

My Hub, My Community

Our Year in
Flight

Rexdale
Community
Hub

2024-2025





**2024-2025
Total Hub
Visits:
207,496**

Executive Director's Message (2024-2025)

As a child, I was always fascinated by flying objects.

Once a week, on our small television (some of you may remember those turtle-back screens), we would watch fairy tales filled with flying carpets and magical characters soaring over towns. I loved seeing the world from above, imagining what it would feel like to float over my neighbourhood and connect with people, fields, playgrounds, and markets from the sky. I often wished for wings or dreamt of tying countless balloons together to lift me into the clouds. When I first learned about hot air balloons, I was speechless. In my imagination, I built one and soared above my small town, feeling the endless sky and fresh breeze on my face.

That sense of wonder has stayed with me. Today, I see Rexdale Community Hub as that balloon, not a static place, but a living, breathing vessel that carries the dreams, stories, and hopes of our community. Every initiative is a flight of its own, rising with the energy of residents, partners, our dedicated staff and volunteers. Together, these flights create a breathtaking journey, one where every action lifts us higher.

Our Year in Flight: Every Action Lifts Us Higher

This year, the Hub recorded **207,496 visits**, a remarkable testament to the trust and connection it has with the community. Of these, **89,733 were community space visits** for programs hosted by Hub partners, grassroots organizations, community groups, and residents, while **117,763 visits** were for services and programs provided directly by the Hub and its partner organizations. In addition, the Hub facilitated over **7,000 space bookings**, strengthening our role as a backbone organization for seven Hub partners and more than fifty community groups and organizations. These numbers represent much more than traffic; they are families finding support, youth discovering talents, and neighbours coming together. Each initiative became its own balloon, lifting the community into new heights.

Civic Engagement, Events, and Truth and Reconciliation

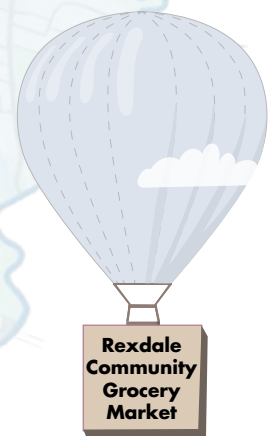
The Hub also continued to soar as a centre for culture and civic life. We hosted **nine intergenerational events, attended by over 7,000 residents**, celebrating Black History Month, International Women's Day, Asian Heritage Month, and more. These events were not just gatherings; they were flights of identity, joy, and deeper connection.

Collaboration was central. **Over sixty local organizations, entrepreneurs, and businesses** showcased their talents at these events, while a team of **more than 250 volunteers** supported logistics, knowledge sharing, and resident outreach. Our food program also continued to support young people, with **10,700 meals served to youth through Makerspace programs**.

In partnership with Elections Ontario, we connected voter education with cultural celebrations, helping residents engage with democracy in meaningful ways. We also advanced our Truth and Reconciliation journey, with staff and partners joining "Lunch and Learn" sessions on allyship and unconscious bias. These conversations went beyond symbolic gestures; they represented a sustained commitment to integrating reconciliation and equity into the Hub's daily operations.

Food Security: Launching the Rexdale Community Grocery Market

The most visible balloon this year was the launch of the **Rexdale Community Grocery Market (RCGM)**. After years of feasibility studies, prototypes, and resident consultations, we finally saw this vision lift off.





In its first year, the market served **over 6,000 local community members** with access to fresh produce at an affordable price. Beyond the direct impact of fresh fruits and vegetables, the market became a site of capacity building, where **over ten community members were trained in retail and customer service skills**, gaining practical experience that strengthens livelihoods.

The RCGM was also shaped by collaboration, with **more than fifty stakeholders participating in four Food Access and Advisory Collaborative (FAAC) events** to co-design the model. Residents shared with us that they felt proud to shop locally in a space that reflected their cultural traditions and dietary choices. Partnerships with growers and suppliers ensured that the market was both sustainable and responsive to local needs. What began as a feasibility study has now evolved into a flourishing community-driven intervention, providing not only food but also dignity, ownership, and a voice.



Youth Empowerment: Makerspace, Robotics, and STEM Club

The Makerspace became an actual launchpad for innovation. This year, **over 100 youth** engaged in coding, design, 3D printing, and robotics. **More than 15 young people directly contributed to designing and shaping the Makerspace itself**, while **50 seniors participated in intergenerational programming**, proving that creativity spans across generations.

The use of the space was extraordinary. Our **3D printers ran for 2,701 hours**, while the laser cutter and CNC machine logged **100 hours each**, tools buzzing with activity as ideas became tangible projects. With support from Sky's the Limit Youth Organization, we added **ten laptops** to strengthen our weekly workshop sessions, widening digital access for youth.

The highlight of the year was our Robotics Team's journey to the **FIRST Robotics World Championships in Houston**. Competing among the world's best, our youth earned recognition for quality engineering and teamwork, proving that Rexdale's young people can compete and shine on a global stage.

Beyond robotics, our STEM Club offered engaging experiences, including toxic waste challenges, CAD design sessions, and cosmic explorations led by professors from York University. Each new skill was another balloon added to the cluster, lifting confidence and curiosity higher.

Neighbourhood Engagement: CaféTO and NERC

Neighbourhood engagement was another flame fueling our balloon. This year marked the launch of **Rexdale CaféTO**, which transformed a dull parking lot at 950 Albion Road into a vibrant public square. With Albion-Islington BIA, local artists, and our Makerspace youth team, the space was brought to life with colourful murals, planter boxes, and native plants. CaféTO hosted four major events, attended by **more than 3,000 residents**, including the Back to School Celebration, where **800 backpacks filled with supplies** were distributed in partnership with Leggat Auto Group, Bags Without Barriers, North Etobicoke Resident Council (NERC), and seven Hub partner agencies. In total, **nineteen local businesses** participated in CaféTO activities, benefiting from increased visibility and community connection.



Our outreach extended even further. Through consultations, surveys, information tables, and door-to-door engagement, we connected with **over 8,000 residents** across North Etobicoke, ensuring their voices and experiences guided our programs. Meanwhile, the **North Etobicoke Resident Council (NERC)** continued to guide our community's direction. With **over sixty active members**, NERC addressed pressing issues such as community safety, youth mental health, and civic engagement. Members participated in the City of Toronto's budget consultations, helping to amplify local priorities in the municipal decision-making process. Their leadership demonstrated that residents are not just passengers in this balloon, but active pilots steering its course.

Revitalizing Greenspace: Panorama Community Garden

Community gardens are the roots that anchor us. This year, we began revitalizing the **Panorama Community Garden**, which had once been a thriving community asset but struggled in the aftermath of the pandemic. Together with residents, we cleaned, replanned, and prepared the ground for new governance and growth. The garden's revitalization represents more than a physical renewal; it symbolizes our commitment to cultivating spaces where neighbours can grow food, learn from one another, and build bonds across generations. Each weed pulled and each new seed sown became another string lifting our balloon, preparing the ground for a greener and more connected community.



Gratitude: The Crew That Keeps Us Flying

Every balloon needs a crew, and ours is extraordinary.

