



NOURISH
ANCHOR COHORT

2021 -
2023

CONNECTING COMMUNITY WITH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FOOD

Toronto Anchor Team
Impact Report



Better Health Outcomes through
Onsite Growing and Food on
Prescription

Published Summer 2023

TORONTO ANCHOR TEAM

The Toronto Anchor Team's work is situated within the context of the Nourish Anchor Cohort, a two-year national innovation program that ran from 2021 - 2023. The goal of the Anchor Cohort was to support health systems across Canada to develop anchor leadership, signalling their commitment to harness the long-term presence, mission, and resources of health care institutions to anchor wellbeing in their communities through food. The Cohort brought together seven multidisciplinary place-based teams to work on 'portfolios of systems interventions' that activated community assets and explored innovative food for health solutions. The accomplishments outlined in this report reflect their efforts to nudge local and regional health systems toward meaningful transformation in order to promote better health for people.

Black Creek Community Health Centre (BCCHC) is located in Northwest Toronto, which encompasses the neighbourhood areas of Jane and Finch, as well as Jane and Wilson, a racialized, working class community of 52,000 residents experiencing precarious work, high costs to access food, and limited growing space. In the context of health inequity many residents experience poorer health outcomes including increased rates of chronic illness. In addition to this, systemic racism contributes to poverty, over-policing, and negative impacts on mental health.

BCCHC has a strong record of leadership in providing care and services for the community, as well as facilitating important spaces for gathering, training, advocacy, and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, mobilizing pop-up vaccination clinics.

The team is looking to deepen their work to repair trust and build stronger community connections as they develop sustainable initiatives that reduce food insecurity and poverty. With a mandate from Cheryl Prescod, Executive Director of the BCCHC, they recognize that "lack of access to healthy food is one example of the different systemic and physical barriers preventing people in underserved communities from achieving optimal health."

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TACKLING WICKED PROBLEMS THROUGH FOOD FOR HEALTH LEVERS

Each team in the Anchor Cohort named a 'Wicked Problem' that they looked to address during their time in the Cohort. Wicked problems were identified through a process of problem space mapping, stakeholder engagement, and surfacing the historical roots of how problems came to be.

Toronto Anchor Team's Wicked Problem

Systemic racism contributes to poverty, over-policing, and negative impacts on mental health. As a priority neighbourhood for the City of Toronto, residents' experience with job instability and limited access to culturally appropriate foods limit opportunities to advance sustainable purchasing and contribute to community wellbeing.

The Toronto Anchor Team identified 10 priority Food for Health Levers to action in their work. The Food for Health Levers were developed by Nourish to frame powerful ways of impacting climate, equity, and community wellbeing through food in health care. These leverage points help us make connections between our food, health, social, and ecological systems and reach their greatest potential when working in concert.



INTERVENTIONS

During the Anchor Cohort, the team employed a collaborative, experimental approach to developing and testing smaller scale ideas at the program and policy level in three key areas:

- A food prescription pilot program for families experiencing food insecurity, with fresh produce boxes being delivered directly to homes twice/month
- A container garden in Sheridan Mall, running for its second year in 2023, with garden options available to community members who have difficulty accessing fresh produce
- A supplement to the “Black Social Prescribing” project with a food add-on for Black identifying Black Creek Community Health Centre participants



Phoebe Lee, Project Lead for the Toronto Anchor Team, joins Mair Greenfield from Nourish at the traditional cooking workshop in Thunder Bay. Summer 2022.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

The Toronto Anchor Team established a diverse portfolio of **18 mutually reinforcing interventions** that emerged from **40 initial ideas*** identified during the planning phase. These include:

- The establishment of a **Food Prescription Pilot** project that provided 17 families with additional fresh food while allowing the health centre to test and refine the program for greater effectiveness.
- The planting and harvesting of a **community garden** on the land of a neighbouring shopping mall during the spring, summer, and early fall of 2022 and 2023. The garden incorporates community volunteers and offers complementary education. It also built on learning from the first year to add more cultural vegetables such as callaloo, okra, and eggplant. In the next phase of the project the team hopes to offer cooking classes for how to use the food that is grown.
- The expansion of an existing **Black Social Prescribing Project** - another variation of food prescription practice - which offered Afro-centric food hampers and an opportunity for youth to participate in an after-school cooking program.

The emphasis on growing, securing and/or preparing culturally appropriate foods increased the uptake of fresh and healthy foods and has had a tangible impact for hundreds of people:

**Due to changeover in staff and partners, the team experienced limitations with their capacity to advance all of their ideas. However, they successfully advanced several projects, as noted above.*



Samples of culturally responsive foods grown at the Black Creek Community Health Centre onsite garden: tomatoes, okra, and eggplant. Summer 2023.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT



65 bags of produce (greens) weighing approximately 230 kg were given out between August and October 2022, and in 2023 the team has already provided over 20 bags
**data as of July 2023*



100% of the 17 families participating in the Good Food Prescription pilot reported an **increase** in their consumption of fruits and vegetables, **reductions** in food costs and time spent locating appropriate food, with some identifying they were feeling healthier and more energetic and had decreased worry around obtaining fruits and vegetables.



