

The Real BFN

Bathurst-Finch Network, 2013



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The Bathurst-Finch Network is a group of community workers and residents in the Bathurst-Finch area. Since 2009, we have been working to respond to the Bathurst-Finch neighbourhood. Our approach is organic. We stay flexible, curious and inspired. Our strength is our people. We are surrounded by brilliant, committed, festive, courageous and incredibly creative community members and workers who are determined to do what it takes to make a better world, starting in Bathurst-Finch.

In 2013, the Bathurst-Finch Network will celebrate our fourth anniversary. We decided this would be the perfect time to map out the work we've done to date, and start to plan for the future. In these pages, you'll find snapshots of what we've accomplished with your input, skills and imagination.

The BFN is facing considerable challenges, including limited funding and staff support. At the same time, our spirit is strong, and we are continuously inspired by the Bathurst-Finch community to reach higher and to do more. We can't wait to see what happens next.

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE STAFF OF ANTIBES
COMMUNITY CENTRE FOR THEIR DEDICATION TO THE
BATHURST-FINCH COMMUNITY AND THEIR UNWAVERING
SUPPORT FOR THE BATHURST-FINCH NETWORK.
YOU INSPIRE US EVERY DAY TO BE BETTER, TO DO BETTER,
AND TO BUILD THE COMMUNITY OF OUR DREAMS.

“The BFN means a lot not only to me but also to the entire community. As a group we help each other with personal issues, we inform one another of events, and we always welcome newcomers with open arms. **The BFN is like a second home.”**

Muslema Noori, community resident and BFN member

“BFN is like a family to me. It doesn’t just fill in for lacking services. The BFNers are people who **truly care.”**

Jenny Gonzalez, community resident and co-Chair of the BFN Food Action Team

“BFN to me is like a home of multicultural people. I find this network a very comfortable place to be. Whatever you say is heard and accommodated. It was framed perfectly to connect isolated residents **to the community.”**

Cleofe Bangsoy, community member and founding member of BFN women's committee

“The BFN to me means a new chapter in my life. It means home, community, hope, togetherness, **change, joy and delight.”**

Shannon Thompson, community resident and member of BFN events and women's committees

“To me, the BFN means dignity, harmony, respect, happiness and passion. The BFN makes an incredibly strong and welcoming bridge between **newcomers and new life in Canada.”**

Canan Polat, community member and founding events committee member

“That is what the BFN is all about. **People and compassion.”**

Maureen Simpson, BFN member and community leader

IDENTIFYING ISSUES

Bathurst-Finch has one of the highest concentrations of people who are very new to Canada in the city. The neighbourhood also has one of the highest concentrations of elders, and a higher than average concentration of youth. Social isolation is a real issue in Bathurst-Finch, as it is city-wide. In addition, many programs geared towards newcomers in the area require participants to be Permanent Residents or Convention Refugees, eliminating significant numbers of community residents. Finally, community residents and workers have identified user fees, transportation, child care and food security as barriers to participation.

The BFN has focused on building free community programs and events that include child care, healthy food, transportation supports and interpretation and that have no registration criteria. Our goal is to create barrier-free spaces that are welcoming to everyone. It is a permanent work in progress.

TAKING ACTION

Community women's dinners. The BFN women's committee is led by Diana Valdez and is responsible for planning monthly community women's dinners, one of the BFN's most popular programs. Attended by approximately 30 women each month, including committee members, the dinners bring together women across cultural backgrounds, generations and language groups. Activities have included workshops on tenants rights; discussions on women's rights; think tanks on neighbourhood improvements; yoga classes; ski trips and much more. Activities are informed by women's dinner participants, who have expressed through a recent survey that they attend primarily for social and community-building opportunities.



Inspiring Bathurst-Finch Women's committee members (from left) Hamda Mohamed, Diana Valdez and Cleofe Bangsoy. The Bathurst-Finch Network Women's Committee has kept the BFN's monthly community women's dinners going for more than two years.

The Meet and Speak conversation circle was created by community worker Sarah Crossley in response to the fact that many of her clients were unable to access language supports due to their citizenship status. Currently, most programs for newcomers are open only to Permanent Residents and Convention Refugees, excluding many in Bathurst-Finch. The BFN ESL committee's conversation circle at Centennial Library is criteria-free, attracts 15 - 20 people weekly, and has been running for two years thanks to the incredible dedication of area volunteers—in particular the dedicated Farnaz Rostami—and community workers.

Health promoter
Judith Otto presenting
at the BFN awards.
Judith helps run the
'Meet and Speak'
conversation circle and
offers her well-honed
facilitation skills to the
BFN Free School.



Anton Samarkin,
founding Chair of the
BFN events committee
and creator of the
BFN's original website,
accepts a BFN
Community Building
Award.



Community Resource Night. While Bathurst-Finch has one of the highest concentrations of recent newcomers in Toronto, there is no legal clinic immigration lawyer for the area. The BFN worked with North York Community House, Unison Health and Community Services, West Toronto Community Legal Services, Downsview Community Legal Services, Refugee Law Office and Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre to bring a monthly resource clinic to Antibes Community Centre that includes lawyers, settlement workers, case-coordinators and financial counsellors. The legal clinic can see 6 - 10 participants per month, and is consistently full. Community Resource Night continues thanks to the amazing work of Unison health promoter Julia Fursova and North York Community House settlement worker Marina Novinskaya.

