

Toronto / December 5, 2020

On Thursday December 3, parents and guardians in Thorncliffe learned that one of their local schools, East York Elementary, would be closed until December 10 due to COVID-19 related concerns. Journalists descended on our community soon after, causing great anxiety and stress among residents.

But there is another story about our community that has not been told.

Since the beginning of the pandemic Thorncliffe residents have followed every public health guideline. They have been masking, washing hands, and physically distancing – practices that are not easy to follow in our densely populated, highrise neighbourhood.

Our community has enthusiastically embraced testing. We were delighted that the first voluntary mass asymptomatic testing program in the province was located in our neighbourhood.

“Once I am tested and good then I am more confident in getting involved in various initiatives. I don’t have to worry about infecting others at this point” said Shafiq, a young Thorncliffe resident.

Thorncliffe residents have also been looking out for each other over the last several months as they have always done. Community members have been volunteering their time and efforts at our neighbourhood Food Bank to make sure no resident goes hungry. Residents started a local enterprise to sew and distribute cloth face masks, which gave us the tools to protect ourselves.

“Thorncliffe residents have taken extraordinary steps to support each other and look out for each other. It is a model for how communities can respond during a pandemic to keep themselves strong despite the challenges they face. TNO and FHC are proud to work with them” said Ahmed Hussein, Executive Director of TNO-The Neighbourhood Organization.

A large number of people in our community are essential workers. They work in health sector, grocery stores, warehouses, drive delivery trucks and work in other jobs in the service industry that puts them at risk every day. They do the jobs that let other Toronto residents fulfil their basic needs in the midst of the pandemic. Even though, almost 99% of our residents live in high-rise rental apartments in a very high density area, they work hard to stay safe.

Despite the challenges arising from these realities and despite the systemic barriers they face, Thorncliffe residents have responded to this unprecedented health crisis with determination and resilience. This is our story.

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