The **157 people** in the Black Social Prescribing Project not only reported an **increase** in the consumption of healthier foods, but they also appreciated having greater access to culturally-responsive food. For example, **15 Black youth** are now participating in a 'Cooking with Friends' program at a nearby secondary school where they learn to utilize the produce in culturally-responsive recipes.

LOOKING FORWARD

The Toronto Anchor team has incorporated garden management responsibility as part of the Dietitian's job description to ensure sustainability of the work going forward. The team has also secured ongoing financial commitment from BCCHC to continue the garden year-over-year as long as mall management allows the health centre to continue using the space. In the future, they plan to integrate mental health programming in conjunction with the garden and cooking classes. Opportunities for continuing the Food Prescription & Black Social Prescribing Projects are unclear at this time as they are highly funding-dependent. However, BCCHC is committed to continuing the garden and exploring opportunities to connect food prescribing with responding to the needs of the community. BCCHC leadership is very supportive of food initiatives and would like to keep the conversation ongoing following their participation in the Anchor Cohort. The team has also joined a Food Access Working Group for the Northwest Toronto Ontario Health Team where they plan to stay connected and share relevant resources and ideas.



Phoebe Lee, Project Lead for the Toronto Anchor Team (second from left) participates in a sharing circle about food sovereignty with members of other Anchor teams in Montreal. Summer 2022.

Want to learn more? Reach out to the Toronto Anchor Team about their work, or contact [Nourish](#) if you're inspired to lead change in your own community.

Phoebe Lee, Community Dietitian, Black Creek Community Health Centre
Email: Phoebe.Lee@bcchc.com

Robin Speedie, Program Director, Nourish
Email: RSpeedie@nourishleadership.ca



TORONTO ANCHOR TEAM SNAPSHOT

Black Creek Community Health Centre

Provides accessible health care from a variety of health care providers, while addressing the social determinants of health. Their mission is to engage with individuals, families, and organizations to enhance community well-being, and to foster connections in order to build a healthy, resilient and empowered community.

Black Creek Community Farm

A Black-led urban farm and agricultural centre serving the Black Creek / Jane and Finch community. The farm grows fresh, organic produce and offers community programming to address food insecurity and health equity locally. The farm was the primary community partner for the early phases of work prior to needing to withdraw from the Anchor Cohort.

Other Organizations Involved:

- Alliance of Healthier Communities (AOHC) - Black Social Prescribing Pilot
- Ontario Health Team (OHT) Northwest Toronto
- Bowery Project
- Foodshare



BCCHC serves 11,389 clients annually in the Jane & Finch community in Northwest Toronto.

