

RALPH THORNTON CENTRE

ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT 2012-2013



REFLECT > **RENEW** > **RE-ENERGIZE**

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FUTURE FORWARD...

Planning Together

The Ralph Thornton Centre (RTC) was established by Toronto City Council in 1980 as a “multi-purpose community facility” within the former Postal Station G. When named, it was also identified as a “Town Hall” to recognize its historic role as a gathering place for community members. Over the years, the RTC has played a central role in bringing residents together to identify, discuss, and address local issues and needs. The RTC has a proven track record of supporting social justice, civic engagement, and social, recreational, and cultural activities.

REFLECT – Where are we now? Why are we here?

Over the last 33 years, there have been many changes in the demographic profile of the community, its needs, expectations, and the services available to provide support. In recent years funding for programs has declined and it has become increasingly difficult to secure scarce resources. While the City of Toronto provides core funding for the operation and accessibility of the building, the organization is responsible for finding funding from other sources to provide locally relevant programs.

This is as an important time for reflection and renewal. In response to the opportunities and challenges

facing the Centre, the RTC Board of Management initiated a Renewal Planning Process to update our understanding of our community and its needs, what we do well and what we could do better, and what changes, if any, need to be made to ensure community and program relevancy continues.

Starting with an updated community profile and input from our partners, members, funders, stakeholders, space users, and staff, we are identifying current and future community needs and expectations, as well as challenges to be addressed and new opportunities to be explored. We will also examine the RTC’s unique role in the community as we consider the future.

RENEW – Where do we want to be?

While City Council sets the RTC’s general mandate, the RTC Board determines how that mandate is carried out. With the information gathered during the reflection phase and the community’s help, we will verify and update the RTC’s mission/vision (how its mandate is implemented) and overall goals (what it will achieve as an organization serving our community). We will also determine and verify our strategic directions (to provide focus for Centre activities) and priorities (which activities are



undertaken and when) for the next three to five years.

RE • ENERGIZE – What do we need to do? How do we know if we are successful?

The Renewal Plan will document what we need to focus on organizationally and programmatically; as well as identifying the resources needed to successfully implement our new strategic Renewal Plan. As we move forward, we will also identify and measure our performance and success so we know how we are doing and make adjustments to ensure we remain on the right path. We will report annually to our members to ensure community accountability. Together our future is bright and we are excited about our renewed commitment to the community and to the future success of the RTC.

REFLECT > RENEW > RE • ENERGIZE

COMMUNITY MATTERS

One of the principle purposes of the Ralph Thornton Centre is to provide opportunities for community engagement.

The Community Matters (CM) series does just that, providing information to community members and engaging them in topics that affect the neighbourhood and the larger community.

Starting in the Spring of 2012, CM has offered participants a chance to hear planners, columnists, activists, writers, professors, and other experts — from our neighbourhood and from farther afield — discuss:

- rapid changes in our neighbourhood and their effect on community members
- history of our community and previous transformations in the east end
- ideas for improving community safety
- keeping housing affordable
- making transit more accessible

CM events have been extremely well-attended, on average attracting 60 to 100 attendees. Participants have contributed stimulating comments and thought-provoking ideas to the discussions, and demonstrating the well-documented inclusive and progressive nature of the South Riverdale community.

CM receives regular requests by attendees to record the events so that those who are unable to attend may access the information. As yet, we have not been able to find an effective way to do this, but we hope to in the near future. The RTC website will host any information we're able to communicate.

CM was initially planned and organized by some RTC Board members, and they were later joined by community members who believed this was an excellent project and wanted to help out. Our thanks go to Carla Cesaroni, Joy Connelly, Diane Dyson, Judy Leung, Maggi Redmonds, and Thorben Wieditz for their hard work in making it all happen. Thanks

also to the Queen-Saulter branch of the Toronto Public Library, the staff at the RTC, and student Jen Allard for their support of this project, and to Krista Downey, who designed our wonderful posters.

In the coming season, CM will partner with various local groups and organizations that have ideas and outlooks they would like to share with the neighbourhood. Watch for events on food, the south-of-Eastern employment lands, and small businesses in the area.



Providing opportunities for community engagement.



VOLUNTEER REPORT

The Ralph Thornton Centre relies on volunteers to make the Centre such a special place. In the past year, over 165 volunteers have given their time to ensure the success of the RTC. Our volunteer program is a key component in creating strong partnerships with various individuals and organizations throughout Riverdale. Our volunteers contributed over 8330 hours of their time last year to make the community and neighbourhood a better place for all.