To our **Board of Directors**, led by Chair **Safia Ahmed**, thank you for your vision, governance, and leadership. To our **funders and partners**, including United Way Greater Toronto, City of Toronto, Albion-Islington BIA, Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto & Region Conservation Authority, and countless others, your belief in us fuels every flight. To our **North Etobicoke Resident Council** members, thank you for amplifying the voices of our community. To our **volunteers and summer students**, who painted benches, planted gardens, supported events, and staffed markets, your energy has been the wind beneath our wings. And to our **dedicated staff**, you are the strings that steady the balloon, the flame that keeps it rising. Together, you have ensured that our balloon did not just rise, but carried the whole community with it.

Looking Ahead: Reaching New Heights

This year has shown us that every initiative, whether planting a garden, building a robot, or hosting a festival, is a balloon tied to our shared vision. Alone, each flight is beautiful. Together, they create a sky filled with colour, collective movement, and possibility.

As we look forward, let us continue to build and create opportunities for everyone in our community. Let us continue to lift one another higher, ensuring that every resident feels the breeze of opportunity and the warmth of belonging.

With gratitude,

Amra Munawar
*Executive Director,
Rexdale Community Hub*



Reaching New Heights: Collaboration that lifts and empowers for community impact

By: Russ Mitchell



Lift Off!

Where it all began

The fascination and fun surrounding model rockets began for me in middle school. Long before STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) became the acronym it is today, us kids were learning about and launching small rockets under the watchful eye of our teacher. Of course, safety was always a priority. But it didn't mean that every launch went as planned. One afternoon, as our class began launching our carefully crafted projectiles, one rocket was inadvertently placed slightly tilted onto its launch pad. On take-off, instead of blasting up into the sky and being accompanied by the usual cheers and feelings of exhilaration, an audible gasp of fear and panic could be heard as the rocket made a right-hand turn and proceeded to fly horizontally at great speed above the ground. It shot across the school yard ... and straight into a very full staff parking lot. Just as it was about to hit the side of one car, it suddenly nose-dived under it and promptly exploded. Sweet relief!

Stabilizing the Launch Pad

Here at the Rexdale Hub we have been playing a role this year in stabilizing our 'launch pad' - the service system in the neighbourhood - by collaborating with various community partners. For example, we've held a variety of conversations at a municipal level with the City of Toronto and our local Councilor, resulting in

new initiatives that support Hub operations like the renovations of our community kitchens and gym stage, all of which positively impact service users. Also, through the Hub facilitating the ongoing collaboration between Hub partners, we were able to reduce the barriers to civic engagement and provide a welcoming space that meets the needs of community members. We brought together Hub tenants and Resident Council members to address low turnout in elections through voter education initiatives, dovetailing our Black History event with a presentation by Elections Ontario. This was an opportunity for local residents to educate themselves and build capacity around the political process before the provincial election. Participants were able to get their questions answered, pick up literature pertinent to the election, and take home free giveaways.

Ascent

Going higher

It was a high school friend and his sister that showed me how to really take model rocketry to another level! John was the curious type and never shy about experimenting. His sister on the other hand was the one who helped fuel his curiosity ... literally! A little older than John, she had access to a science lab at the university and used her spare time concocting ignition powder recipes - a mixture of sugar, potassium nitrate, plus who knows what else. Having built the rockets to the desired specification and created the fuel to power them, the three of us would scurry down to an

abandoned railway track to 'safely' test out the latest models. As Eric Allin Cornell – Nobel Prize winning physicist once said, "... It was fun to watch [our rockets] blast into the air, suspenseful to wonder if the parachute would open to bring the rocket safely back." Were we successful? By all measures yes, but moreover there was lots of energy, momentum, and collective effort that went into creating the meaningful experiences we shared together.

This is not unlike the collaborative work that gave 'lift' to the Hub's Event Planning Committee this year ...

- **Behind the scenes: the 'fuel' of planning.** This year the Hub's Collaborative Event Planning Committee introduced new Terms of Reference and co-chair role descriptions, leading to the implementation of a co-chair model that now includes youth leadership. The Committee also kicked off the new year with an *Aligning for Impact* session that brought together committee members/agency representatives for fun, food, and robust conversation. The purpose was to explore our mission, uncover helpful strategies we could leverage, and agree the goals we collectively wanted to achieve in 2025. We used empowerment evaluation to evaluate certain key components/activities that make up our mission, and our collective conversation explored our strengths and areas for improvement. This led the Committee to set key goals and to develop a **2025 Action Plan** to support: 1. Improved internal communication with community residents and agency partners; 2. A pursuit of increased funding from within and outside the wider Hub community and 3. A consistent planning framework that would be applied to planning efforts, fostering greater collaboration and commitment of all members.
- **Building and sustaining momentum: Collaborative community events.** The Planning Committee hosted nine intergenerational community events for more than 7,000 local residents focused on celebration, engagement, sharing cultural food, information sharing, and access to other community resources.

- **Below is a quick look at a few of the events we did:**

- July saw up to a 1,000 staff, volunteers, and residents join together for an afternoon to Celebrate Canada Day and its people under the theme: *Citizenship For All*. Local DJ and MC ensured residents stayed engaged, entertained, and had lively and happy music bringing people to their feet (even in the heat). A number of outside organizations joined all the Hub agencies, with each providing meaningful and interactive activities for both children through seniors. Our First Nation guest shared an informative and cultural indigenous presentation that really reminded us that we have been welcomed into something bigger than ourselves, and helped to set the tone for the afternoon. Residents also enjoyed the delightful musical presentations by our local Women's Pakistani Dance Group and some drumming by Hub board member and local resident Abraham Abbey. As always there was lots of excitement around the prize draws generously provided jointly by Hub and its partners. Then when the gym quickly emptied, we all knew folk were heading for the free yummy food of burgers, vegetarian patties, roasted corn, and ice cream. To mark the day, Art of Wong helped us visually capture both the spirit of the day, as well as the values we each can embrace -- values that ensure citizenship is truly for everyone.



A dedicated team of 250+ volunteers actively supported community events, planning, and knowledge-sharing.

- Our Black History Month event took place in late February, after being rescheduled due to inclement weather. Even though the weather challenges continued, approximately 400 happy residents still managed to fill the gym. The event hosted an amazing intergenerational program of singing, dance, drumming, spoken word, and Black history, punctuating the gym with style, colour and joy! In addition the event hosted a marketplace; the evening concluded with a selection of festive foods.
- An International Women's Day celebration also took place at the Hub, as women from across the community gathered to celebrate the difference they make in the world. *For ALL women and girls: Rights, Equity, Empowerment*, was the event's theme and included a panel discussion led by the Rexdale Community Legal Clinic. Again, there was an opportunity to explore a small marketplace featuring women entrepreneurs and to share tasty refreshments.



Creating meaningful experiences: evaluating our collective effort: Much like the iterative process of testing and improving model rockets, the Hub continually assesses and reflects on the experiences of residents attending community events, using lessons learned from both successes and challenges to refine our approach. For every action there is a reaction. For example, 136 community members completed surveys following the Black History Month Event and International Women's Day. Their feedback and suggestions were invaluable for fostering ongoing improvement and ensuring that future gatherings will be even more positive and impactful. That's an approach we continually engaged in for all our events as part of our collective effort.

Orbiting (Well Almost!)

Reaching for the Stars ...