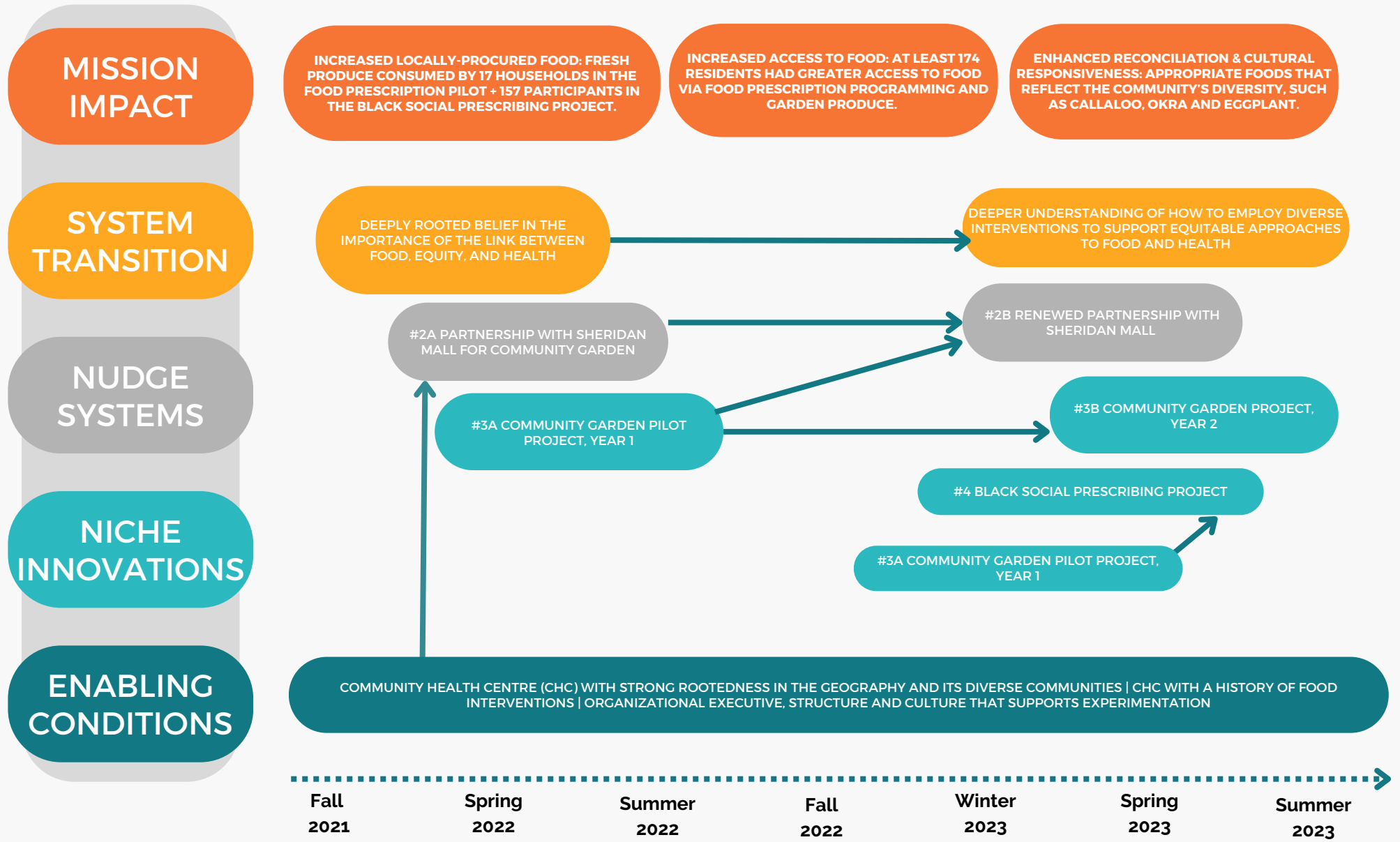


The CHC does not include any inpatient beds as it is a health centre rather than a hospital. It completes over 11,000 appointments with more than 11,300 outpatient clients served each year.



- BCCHC does not serve meals directly
- Current spending is \$300/month on fresh food boxes
- Approximately \$200/month for food hampers
- Packaged meals have been eliminated in 2023 in favour of fresher options
- \$10,000 yearly via a grant for fresh greens from Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC) and Chickapea pasta

DETAILED INTERVENTIONS & OUTCOMES



Reference Number & Date	Title	Key Outcomes	Significance	Contributions
1. Winter 2022 - Spring 2023	Food Prescription Pilot Project	BCCHC expanded a Food As Medicine program to provide 17 families with 2 food boxes per month (bi-weekly) for 4 months.	Adjustments lead to improved access to fresh produce which can improve health and wellbeing as well as reduce the costs required for food.	The Toronto Anchor Team advocated for and managed the program and led the evaluation.
2a. Spring 2022	Partnership with Sheridan Mall for Community Garden	Developed a partnership with the management of Sheridan Mall to use adjacent, mall-owned space to set up a container garden.	The space is critical for establishing a community garden and the Mall was originally not convinced of its merits.	The Toronto Anchor Team led the discussions and finalized an agreement with Mall management.
2b. Spring 2023	Renewed Partnership with Sheridan Mall	Mall management agreed to continue to allow the adjacent lot to be used for community garden space for the 2023 season.	The experience and results of the 2022 pilot were sufficiently positive to sustain the Mall management's support for the project.	The Toronto Anchor Team led the discussions with Mall management that led to the positive decision.
3a. Spring - Summer 2022	Community Garden Pilot Project, Year 1	BCCHC developed a first-time container garden to create an opportunity for community members to grow culturally-oriented vegetables and herbs.	The Garden is an 'ice-breaker' initiative to engage and build trust with the health centre and across the community in a way that builds new relationships, beautifies the space, inspires action and agency around food, and creates a pathway for further engagement with the health centre on other issues.	The Toronto Anchor Team led the development, planning, implementation, and management of the garden pilot.
3b. Spring - Summer 2023	Community Garden Project, Year 2	Developed an upgraded community garden that was able to provide more culturally appropriate vegetables, enable more opportunities for volunteering and	Allowed BCCHC to build on lessons of the 2022 garden and expand relationships within the health centre and with the Health Equity	The Toronto Anchor Team led the development, planning, implementation, and

		centre awareness of options around fresh foods in the community.	Table arm of the Ontario Health Team.	management of the garden project.
4. Spring 2023	Black Social Prescribing Project	Expanded an existing social prescription program operating in four Community Health Centers in Ontario that offer tailored, Afro-centric grocery hampers allowing 14 families (57 recipients) to create culturally appropriate meals, along with a Chef-supported after school cooking program for youth.	Demonstrated the possibility of developing culturally appropriate food programs in a way that builds local social enterprise and capacity to undertake food-related interventions in the future.	The Toronto Anchor Team employed Nourish-initiative resources to expand the pilot and coordinated inter-team collaboration for BCCHC and other health centres across Toronto.



NOURISH

Nourish believes food is a powerful way to build health for both people and the planet, in addition to providing comfort and healing to patients, creating more resilient communities, and addressing climate change.

Starting from a community of practice, we have grown to a network of leaders, organizations, and communities, shifting the focus upstream to work preventatively through food in health care.

Through our work with cohorts of leaders and action learning programs, we equip innovative individuals and teams with the skills and momentum to empower bold leadership in climate action and health equity. We work across community, institutional, and policy scales to steward food for health innovation.

Join us!

NourishLeadership.ca