We have a range of volunteers contributing their time, enthusiasm, and commitment to the delivery of our programs. For example, local high school students spend hours supporting our After School and Mentor programs. These youth prepare healthy, nutritious snacks, play games with the children, and provide homework help. This experience gives them the opportunity to learn about volunteering while giving back to the community, at the same time as they earn their community service hours.

Many of the students enjoy the experience so much they remain volunteers with us until they graduate. This has also meant that we have been able to write letters of reference for many of our students who are university and college bound. It is a joy to watch as our younger volunteers evolve from sometimes timid and shy teenagers

to competent young adults who have become community leaders.

Our newest space, the Exchange Loft, was created to connect community members with the resources they identify as important to them. Our program volunteers help participants:

- create a welcoming space when people arrive at the RTC
- access computers to check emails and search for employment
- make connections with other people in the community who have common interests

One volunteer, Thomas Tai, is a student in Criminology at York University and a local community member who joined the RTC to give back to his community. Thomas has learned about the diversity of Riverdale and the need that exists for our unemployed residents.

Thank you to Thomas, and to all our volunteers, for everything you do!

“My time as a volunteer at the RTC has taught me the importance of community centres such as this one.”

“The experience I gained has shown me that many people rely on their community centre for many purposes. It may be for general help with computer usage, a way to check their email to create important documents, or to have access to today’s technology, like scanning and printing documents. Some community members even rely on us for basic services such as access to telephones.”

“I have enjoyed volunteering at the RTC, especially when I see visitors getting the help they need and taking the opportunity to use the centre as a tool to find employment through our offered services.”

“Many of our neighbours also get involved and help out at various street festivals and community events that celebrate our neighbourhood. It is due to the hundreds of people who donate their time that the RTC can keep our doors open and the building thriving. It is you that keeps us moving forward.”

Thomas Tai



MENTOR PROGRAM

Over the past year, the Mentor Program (MP) at the Ralph Thornton has continued to successfully create a dynamic supportive learning environment for local newcomer children between the ages of 6 and 12 (grades 1 to 6) with a particular focus on supporting Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese speaking) children.

The program is a great example of how the RTC partners with our local community agencies, high school students, and volunteers to deliver effective programs that make a difference in our neighbourhood.

This year over 62 volunteers and students contributed their time and shared their skills and talents to ensure the success of this important community program.

The MP is in high demand. We have seen a significant increase in the number of children wanting to get into the program and have found that the most effective way to promote this program is through word of mouth – so many children and their families love the program that we have a waiting list.

As a free program, it provides an interesting balance between individualized learning development plans and community-building activities. Our lead staff, Janice Zhang, Program Coordinator, meets with each student and their primary caregivers to develop an

individualized learning plan tailored to the specific strengths and areas of development for each child. This learning plan focuses on three strategies:

- Learning English — reading and writing; helping with homework/ tutoring
- Improving self-esteem/ self confidence: — through conversation circles and group activities
- Community integration — through events, excursions, and various activities

A volunteer recently told us why they love helping out in the program:

“During lessons, I have to be the teacher, but during activities I get to be more of a friendly mentor, similar to an older sibling. Each and every day I get to see the children improve their English – volunteers feel the satisfaction of being able to help someone.”



2012-2013 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- 72 children registered and 25 were on the waiting list – a 12% increase from last year.
- Over 100 parents reached out to us to discuss student progress, gather information and feedback, and make connections to various services in the community.
- Quilt Art Project – an innovative art and story collection project focused on encouraging participants to tell their tales in a fun way while capturing their special stories and cultural connections.
- Reading Tent – our first-time collaboration with the Frontier College Summer Reading Tent Program introduced children to a range of new books and specialized literacy games and activities that encourage reading. Many of the children came out of their shells for the first time and happily read out loud to each other – it was wonderful to see.
- Cooking Camp during March Break – our collaboration with South Riverdale Community Health Centre offered a special March Break program focused on providing hands-on learning opportunities regarding food, nutrition, and proper kitchen hygiene. It was also a great chance for the children to share and learn about cultures.

The MP Coordinator is Jianli (Janice) Zhang who joined the RTC team in 2010.

Also pictured at left is After School Program Co-ordinator, Sonnja Parris.

Jianli has a community service diploma and has worked with a variety of communities. She speaks English and Mandarin, which makes a huge difference in supporting Chinese newcomers and their families better integrate into the community.

