

## We are More than a Community – We are a Family.

In support of a News Release made by TNO and FHC.

From community leaders.

December 6, 2020

We are a truly diverse and multicultural community. We have different backgrounds with some of us coming from countries of war, low economy and/or a totalitarian regime. So please believe us when we say we know the definition of struggle all too well. In times of immense stress, people tend to show their true colours and we are so proud that our community has applied what we know best: compassion, empathy, kindness and the willingness to help each other despite own struggling.

We were one of the first communities to respond to the challenge call from Michael Garron Hospital to sew 2000 masks per week for our community. Thanks to TNO and other donors, our sewers were equipped with fabric and machines to achieve our mission to provide for Thorncliffe Park and other neighbourhoods. Without the intention of receiving a return, we came across the unfortunate situation where donating masks in a Facebook group was rejected because other members were offering this for sale.

In response to food insecurity, we were the first community to come together to cook and distribute hot meals. Our mission then extended beyond our neighborhoods, as we received calls from all over the GTA and even from Social Services Toronto caseworkers. Without funding and with the generosity of caring people, we were able to accomplish so much when all the food services were closed like food banks, Wheels on Meals agencies and community kitchens. Thanks to our volunteers, more than 500 families received hot meals during the month of Ramadan. After these initiatives, several other projects were inspired in our community which are continuing today.

We are the ones who are helping our neighbours with rent payments; who help seniors with purchasing air conditioners, laundry machines and other equipment because they are left without Personal Support Workers due to social distancing; we have taken the place of social workers for our seniors and people with disabilities helping them with resource navigation and grocery delivery; we are the ones who are helping families with newborns to buy cribs and other necessary baby supplies; we are the ones who are helping new families make last month's rent payment. And all this is just to name a few...

We are the ones who have prevented the burnout of our parents who have children with disabilities. Lockdown has made it a stressful for these families as their children are regressing in their conditions. Us, their mothers, decided to take matters in our own hands and organize outdoor activities for our 22 children. Thanks to our residents' generosity (again without governmental funding) it was possible to organize and give our kids two weeks of summer with

the needed social interaction. As a result, our parents have got some relief and our children have had a smooth transition into the new school year.

The word “boredom” does not exist in our community. We are too busy helping each other. We encourage each other towards a healthy lifestyle (stepping initiative from Abdul Rashid), getting engaged in supporting women in the community by virtual weekly storytelling sessions to decrease the anxiety related to COVID-19, organising a completely voluntary bike match and distributing 75 bikes for women in the community for safe riding during the pandemic (Najia Zewari), food distribution (Shakeel Ahmed, Safia Parveen, Eshrat Meshkoti and many others), self-education, entertaining our kids through Zoom activities, organizing free tutoring, etc. We are striving, we are blooming, we are living a full life.

We would like to thank all the local agencies, not-for-profits and supporters, including TNO and FHC, for their ongoing and invaluable support for our residents during this period particularly. We thank our landlords for keeping our buildings safe and we thank our schools for all the efforts to keep our children safe. Despite the latest incidents, we believe that our schools’ staff do everything in their power to prevent their facilities from an outbreak.

We are endlessly grateful to our residents for staying united and being supportive and sensitive to each other’s needs. We are a family at the end. Lots of love and hugs to everyone.

Shakhlo Sharipova  
“Reach for Change” Community Support  
Group, Leader  
TPASN, Thorncliffe Park Autism Support  
Network, Founder  
[Sh2010sharipova@gmail.com](mailto:Sh2010sharipova@gmail.com)

Safia Parveen  
Thorncliffe Park Wellness Café, Leader  
[safiaparveen@hotmail.com](mailto:safiaparveen@hotmail.com)

Najia Zewari,  
Women’s Wellness Café, Leader  
Women’s Cycling Network, Co-Founder  
[nzewari@hotmail.com](mailto:nzewari@hotmail.com)

Eshrat Meshkoti  
Local Champion from Flemingdon side  
[Eshrat.m66@gmail.com](mailto:Eshrat.m66@gmail.com)