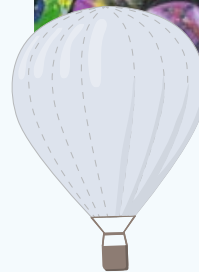
Getting lift-off this year was Canada's first student-led space launch - a rocket named StarSailor. The 13-meter tall liquid-fueled rocket, successfully launched recently from northern Quebec in a landmark moment for Canadian aerospace. The launch was orchestrated by students from Concordia University's Space Concordia team and marked Canada's first space launch attempt from its soil in over 25 years.

The rocket, named Chicabesh—a Cree word meaning “star boy”—symbolized more than just technological achievement. It was a powerful testament to student innovation and a meaningful collaboration with the Cree Nation of Mistissini. The Cree Nation generously provided a remote and secure launch site, approving the use of their territory and actively integrating their culture into the mission. This partnership fostered a rich cultural and educational exchange, especially for Cree youth, and reflected a shared commitment to respect, dialogue, and mutual inspiration.

StarSailor is now recognized as the largest student-built rocket ever to fly in Canada. The project began over seven years ago and has involved more than 700 Concordia students, each contributing to its development and success. Reaching the milestone of liftoff was the culmination of years of dedication, pursuit of engineering excellence, and cross-cultural collaboration.

Promising practises that give a lift

One of the promising practices this year that helped give lift to the work of the Rexdale Hub, has been to implement and advance our cultural competency and inclusivity. For example, First Nations collective history has had a most profound impact on us. As a result, the Hub has sought to move beyond symbolic gestures (though important as they are) such as reading a land acknowledgment at meetings or wearing orange on Orange Shirt Day. Instead we chose to begin integrating First Nations realities into the very fabric of Hub life. This year, we decided to start with Hub staff and then extend our efforts to the broader community. To that end, agency partners organized a hybrid Truth and Reconciliation event, inviting staff to participate in any of five “Lunch and Learn” sessions hosted by the University of Manitoba during the week leading up to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Regardless of the session selected, all cross-agency staff at the Hub were encouraged to reflect together on one shared theme: *Allyship and Confronting Unconscious Bias*. Many agency staff participated online while working remotely, while others gathered onsite at the Hub, thanks to a tenant agency that generously opened their boardroom space. A key message repeated by the event speakers was that becoming a true ally and addressing unconscious bias requires a deep understanding of Indigenous history, along with a commitment to ongoing education. In response, the Hub’s Event Planning Committee has taken up the challenge to continue facilitating learning events in the months to come.



A different kind of Rocket

In celebrating Asian Heritage Month, hundreds of residents converged on the Hub in late May; a perfect time to launch a different kind of rocket – the leafy green kind! What? Yes, it just so happens that Arugula, a spicy, peppery leafy green vegetable is also known by the name ... ROCKET. **This year we launched a green grocery market to provide local residents with culturally relevant and reasonably priced fruits and vegetables.** You might have missed our ‘Rocket’ launch, but you’ll be sure to have encountered some of its other family members, like Cauliflower, Broccoli, and Kale if you made a visit to the market. Now open twice a week, this initiative has reached thousands of customers and made an impact in four main areas:

- 1. Positive Changes.** Community members have improved their quality of life through increased access to affordable fruits and vegetables locally at our new market. To support this new launch, a feasibility study and financial model were completed, a marketing strategy was developed, communication materials were updated, essential equipment was acquired, community awareness was raised through partnerships, and market vouchers were introduced and distributed. In addition, our implementation of a planning framework streamlined our market operations ensuring we remained relevant and effective in how and to whom we serve.

- 2. Community Engagement.** We conducted customer engagement evaluations that yielded positive feedback, reflecting high levels of convenience and satisfaction among shoppers. We also fostered a sense of community ownership by organizing an artwork session with local seniors, resulting in a vibrant backdrop for the market. We hosted a Market Operations Workshop that enhanced relationships among community stakeholders and increased collaboration and coordination as project partners. In addition, our successful funding and grant applications enabled us to acquire essential market equipment.
- 3. Systemic Change.** We worked towards systemic change by collaborating with the City of Toronto's Social Development, Finance and Administration staff and our Ward 1 Councilor and gaining approval for the market's site. Additionally, we contributed to the consultation for updating the City of Toronto food charter. Our efforts also led to successful funding from the Toronto Regional Conservation Authority Urban Agriculture Initiative, enabling the purchase of essential market equipment like display units, coolers, and freezers.
- 4. Capacity Building.** We fostered opportunities for capacity building: for community members (a Knowledge Exchange event focusing on food systems); for market staff (professional development training such as on community service, market safety procedures, and conflict management; for placement students (customer service and retail trade skills training); and for stakeholders (regular project progress updates – in person, virtual, and by video) broadening stakeholder understanding regarding patterns of food insecurity, both regional and specific to North Etobicoke, as well as community-based responses such as our market. We also widened dialogue around food security, providing an interview to CBC Metro Morning regarding our market's approach; contributed to a community health intervention study by project partners - University of Guelph - on the work of the Hub's market; and presented our community market story to North Etobicoke Cluster partners.

Staying on the journey that lifts us all ...

In reflecting on this year's journey, it's the power of collaboration that has given us the lift to reach new heights. The Rexdale Hub's commitment to partnership, inclusion, and innovation has translated vision into meaningful impact. Our collective pursuit of progress, much like the science of rocketry, is built on experimentation, adaptation, and shared learning. From fostering civic engagement, celebrating diverse cultures, to improving food security, we've created opportunities for growth and connection that will continue to lift us all. Looking ahead to next year, the lessons gleaned from today will encourage us to maintain momentum, embrace new challenges, and remain steadfast in our dedication to supporting every resident toward an even brighter future.



A photograph of two women standing in front of several black metal wire racks filled with fresh produce. The woman on the left has grey hair and is wearing a black patterned top and a green apron. The woman on the right is wearing a black hijab, a blue long-sleeved shirt, and a green apron. The racks contain various items: onions, avocados, tomatoes, and green onions. In the background, there is a brick wall with a mural of a bicycle and flowers. A blue circular text box is overlaid on the image.

RCGM:
Served 6,000+
local community
members with access
to fresh produce at an
affordable price.



Our Makerspace, Our Story

PART I Preparing the Balloon – Building the Makerspace

Every balloon needs careful preparation before it can lift off. For the Makerspace, that preparation began not with flashy machines or high-tech gear, but with something simple: a row of wooden tables. Built from 2x4s and sheets of plywood, those workbenches became the foundation of everything that followed. They carried the weight of every tool, every project, and every idea in the months ahead.