“Having been a newcomer myself, arriving at Canada almost 10 years ago, I experienced the same difficulties that these kids and their families are facing – my own child in a new school in a new country with a new language, the lack and unavailability of information about the community, the initial cultural shock. Thus I feel the necessity and burden to be a teacher, guidance counsellor, and friend to help ease children and their families into the Toronto community, to help them rebuild their confidence and comfort in their new home.

“Every day, I come to work with fervor to see their progress and with love to hear their stories. I feel youthful at heart because I am able to learn a lot from my kids and youth volunteers. The lessons in the program have been customized because I understand that each child is unique; many program ideas came from the children and youth volunteers, and have been implemented to help more and more to learn more effectively and contently.

“I am very glad to hear parents say to me, ‘My son/ daughter has learned fast. There is certainly significant improvement; he/she corrects my pronunciation now.’ I love and value my job. I think the best part of it is the ability to help people and to make such a direct and dramatic difference in people’s lives every day.”

RIVERTOWNE COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROJECT

The Ralph Thornton Centre continues to play a vital role in neighbourhood development in Rivertowne. Through the efforts of our staff, volunteers, and community leaders we support a number of community events and activities intended to foster community and neighbourhood integration. Over the past year some of those included:

Community Leadership Training

The RTC was delighted to work with Toronto Community Foundation's "Playing For Keeps" to recruit Rivertowne participants to attend a Community Leadership Training Program at George Brown College. Fourteen Rivertowne residents completed the two-weekend intensive training that focused on developing skills in community leadership, sport, and activation. RTC staff provided important assistance to the students. Graduates will receive certificates at a ceremony in September.

Suzette: Somehow Suzette finds time to volunteer for her community despite the fact that she is the mother of four girls and always on the go. She has been a key player in virtually every community development initiative in Rivertowne and her girls are amazing — always willing to help out. If you want to get a job done, get Suzette on the case! Suzette will be graduating with a certificate from George Brown College later this month as one of Rivertowne "Playing For Keeps" Community Leaders. She was also the editor of the Rivertowne newsletter for two years.

Miriam: The RTC had the good fortune to hire Miriam part time last year as a Community Outreach worker, although she'd been volunteering in her community years before that and most recently with the Women's Leadership Group. Miriam seems to know everyone in Rivertowne and everyone seems to know her. One thing that makes Miriam such a valuable volunteer is her particular skill in recruiting other volunteers. It's hard to say no to Miriam! She's the mother of five fantastic kids, and she's obvious instilling the importance of community life in them — they get involved in pretty much any program or opportunity that's offered.

Playing For Keeps Games Day:

As part of the Community Leadership Training Program each participant organizes a "game" in their home community. In Rivertowne, with the deadline fast approaching, several participants joined forces to host a community games day, combining their efforts and offering an afternoon of fun with games of volleyball, nerf baseball, mini putt, crafts, baking, and dance (salsa, hip hop, and merengue) with healthy snacks from the Good Food Pop Up Market. A video was made of this event and it will be posted on the Playing For Keeps website.

"The work Ralph Thornton is doing is great. The soccer team and the BBQs really help neighbours be more friendly."

— Salvador, TCH tenant, Rivertowne

Back To School BBQ

The annual Back to School BBQ is a long-standing tradition in Rivertowne. In 2013, the event was largely initiated and led by tenants, specifically members of the Rivertowne Women's Leadership Group, who were also members of the Party Planning Team established three years ago and which existed in a less formalized way since Don Mount Court Days. The RTC supports this tenant-driven initiative by, among other things, printing flyers and providing back-to-school supplies. There is a strong sense of pride on the part of the organizers that this is their event, rather than something put on for them.



Rivertowne Profiles

Debbie: Originally from Africville, Nova Scotia, Debbie is a long-time resident of Rivertowne, dating back to Don Mount Court days. You can always count on Debbie to volunteer, especially if it's anything involving kids. She's like a grandmother to many in the neighbourhood and is always looking out for everybody's well-being. Debbie loves the arts and was the most enthusiastic and reliable volunteer during both the *Carbon Buster Play* and the development phase of *In Another's Shoes*. You always knew that she'd be on time (or even early).

Sainne: This passionate young community leader is a force to be reckoned with! And her passion is contagious — when Sainne gets involved in an activity, she's able and willing to recruit others. For several years, being a skilled basketball player and mentor, she has organized and coached a girls' basketball team in Rivertowne. Even when obstacles got in the way, she kept working towards her goal. You definitely want to have Sainne on your side!

"I've seen a lot more tenant engagement, including youth engagement, as a direct result of RTC's community development project and I can see that it's making a positive difference."

