadership, compassion, dedication, and professionalism in making our Hub a tremendous success.

The world is seeing an unprecedented crisis in 2020; it is my hope that our collaborative work at the Hub will continue providing essential support to our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will emerge from this crisis stronger and resilient as a community!

Safia Ahmed *Chairperson*

Our Hub Partners, Board and Staff Members, Funders and Community Supporters



Our Present Hub Partners

Albion Neighbourhood Services
Delta Family Resource Centre
Rexdale Community Health Centre
Rexdale Community Legal Clinic
Rexdale Employment Services
Rexdale Women's Centre

Our Present Board Members

Abraham Abbey 2014-Present
Desree Prince 2014-Present
Fatima Filippi 2013-Present
Safia Ahmed 2013-Present
Shermeen Farooqi 2019 - Present
Yodit Edemariam 2019 - Present

Our Funders

City of Toronto United Way Greater Toronto

Our Supporters

Afghan Kebob Cuisine

Al-Meezan Grocery and Halal Meat Al-Meezan Spicy Grill Ali Baba's Middle Eastern Cuisine **BMO** Financial Group **Bird Studies** Department of Geography and Planning, University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto FORTINOS, Queens Plate Google Kitchener, Waterloo IBM Canada Ltd. Home Depot Branch #7114 Maximum City Mushkaki Restaurants Inc. ONE Toronto GAMING Parks Canada Park People

PepsiCo Canada
Repair Café Toronto
Royal Astronomical Society of Canada
Royal Bank
Ryerson University (Department of
Geography and Environmental Studies)
Sheriff's No Frills
Sidewalk Labs Toronto
Sprout Community
Subway #11321
The Salvation Army (Etobicoke Temple)
The STEPS Initiative
Toronto Community Benefits Network
Toronto and Region Conservation
Authority (TRCA)

Physics and Astronomy, York University

Our Present Team Members

Aiman Malhi
Amra Munawar
Bright Bilson
Harry Persaud
Hassan Bokhari
Kavielle Blake
Kizzy Price
Russell Mitchell
Samson Ayeleso
Shriranga Raje
Thelma Adelekun
Vicki Crystal
Warda Sharmeen

Mural Credits

The Art of Wong Inc.





Serving the Community is Our Business

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Our Mission

Rexdale Community Hub's mission is to provide accessible, welcoming space with collaborative, integrated services and programs to enrich every aspect of the community's life.

Our Vision

A healthy and sustainable community where residents are empowered and engaged.

Our Values

Accessibility – We are committed to ensuring that access to appropriate and acceptable services and resources within the Hub is promoted and ensure that inequities in health and well-being are addressed.

Accountability – We are accountable to the community for the actions and services of the Hub. We will ensure program and services reflect identified community needs, integrate community resources and as partners, we will effectively dedicate our collective resources to this end.

Community Engagement – We are committed to provide stakeholders in the community opportunities to participate in decision-making through processes designed to identify, understand, and address community needs on an ongoing basis.

Diversity – We are committed to inclusion and value and respect the differences found in our community. We demonstrate this understanding through sensitivity, culturally competent and inclusive practices and policies that include individuals from diverse groups in our decision making, information sharing, access to services, governance and employment.

Equity – We are committed to ensuring that all people reach their full potential and are not disadvantaged from attaining it because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, social class, socio-economic status, or other socially determined circumstance.

Excellence – We strive to provide the best and most appropriate programs and services to the community. We listen carefully to the needs of the community, seek the resources to respond to these needs, and implement programs and services with the highest standards.

Sustainability – We will measure, improve, and be accountable for our environmental, financial, social, health and well-being results.