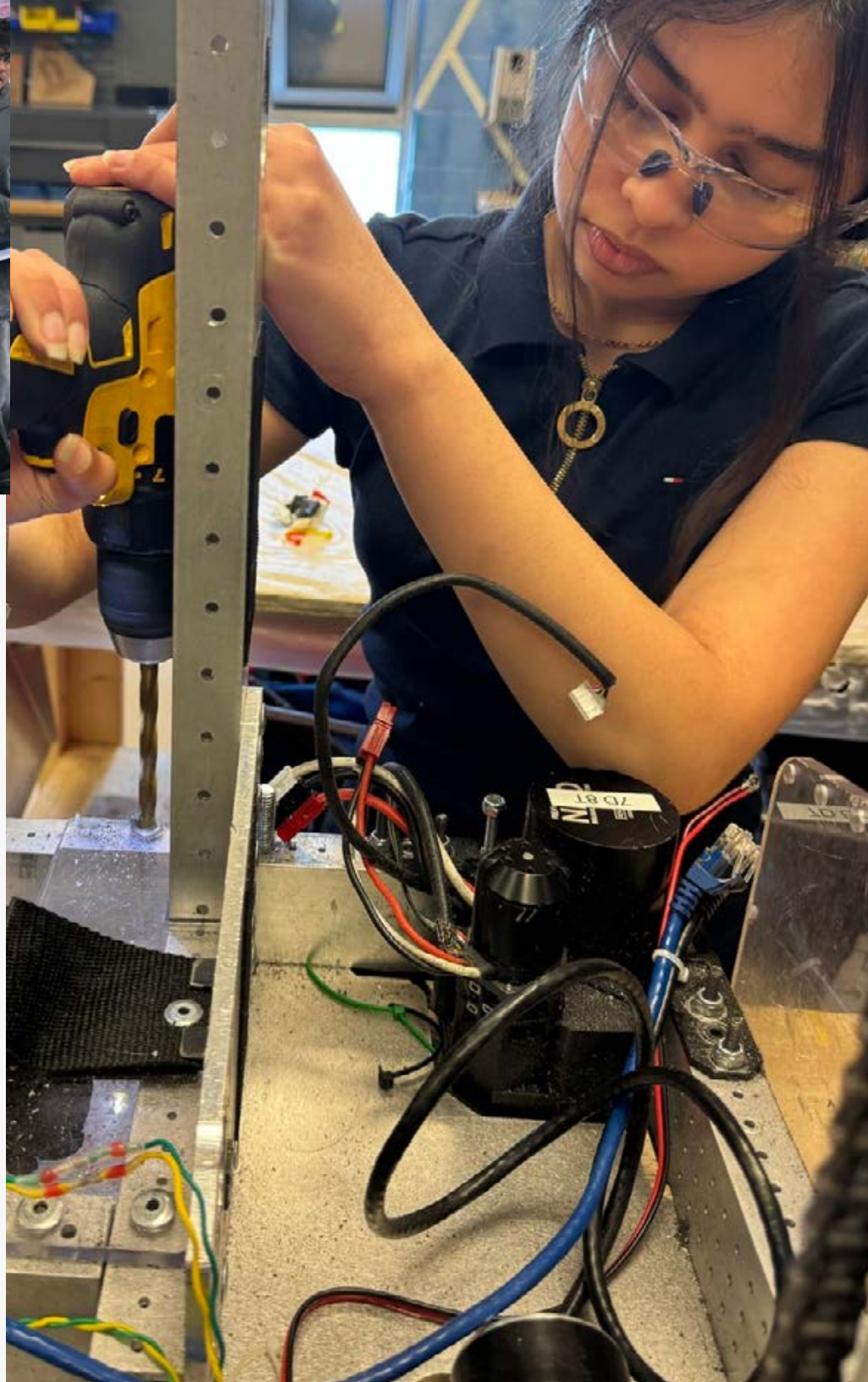
Before those tools ever arrived, however, there was the question of what to bring into the room. Together, our youth drafted a list of the machines and equipment the Makerspace would need. They compared options, researched suppliers, and leaned on advice from industry mentors to make informed choices. Deciding on each item, from 3D printers to a CNC router to the xTools laser cutter wasn't just a shopping trip. It was a lesson in planning, budgeting, and designing a space with the future in mind.

Once equipment began to arrive, the Makerspace quickly turned into a workshop of workshops. The first 3D printers were unboxed, calibrated, and tested by students who were eager to see their designs come to life.

Hand tools were not simply shelved; youth cut precise foam inserts to give each one a proper place, so the space looked and felt professional. When new laptops were purchased, students didn't settle for stacks of boxes. They designed and built a rolling cart to store and charge them, tailoring it to the Makerspace's needs. Even everyday essentials like whiteboards and material racks were designed and constructed in-house, proving that creativity doesn't stop at the machines.

The arrival of the CNC machine marked a turning point. With it, youth could move beyond plywood benches and create something unique to the Makerspace itself: custom collaborative tables. They produced CAD models, worked with a local shop to fabricate the wooden bases, then cut, painted, and finished the tabletops by hand. Suddenly the room didn't just look like a workshop, it looked like our workshop.

Each step, from drafting equipment lists to sanding boards, was like tying another string to the balloon. It wasn't contractors or outside experts who gave the Makerspace its lift. It was the steady, collective work of youth who built not only a space to learn, but a place they could call their own.



PART II Robotics – Finding a Home, Growing as a Team

For years, robotics at Rexdale had a heartbeat inside a local high school. Students met after class, building machines that seemed larger than life. But when that school space was lost, the team suddenly found itself without a home. Robots don't fit easily into living rooms or basements, and without a workshop the future of the team was uncertain.

That's when the Makerspace opened its doors. What had begun as a community vision quickly became the new foundation for the robotics program. The same youth who once scrambled for space now rolled their prototypes across brand-new floors, testing drivetrains on freshly laid carpet and wiring control boards at workbenches they had built themselves.

The shift wasn't only about having a roof overhead. It was about stability, identity, and pride. The Makerspace gave the robotics team more than tools, it gave them belonging. Students who had once packed up projects into storage closets now had a permanent home, surrounded by machines and mentors invested in their growth. And with that home, the team began to grow not only in size, but in ambition.



With a new base secured, the team turned its focus back to competition. At the Canadian National Exhibition, they fielded two robots, finishing 3rd and 5th. For students who had only recently been unpacking machines in their new workshop, it was a powerful validation: their designs worked, their code held up, and their teamwork carried them through match after match.

Only a few weeks later in Hamilton, the STEMLY Cup offered another test, and this time the stakes were even higher. Unlike local events, this competition attracts a different caliber of opponent. Many of the strongest Canadian teams sign up, and across the border some of the top American teams travel north to join the field. The result is one of the most competitive off-season tournaments anywhere in the region.

For Rexdale youth, simply entering that arena was a leap forward. Yet they did far more than hold their own. By the end of the weekend they stood as the 8th alliance captain, a role reserved for teams respected enough to lead partnerships and shape strategy. For a group that had only recently secured its new home inside the Makerspace, it was a statement: they weren't just rebuilding, they were rising among the best.



These milestones marked a clear turning point. The team that once worried about losing its space was now competing with confidence, building not only stronger robots but a stronger sense of themselves. The Makerspace had given them room to grow, and with it, they were proving what was possible when youth had the space to dream and the support to act.