— Marsha, TCH tenant and former youth rep, Rivertowne

"Thank goodness for RTC. I really care about the kids in Rivertowne and so does RTC. They help make things better for the kids and that's the most important thing."

— Debbie, TCH tenant, Rivertowne

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

The After School Program (ASP) at the Ralph Thornton Centre is a free program designed for children ages 6 to 12. We focus on creating a safe, stimulating environment that meets the needs of each child. Activities such as cooking, art projects, homework, active and cooperative games, and library visits help children develop social, academic, and interpersonal skills. In addition, we offer a school pick-up SafeWalk service and provide a healthy snack daily for children enrolled in the program.

This year ASP provided nutritious snacks for 15 to 20 children daily. Our cooking workshop taught participants about kitchen safety and nutrition, and how to prepare healthy food with a focus on fruits and vegetables. This workshop proved to be one of most enjoyable activities for children as they were encouraged to bring their own recipes to prepare, cook, and eat together.

ASP was supported by our program coordinator, 7 placement students and 10 volunteers, as well as a local community artist. Collectively they contributed their time and expertise to support and enhance the program.

Successes/Highlights

- **Safe Walk:** This was the first year of Safe Walk and it was met with great enthusiasm by parents and schools. Since offering this service, our participant numbers have doubled. We walked almost 20 children a day. We also used this time to teach participants about sidewalk, road, and street safety and to increase awareness of their surroundings.
- **Art Show:** Our annual Art Show was amazing. Children invited their families and proudly displayed their works of art. Along with the art exhibit, there were craft activities and special performances, including singing and dancing — a great way to wrap up the ASP year.
- Several local adventures this year included swimming at Jimmie Simpson, celebrating Earth Day at South Riverdale Community Health Centre, and touring local playgrounds — the favorite being Joel Weeks.

The ASP coordinator is Sonnja Parris, Child and Youth Worker, who joined the RTC in 2011. Sonnja has over 10 years of experience working with children and their families in the South Riverdale Community.



2012-2013 RTC Board of Management (pictured on the next page >>)

Back row, l to r:
Nooreen Pirbhai
Maggi Redmonds
Krista Downey
Sandy Williams
Thorben Wieditz

Councillor Paula
Fletcher
Michèle Harding

Absent:
Allison Colin-Thome
Lauren Walter

Front row l to r:
Hongmei Cai
Jennifer King

Photo credit:
Mandeep Flora

REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT

Reflect Renew Re-Energize: The theme of this year's annual meeting and report was not chosen lightly.

Over 2012 and 2013 we have experienced many challenges and change at the RTC. We are excited that, as part of the renewal process, we are re-engaging with those who use our services and space and with our valuable partners in the community. We welcome your input into this process.

Responsible and accountable governance of a community agency is a duty and an obligation that a board undertakes. The RTC's Board of Management has exercised this duty with great care and diligence over the past two years. We believe that the results of this conscientiousness will ultimately be demonstrated in improved RTC programs and services and increased contributions that foster a healthy, inclusive South Riverdale.

The Board's profound thanks go out to many people, only some of whom we have space to name here.

Our retiring Board members deserve our deep gratitude. On top of regular Board duties Krista Downey generously

offered her amazing marketing and graphic design skills; Lauren Walter brought new energy, talent, and success to our fundraising efforts; and Thorben Wieditz was a tremendous Community Matters idea-generator and organizer. We will miss all of them on the Board but hope they remain involved in the RTC.

We also owe thanks to our interim management team: ED Maura Lawless: Financial Manager Rick McCarthy; and HR Manager Hussain Haider Ali, all of whom stepped up and in to offer much-needed support and competence, and to the folks at our sister agency, The 519 Community Centre, who generously allowed them to spend some of their time with us.

And lastly, our thanks go to Paula Fletcher, our Ward 30 Councillor, and to numerous staff at the City of Toronto who have demonstrated their commitment to strengthening community by so willingly contributing their assistance and expertise.

The Board is looking forward to an exciting coming year. We hope you'll participate in the RTC with us.

Maggi Redmonds,
President, Board of Management



REPORT FROM THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It has been a real pleasure stepping into the role as Interim Executive Director at the RTC over the last few months. I can absolutely say this is an amazingly vibrant community and neighbourhood and I have truly enjoyed my time here.

Over the past number of months I have worked closely with the Board, staff and Councillor Fletcher to better understand the community needs and priorities, stabilize the funding structures, and begin to plan for the future. The Centre staff have demonstrated a true commitment to the community and are eager to create a space where people feel welcome, engaged, and part of a vibrant, active community. The Board through their vision and leadership have demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the value and role the RTC plays in the community. I am confident that the efforts they are undertaking through the Renewal Plan will lead to amazing things for this community, the neighbourhood, and the Centre for years to come.