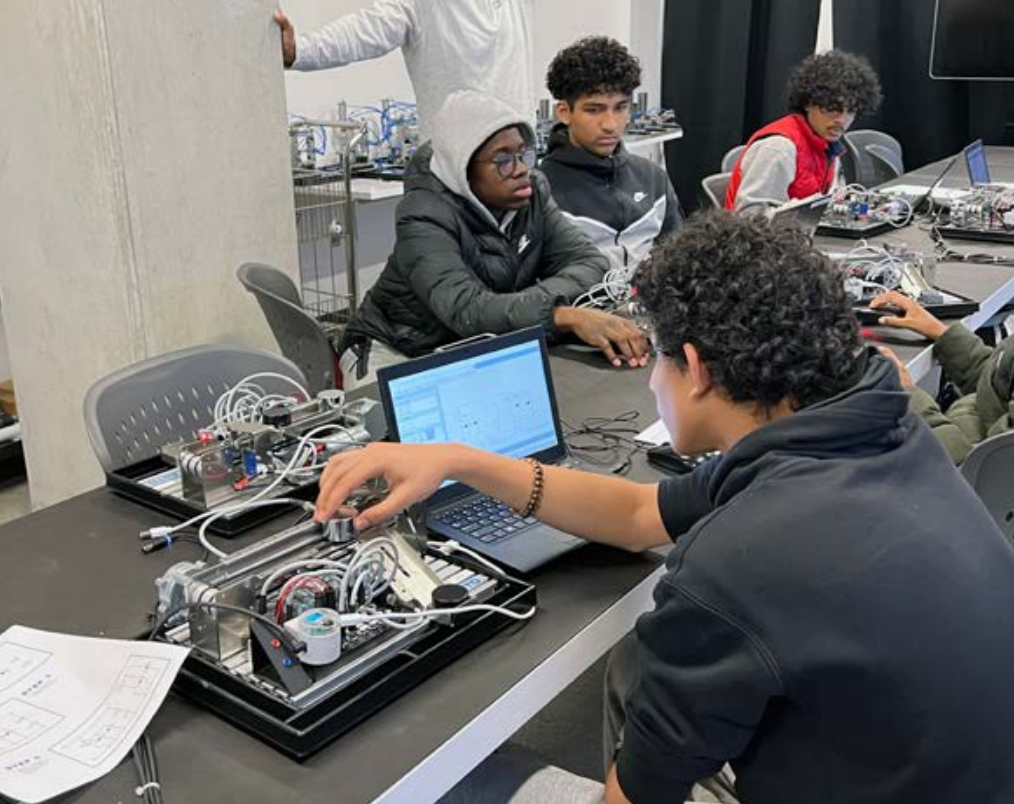
PART III STEM Club – Curiosity Takes Flight

While the Makerspace gave robotics a home, it also became the launchpad for a wider community of youth eager to explore science, technology, engineering, and math. The STEM Club met week after week, drawing in students from across Rexdale who came not just to learn, but to challenge themselves and one another.

Some nights tested imagination in playful ways. In the Toxic Waste Challenge, teams had to find creative solutions to move a container without crossing the danger zone, building teamwork under pressure. In the Hold the Load competition, youth engineered structures that were pushed to their breaking point under increasing weight, with cheers erupting each time a design held longer than expected. Other evenings turned the Makerspace into a racecourse, as students laser-cut intricate mazes and then competed to see who could solve them fastest.

Beyond the games and experiments, the STEM Club opened doors to the wider world of science. A visit to Humber Polytechnic gave students their first glimpse of college-level technology labs. And one unforgettable evening, York University professor Patrick Hall guided the group through the mysteries of the cosmos, from black holes and the origins of the universe to the concept of singularity and the way space continues to expand. For many youth, it was their first time hearing these ideas explained with such passion, sparking questions that stretched long after the presentation ended.

Alongside those eye-opening moments, the foundations of STEM were being laid. Python coding nights introduced youth to their first lines of code, building up from simple print functions to problem-solving exercises. CAD sessions gave them the tools to design in 3D, while workshops on 3D printing and laser engraving taught them how to bring those designs to life. Each new skill was another balloon added to the cluster, lifting confidence and curiosity a little higher each time.



PART IV Robotics – Build Season and the Road to Houston

Once January arrived, the Makerspace shifted into its most intense period yet: build season. For the robotics team, this meant nearly two months of nonstop effort, well over 1,000 hours poured into designing, machining, wiring, and coding. The 3D printers rarely sat idle, the CNC router carved out precise aluminum parts, and students clustered around laptops to refine their vision systems and match strategies. The Makerspace wasn't just busy, it was alive, every corner of it humming with creation.

What truly defined this season, however, was the drive of the students themselves. Given the space, time, mentorship, and permission to push their limits, they threw themselves into the work completely. They arrived before staff could unlock the doors and stayed so late they had to be escorted out by security. Even on days when blizzards shut the city down, they dug pathways through the snow and pleaded to be let inside. The Makerspace gave them opportunity, but it was their relentless passion that turned it into achievement.

By late February, their machine was ready to face its first real test: the Humber Polytechnic District Event. Against all odds, the team advanced to the finals as alliance captains, a first in program history. Along the way they also earned the Quality Award, recognizing the precision and craftsmanship of their robot's machined components.

Momentum carried into North Bay, where the team fought through elimination rounds and finished 3rd overall, falling only in a razor-thin set of matches.

Finally, at Provincials, they entered a field stacked with the strongest teams in Ontario. Match after match, they proved they belonged at the highest level, drawing notice for their speed, consistency, and strategic play. By the end of the weekend, they had done what once felt impossible: secured their place at the FIRST Robotics World Championship in Houston.

For the students, it was the culmination of a season defined by resilience and ambition. For the Makerspace, it was proof of its purpose: when young people are given the environment to thrive, they can rise to meet even the world's toughest challenges.



**Stats on
Machines:**

3D Printer: 2,701 hours

Laser Cutter: 100 hours

CNC Machine:
100 hours

**Makerspace
Development:**
15+ youth actively
participated in planning
and designing the first
Innovative Makerspace
in North Etobicoke.



Every Action Lifts Us Higher

By: Warda Sharmeen

Introducing the first ever “Rexdale CaféTO”!

The flame that powers a hot air balloon takes great precision, time, and energy. When it is ignited, that flame can cause the start of an exciting adventure. The actions we take to create spaces for joy and laughter energize our community, the same way a flame heats up a balloon that is ready for lift-off. These actions bring opportunities for neighbours to share experiences with one another, bring success to our economy, and allow the sharing of resources for collective impact.





By building on our previous efforts in identifying community spaces that could be reimagined to better suit the needs of our neighbours, we launched North Etobicoke's first "**Rexdale CaféTO**," funded by the City of Toronto's Dining District Grant Program. Rexdale CaféTO is a community-led initiative that temporarily transformed an underutilized strip mall parking lot at 950 Albion Road, into a vibrant outdoor dining and community space in the heart of North Etobicoke.

And what an adventure it was! We collaborated with Albion-Islington Square BIA, the Hub's in-house partner agencies, other community service organizations, and connections with local residents to revitalize the parking lot into Rexdale CaféTO. Through the City of Toronto's Dining District Grant Program, we were able to:

1. Using community-driven design to create a safe and accessible gathering space for residents of North Etobicoke
2. Enhance brand awareness for 7+ local restaurants by providing them with the opportunity to showcase their menu options and market their stores by directly speaking to the community during festivals, in an interview-style.
3. Collaboratively host four community events at Rexdale CaféTO, that helped to strengthen relationships between 3000+ residents, service providers, and local businesses
4. Provide ongoing stewardship opportunities for 3 local residents

With the help of youth at Rexdale Community Hub's STEM Club, a local Urban Planner, and consultations with North Etobicoke Resident Council, we developed a site plan for the parking lot. It helped meet safety standards, make efficient use of space, and consider environmental conditions at the site. The STEM Club members also crafted wayfinding signage and 3 planter boxes in the Hub's Makerspace, which later housed 200+ native plants donated by the Toronto & Region Conservation Authority! We also brought bright colours to the once dull parking lot, by partnering with local Artists to paint the site's brand-new picnic tables, a mural on the fence that surrounds the site, as well as a large ground mural.

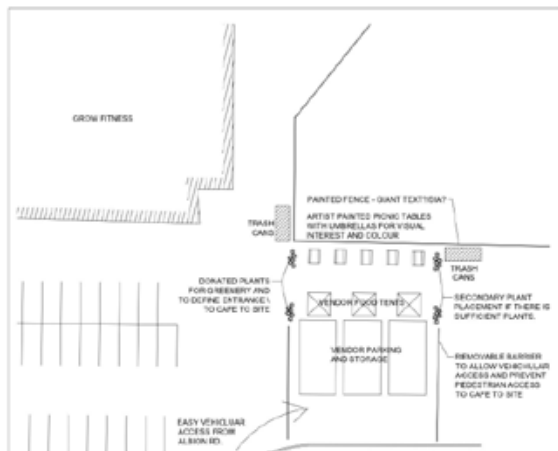
Lift off! Together with the community, the Rexdale CaféTO site hosted four interactive and free events during the Fall. We began strong, with a group of 20 local youth who volunteered their time to help beautify the site in a "Community Planting Day." We officially kicked off Rexdale CaféTO to the community by hosting our annual collaborative "Back to School Celebration."

Rexdale CaféTO also facilitated placemaking by supporting community service partners, such as Arts Etobicoke, in hosting the first ever "Albion Islington Square Arts Festival" at the site. We welcomed over 400 residents across North Etobicoke who enjoyed a vibrant display of art installations in various locations at the intersection, while enjoying food and drinks from restaurants at the Albion Islington Square BIA.

The final Rexdale CaféTO event was all about embracing the beautiful fall season and celebrating the togetherness of our community. In mid-October we hosted our annual “Fall Harvest Festival/Rexdale CaféTO Wrap-Up”. All event participants got an opportunity to enjoy fun games/activities, giveaways, face painting, henna, African drumming, Indian Bhangra performances and workshops, and dancing from local Artists. They took photos with their loved ones, created community connections through 15+ partner organizations’ information tables, enjoyed special prices on delicious food and drinks from 7 participating restaurants.

“Success is in the journey, but the reward is the view from the top” – Larry Stevens

Rexdale CaféTO helped enhance streetscape in North Etobicoke by transforming a public space into one that promotes community gathering and well-being. We are grateful for the opportunity to create inviting settings for residents to enjoy meals together, foster connections, and a sense of belonging among neighbours. Be it big or small, initiatives like the Rexdale CaféTO enhance our neighbourhood’s connectedness, enrich its vibrancy, and celebrate its beautiful diversity!



Charting the Course with North Etobicoke Resident Council (NERC)

This year, NERC members guided the direction of our balloon's flight. Through regular monthly meetings and partnerships with local service providers, NERC members took a lead in addressing 4 key areas of improvement: **community safety, youth mental health, community beautification, and civic engagement.**

In 2022, NERC took a lead in creating a COVID Memorial Garden at Rowntree Mills Park, to honour the lives lost to COVID-19 in North Etobicoke and the frontline heroes of our community. The garden is not just a functional seating area for neighbours to reflect; it also adds colourful native plants to Rowntree Mills Park – truly something beautiful to behold. This year, NERC continued to organize regular clean-up and maintenance of the garden, by organizing a group of dedicated volunteers and partnering with the City of Toronto and Toronto & Region Conservation Authority.

NERC's efforts in collaboratively hosting the annual "Back to School Celebration" was also a great success this year. The event saw more than 2,000 residents of North Etobicoke and was held at the temporarily transformed parking lot at 950 Albion Road – the Rexdale CaféTO. Thanks to funding from the City of Toronto, and NERC's partnership with the Hub's in-house agencies, local community service organizations, and other amazing organizations like Bags Without Barriers and Toronto North Christadelphians—we collaboratively distributed 800+ backpacks filled with school supplies. The end of summer is a bittersweet time for all families, but also a chance to celebrate new beginnings for our children and youth. This year's Back to School Celebration was truly a warm send-off for young people of our neighbourhood into their new adventures!

Hats off to the NERC members who participated in the City of Toronto's Budget Consultation at the Etobicoke Olympium! Sharing their valuable experiences helped ensure that the needs and perspectives of their neighbours were represented in the City's financial planning.



*Only from the heart
can you touch the sky*
– Rumi

Over **60 North Etobicoke Resident Council (NERC)** members championed local causes such as **food insecurity, community safety, newcomer settlement, housing issues, and policy development.**



Tending the Ground that Lifts Us – Adventure Awaits for Panorama Community Garden

Community gardens are roots that nourish our neighbourhood – they provide us with opportunities to grow our own food, to learn from neighbours of all ages and backgrounds, and to enhance the greenspaces of our neighbourhood. This year, Rexdale Community Hub had the opportunity to help tend to the land that lifts our community.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Panorama Community Garden was a thriving hub for residents of local high-rise towers to access ground-level gardening. Unfortunately, the Garden Group has faced challenges since the start of the pandemic due to a lack of resources. In Fall 2024, Rexdale Community Hub initiated a major clean-up of the Panorama Community Garden which helped to prepare the land for a soon-to-be revitalization project. We also worked with the Garden Group to truly understand the challenges they face, determine how the community might be of help, and decide on a plan for reinstituting a governance structure for the Panorama Community Garden Group.

There is a long way to go, but every action – big or small, lifts North Etobicoke higher. And our team is so excited for the adventure that awaits for Panorama Community Garden!



Heroes of North Etobicoke

By: Warda Sharmeen

Community members who uplift their friends and neighbours, who engage in initiatives that enhance our neighbourhood, and who inspire others to make a positive impact, are the heroes of our neighbourhood. Let's meet one hero in our community, Lydia Tharmarajah, and learn about her journey as a changemaker in North Etobicoke...

About Lydia:

I see our community as one big garden, and all the people and projects in our community are diverse plants. Whether these plants are big or small, we water and nurture them equally. And the garden of our community will bloom beautifully, and grow more each year. Togetherness is the best part of our community.

I love my community and want others to be happy. I enjoy helping people, I was an accountant for 30+ years. I write to inspire others and share a positive attitude with my friends.

1. *What community initiatives have you led or participated in that you are most proud of?*

I am proudly part of the Tamil Seniors Group and North Etobicoke Resident Council. We share everything - food, fashion, and stories. It is a big network of 400-500 people, and I help with translation and inspire others through my poetry. It is a multicultural group, and I believe we should accommodate everyone – the world is for everyone.

2. *What inspires you to get involved in community initiatives, and what keeps you flying high?*

It makes me happy to meet new people, make positive connections, and help others in need to the best of my ability.

3. *How do you engage and involve others in your community initiatives? How do you build a team?*

I always call people in my networks, make a connection with them and talk about upcoming events that would be fun for them to join. I always call and invite them. I love to bring people together, and introduce them at our community events. And I often see that they form friendships and become part of new friend groups. This is what makes our community stronger.