I know I will look back on this time fondly and want to thank everyone for making me feel so welcome and part of this amazing team and organization — the future is bright.

Maura Lawless
Interim Executive Director

Maura is also the Executive Director at The 519 Church Street Community Centre

ANNUAL AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

For the year ended December 31st, 2012

Administration/Core City Funding*

City of Toronto	\$633,708
Toronto Public Library - Rental	\$39,364
Total	\$673,072

Program Revenue

Province of Ontario	\$75,905
Government of Canada	\$7,102
City of Toronto	\$72,750
Foundations	\$54,283
Other Grants	\$51,417
Donations and Fundraising	\$10,845
Rentals/Other	\$19,626
Total	\$291,928

Administration Expenses

Salaries and Benefits	\$558,051
Purchase of Service	\$90,450
Materials and Supplies	\$24,571
Depreciation	\$862
Amortization of deferred capital contributions	-\$862
Total	\$673,072

Program Expenses

Salaries and Benefits	\$224,355
Purchase of Service	\$26,511
Materials and Supplies	\$16,776
Depreciation	\$9,216
Total	\$276,858

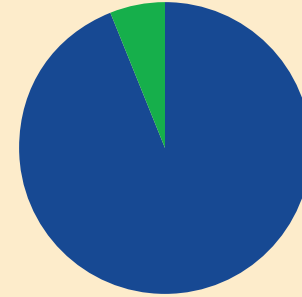
Total Revenue \$965,000

Total Expenses \$949,930

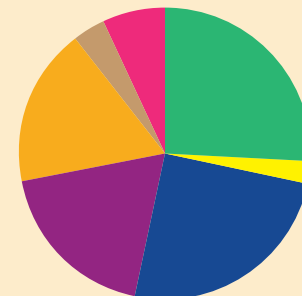
Total Surplus/(Deficit) \$15,070

***Administration/Core Funding:** This is the funding RTC receives from the City of Toronto to keep the building open and accessible to the community — it covers basic salary and benefits as well as the hard costs such as insurance, utilities, and maintenance costs.

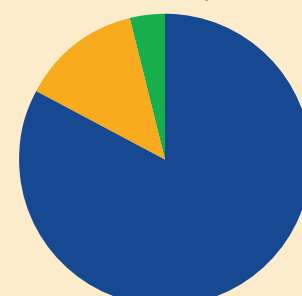
2012 Administration/Core City Funding*



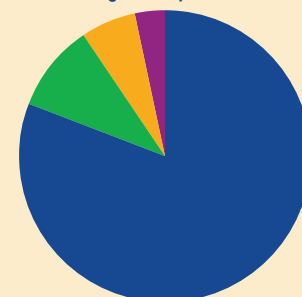
Program Revenue



Administration Expenses



Program Expenses



BRINGING COMMUNITY TO LIFE

In October of 2012, the Ralph Thornton Centre hosted a Chili Cook-off Fundraiser with proceeds going toward the After School Program and the Children and Youth Mentoring Program. The fundraiser was the first of its kind and was successful in creating more awareness for the Centre and for developing new relationships within the community.

The RTC was a stop on the annual Jane's Walk for the Riverside area. The theme for this year centred around how things are made in Riverside. We believe that communities are made at the RTC and walkers were guided through the building to witness artwork made by the children and youth of the Centre and the beauty of our space available to bring people together.

The Riverside BIA has been a huge supporter of the work we do at the RTC. This past spring, the BIA's Eats and Beats event brought people from all over to the streets of Riverside. The Queen and Saultier Library, the RTC, and community-minded businesses provided children's activities and lively music at the Saultier Street Kid's Zone! Our corner was a big hit!



OUR VALUED SUPPORTERS

Adair Morse LLP, Barristers & Solicitors
Air Canada Club
Bulk Barn
Ed's Real Scoop
Frontier College
Hangman Gallery
Happy Gathering
Krista Fogel Photography
Le Canard Mort
Le Rossingol
Metro
Photo 5
Red Sandbox Theatre
Riverdale Massage Therapeutics
SJI Tanning
South Riverdale Child Parent Centre
The Green Park Grocer
The Roy
The Tea Leaf
The Wine Rack



Thanks to the many individuals who generously supported RTC!

Particular thanks to Jennifer King and Ken Steubing and their family & friends, who graciously donated to RTC in celebration of Jen & Ken's wedding.



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