4. *What is the most important thing that community members can do to support each other and lift each other up?*

We always have to think about others. Discerning a person is a form of wisdom – if I see a person who looks sad or worried, I can discern them. I approach them and be a listening ear to see if I can help or encourage them in any way. But it's equally important to know when to give them space. If they require space, I don't push but I will still keep them in my thoughts and prayers.

If you are assigned a duty or responsibility, it is important that you follow through with it. No matter how small, I always try to follow through because it helps build trust. For example, when my friends and I plan trips,

we always organize ourselves and collaborate on what each of us will do. That way we can all enjoy ourselves, along with groups outside of ours as well. That is the best way. Everybody is different in what they can offer, but the spirit of the community is one.

5. *What are some challenges you've faced in your community work, and how have you overcome them?*

I always try to be flexible about the small things because people have different backgrounds and perspectives. For example, sometimes people don't want to accept help and I know not to push further.

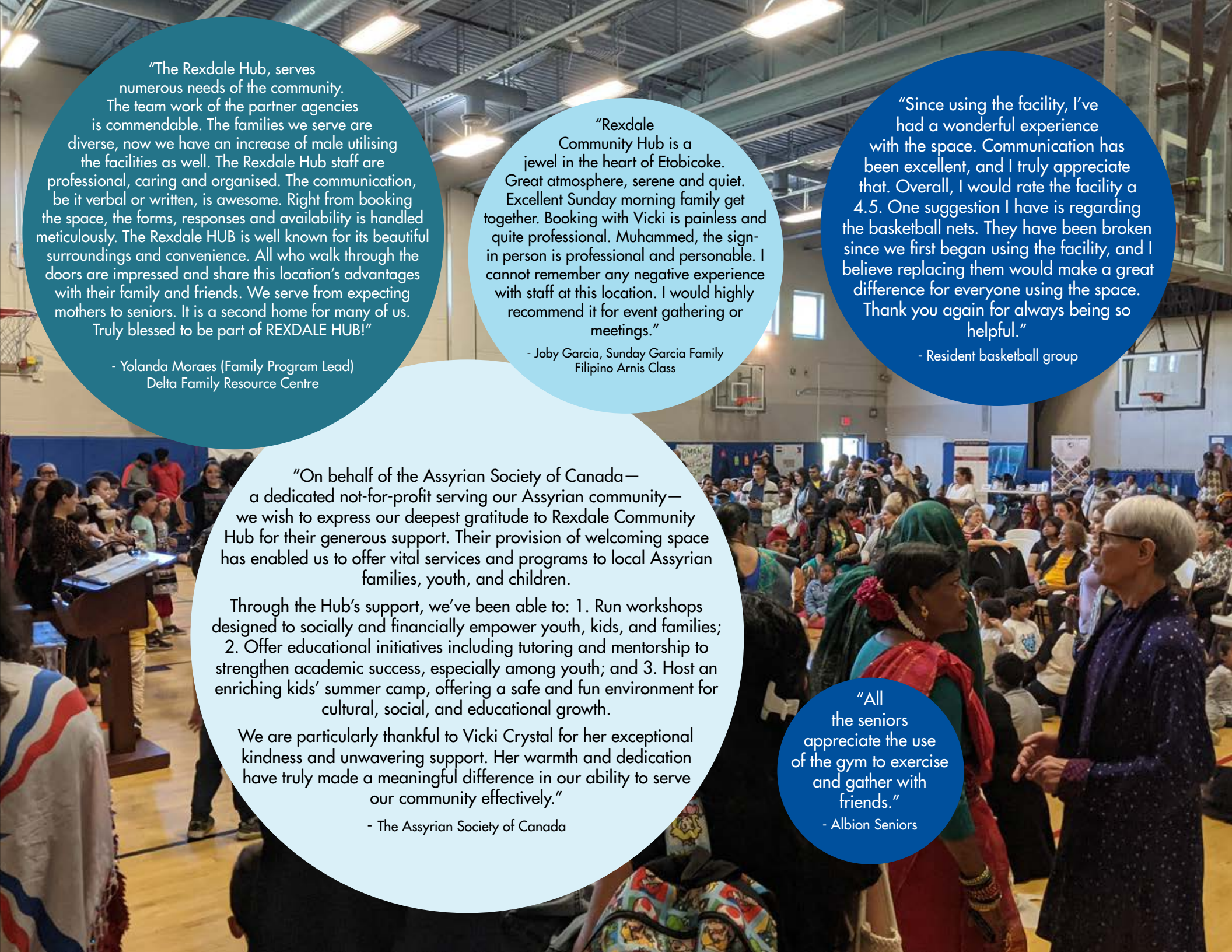
6. *What advice would you give to others who want to get involved in community initiatives and make a positive impact?*

Forming connections is the most important thing you can do – go out for a coffee with your friends, or go for a walk...just show them that you are there for them. Our actions mean much more than just our words. Smiling also helps. It makes you much more approachable.

7. *What is your vision for the future of North Etobicoke, and how do you see your community initiatives contributing to that vision?*

Continue to communicate with different groups to learn from other people. People can come up with new ideas, especially the younger generation. They have fantastic ideas – in the form of culture, advice, and talent. They have a lot to offer that we can learn from. Also, technology is advancing very fast, and we should be open to learning from it.





"The Rexdale Hub, serves numerous needs of the community. The team work of the partner agencies is commendable. The families we serve are diverse, now we have an increase of male utilising the facilities as well. The Rexdale Hub staff are professional, caring and organised. The communication, be it verbal or written, is awesome. Right from booking the space, the forms, responses and availability is handled meticulously. The Rexdale HUB is well known for its beautiful surroundings and convenience. All who walk through the doors are impressed and share this location's advantages with their family and friends. We serve from expecting mothers to seniors. It is a second home for many of us. Truly blessed to be part of REXDALE HUB!"

- Yolanda Moraes (Family Program Lead)
Delta Family Resource Centre

"Rexdale Community Hub is a jewel in the heart of Etobicoke. Great atmosphere, serene and quiet. Excellent Sunday morning family get together. Booking with Vicki is painless and quite professional. Muhammed, the sign-in person is professional and personable. I cannot remember any negative experience with staff at this location. I would highly recommend it for event gathering or meetings."

- Joby Garcia, Sunday Garcia Family
Filipino Arnis Class

"Since using the facility, I've had a wonderful experience with the space. Communication has been excellent, and I truly appreciate that. Overall, I would rate the facility a 4.5. One suggestion I have is regarding the basketball nets. They have been broken since we first began using the facility, and I believe replacing them would make a great difference for everyone using the space. Thank you again for always being so helpful."

- Resident basketball group

"On behalf of the Assyrian Society of Canada — a dedicated not-for-profit serving our Assyrian community — we wish to express our deepest gratitude to Rexdale Community Hub for their generous support. Their provision of welcoming space has enabled us to offer vital services and programs to local Assyrian families, youth, and children.

Through the Hub's support, we've been able to: 1. Run workshops designed to socially and financially empower youth, kids, and families; 2. Offer educational initiatives including tutoring and mentorship to strengthen academic success, especially among youth; and 3. Host an enriching kids' summer camp, offering a safe and fun environment for cultural, social, and educational growth.

We are particularly thankful to Vicki Crystal for her exceptional kindness and unwavering support. Her warmth and dedication have truly made a meaningful difference in our ability to serve our community effectively."

- The Assyrian Society of Canada

"All the seniors appreciate the use of the gym to exercise and gather with friends."

- Albion Seniors

Rexdale Community Hub 2024-2025 Birds Eye View of our Collective Impact

Collaborations that lift and empowers for community impact

2024-2025

Total Hub Visits:

207,496

89,733 community space visits for programs hosted by Hub partners, grassroots organizations, community groups, and residents.

117,763 visits for services and programs provided by Hub and its partner organizations.

Engagement: Connected with **7,415 local residents** through **9 collaborative events and activities.**

Community Space Usage: Strengthened our role as a backbone organization by hosting **7,000+ community space bookings by 7 Hub partners, 50+ community groups**, grassroots organizations, and residents of North Etobicoke.

Cluster Participation: Actively participated in the **North Etobicoke Cluster**, along with **40+ community service partners**, joint-led by United Way and the City of Toronto. The focus was leading initiatives that address food insecurity, community engagement, and mental health and wellness.

Advocacy and Representation: Over **60 North Etobicoke Resident Council (NERC) members** championed local causes such as **food insecurity, community safety, newcomer settlement, housing issues, and policy development.**

Food Program: Distributed **10,700 meals** to children and youth through the Hub's Makerspace Programs.

Youth Empowerment: Enhanced the learning experience of **over 100 youth** by engaging them in STEM Club activities/events.

Makerspace Development: **15+ youth** actively participated in planning and designing the first **Innovative Makerspace** in North Etobicoke. 50+ seniors engaged in the development and implementation of intergenerational programming in the Makerspace.

Rexdale Community Grocery Market (RCGM) planning in action: 50+ stakeholders

shared expertise in developing the RCGM model by participating in **4 Food Action and Advisory Collaborative (FAAC) events.**

6,560 customers at the RCGM:
Served 6000+ local community members with access to fresh produce at an affordable price.

Capacity building opportunities through the RCGM: 10+ community members trained in retail/business management and customer service.

Volunteer Support: A dedicated team of **250+ volunteers** actively supported community events, planning, and knowledge-sharing.

Rexdale CafeTO: 19 businesses involved through 4 community events.

Back to School Support: Supported children, youth, and families by distributing **800 backpacks with school supplies** at the annual **Back to School Celebration.** This initiative was in collaboration with Leggat Auto Group, Bags Without Barriers, Toronto (North) Christadelphians, North Etobicoke Resident Council (NERC), and **7 Hub partner agencies.**

Local Talent and Entrepreneurship: 60+ organizations, local entrepreneurs, and businesses participated in collaborative community events, showcasing local talent.

Digital Access Support: Special thanks to **Sky's the Limit Youth Organization** for donating **10 laptops** to the Makerspace for weekly workshop sessions.

Digitally upgraded equipment, furniture, and community spaces as part of the Digital Place-Based Hub Initiative to deliver collaborative hybrid and/or place-based programming.

Spaces within the Hub where we can safely deliver collaborative virtual and/or place-based programming.

Community Outreach: Reached over **8,000 residents** through community consultations and information tables.



Board Chair's Message

Reflecting on the past year, I am filled with pride at the progress we have made together as a community. While challenges across North Etobicoke persist, this year has shown us once again that collaboration, creativity, and resilience can lift us higher.

The Rexdale Community Hub has continued to be a vital anchor, not just a building, but a living network of people and possibilities. Through strong partnerships with local agencies, grassroots groups, businesses, and residents, the Hub has expanded its reach and deepened its role in addressing food insecurity, youth empowerment, and neighbourhood engagement. The launch of the Rexdale Community Grocery Market, the vibrant Makerspace, and the transformation of outdoor spaces like CaféTO and the Panorama Community Garden are just a few examples of how collective vision can turn into community-led action.

These successes are only possible because of the commitment of so many. To our staff, volunteers, students, and Hub partners: thank you for being the heart and energy of this work. I would like to extend a very special acknowledgement to our Executive Director, **Amra Munawar**. Her vision, passion, and tireless dedication have been the guiding flame of this balloon we call the Hub.

Amra's leadership is not only operational but deeply personal; she embodies the values of respect, empathy, and community that are at the core of our mission. The Board is grateful for her extraordinary commitment, which inspires confidence in our ability to meet challenges with courage and creativity.

I also extend my appreciation to my fellow members of the **Board of Directors** for their strong governance, thoughtful leadership, and commitment to the Hub's mission. Each of you has played an important role in strengthening our foundation and ensuring we can continue to grow and adapt in the service of the community.

As we look forward, let us carry the momentum of this year into the future. We have laid the groundwork for innovation, collaboration, and inclusion that will guide us as we rise to new heights. Together, let's continue to nurture hope, foster a sense of belonging, and build a brighter future for the residents of North Etobicoke.

Sincerely,

Safia Ahmed
Board Chair

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

Hub Partners

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

Board Members

Abraham Abbey
Costanza Allevato
Desree Prince
Fatima Filippi
Safia Ahmed
Yodit Edemariam

Funders

City of Toronto
United Way Greater Toronto
Government of Canada - New Horizons for Seniors Program (Community-Based Stream)

Supporters

Afghan Kebob Cuisine
Albion Islington Square Business Improvement Area
Al-Meezan Grocery and Halal Meat
Al-Meezan Spicy Grill
Authentic Jamaican Jerk
Bags Without Borders
BMO Financial Group
Bird Studies
Caribbean Cuisine
Catch the Fire Church
Department of Geography, Environment & Geomatics, University of Guelph
Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University
Department of Geography and Planning, University of Toronto
Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto
FoodShare Toronto
FIRST Robotics Canada
Google Kitchener, Waterloo
GrowFitness
Home Depot Rexdale #7114
Honda Canada Foundation
Humber Polytechnic
IBM Canada Ltd.
Leggat Auto Group
Lord of Robots
Mushkaki Restaurants Inc.
Mr. Singh's Pizza Rexdale

NACI Robotics
Ontario Farms Inc.
Parks Canada
Park People
PepsiCo Canada
Physics and Astronomy, York University
plazaPOPS
Qualcomm
Repair Café Toronto
Rotary Etobicoke
Roti Roti Family Restaurant
Royal Astronomical Society of Canada
Royal Bank of Canada
Scott Mission
Seva Food Bank
Sheriff's No Frills
Sky's the Limit Youth Organization
Sprout Community
Subway #11321
Telus
The Salvation Army (Etobicoke Temple)
The STEPS Initiative
Toronto Community Benefits Network
Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA)
Woodbine Entertainment - Community Cares Investment Program
Xawaash

RCH Staff Members

Aiman Malhi
Amra Munawar
Atputha Gajendiran
Ghulam Virk
Harry Persaud
Hassan Bokhari
Jacqueline Ambris
Khadija Ahmed
Kizzy Price
Layth Jato
Lida Popalzai
Lester Smith
Mohammad Javed
Nafisa Omar
Nihar Sheth
Ofure Emma Esekile Oluwalanami
Russel Mitchell
Saima Jawid
Sukhman Bhatti
Thenukka Logeswaran
Vicki Crystal
Warda Sharmeen

Report Credits

Bettina Klug

Mural Credits

The Art of Wong Inc.



Our Vision

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

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 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.



Serving the Community is Our Business

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