Community Resource Night has not solved the fact that there is no immigration lawyer assigned to the area, and the systemic problem of lack of area legal representation for immigration and refugee questions remains.

Erez Sussman, founder of the
BFN Music Committee with
Diana Valdez, Chair of the
Women's Committee. Erez leads the BFN
band, and organizes open mic nights
that bring together community
residents of all generations to play music
and share poetry.



Open mic nights. The brain child of area musician Erez Sussman, BFN open mic nights feature live music and poetry from neighbourhood residents across generations and cultures. Festive, spontaneous and always surprising, open mic nights are held 2 - 3 times per year for packed houses at Antibes CC.

Community Day. For the past three years, the BFN events committee has organized 'Community Day,' a neighbourhood extravaganza featuring art projects, children's activities, live music from the BFN band, healthy food and an agency fair. Attended by more than 400 people in 2012, Community Day is a key opportunity to gather feedback from the neighbourhood, and has become the Bathurst-Finch Network's signature event.



BFN member and much-loved community leader Maureen Simpson (left) with events committee supporter Daisy Stone.

BFN awards. In December 2012, the BFN held our first ever volunteer awards. More than 120 people came to honour 40 inspiring community volunteers and activists from Bathurst-Finch and across the city. Live music was provided by the BFN band, and audience members were treated to inspiring speeches and lots of happy tears.

Ski nights. Over the past two years, the BFN women's and events committees have organized ski nights at Earl Bales Park. This year, the Youth Service Network is joining the fun. It's the first time on skis for most participants, and volunteers and Antibes CC staff come along to make sure it's a warm and welcoming experience.



BFN Chair and neighbourhood hero Mike Sterling accepts a BFN Community Building Award.

Youth events. The Youth Service Network (YSN) is Chaired by Jaeyell Kim from Griffin Centre and made up of frontline workers from across the neighbourhood. This year, the YSN is introducing an exciting series of events including skiing, skating, movie nights, karaoke and more. The Bathurst-Finch Youth Council is also organizing its own events, and collecting information about how to make Bathurst-Finch friendlier for youth.

FOSTERING COLLABORATION

We work with community residents and a wide variety of partners to run our community programs and events. Antibes Community Centre, Centennial Library, Fisherville Junior High, Northview Secondary School and Herbert Carnegie Arena offer much-needed space, which is always at a premium in the Bathurst-Finch area. Organizations like North York Community House, FoodShare, Circle of Care, JVS Toronto, Griffin Centre, Downsview Services for Seniors, Unison Health and Community Services, YMCA, Second Harvest, Centennial Library, Antibes Community Centre and Toronto Employment and Social Services offer much-needed staff supports. A broad group of community agencies and City Departments including North York Harvest Food Bank, Live Green Toronto, and Toronto Public Health also help with special events and on committees.

The BFN's
monthly
community
women's
dinner.



Members of the Bathurst-Finch Youth Council
at the BFN Community Building Awards.
Youth Council members are active in building
welcoming spaces for youth in the BF area.

Back row, from left: Vance Tang,
Ye En (Rebecca) Kim, Sureka Vishnumoorthy.
Front row, from left: Maral Mousavi,
Grace Nuri Kim, Angelina La.



Both the City of Toronto and area service providers have identified food security as a key issue in the Bathurst-Finch neighbourhood. The BF area has been classified as a 'food desert,' by Toronto Public Health—an area where low cost grocery stores are few and far between, and where lack of access to public transportation makes a bad situation worse.

IDENTIFYING ISSUES

Until recently, there was no food bank in the Bathurst-Finch area. Instead, area residents travelled to Lansing Food Bank at Yonge and Sheppard, generally taking more than one bus to arrive. This was a particular hardship for area elders who use food banks. In 2009, Lansing reported that a high percentage of food bank visitors were coming from the BF area.

TAKING ACTION

The BFN worked with North York Harvest Food Bank to raise awareness among stakeholders about food need in the area. It also established a sub-committee called the 'Food Action Team' to bring partners together to begin to address the issue of food security in the neighbourhood.

CREATING INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2011, the BFN worked with partners including North York Harvest Food Bank, Unison Health and Community Services, Circle of Care and FoodShare to write a collaborative Trillium grant to start a community food bank in the BF area. The Trillium was successful, and the group identified a space through a partnership with Northview Secondary School. The Bathurst-Finch Community Food Bank opened in December of 2011.



Rockford Community Garden

FOSTERING COLLABORATION

The Food Action Team offers some support to the Rockford Community Garden, using our range of partnerships to connect youth with community gardening. The group also works to coordinate and connect food programs throughout the neighbourhood including the Northview Garden, Rockford Community Garden, the Bathurst-Finch Community Food Bank and the SHOP program.

PROGRAMMING

When Second Harvest began receiving a high volume of calls from the Bathurst-Finch community asking for food relief, they asked to partner with the Food Action Team to run the 'SHOP' program. SHOP provides free fresh produce on a monthly basis in a market-like atmosphere. Today, the Food Action Team works with Second Harvest to deliver the SHOP program to more than 100 families per month.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Food Action Team is led by Jeanny Gonzalez and Vanessa Ling Yu, and works with a wide range of partners in the area and city-wide on food issues. Leadership on food security comes from community residents, who are passionate about trying to make sure everyone in the neighbourhood has access to healthy food. Participation in Food Action Team work around food security includes North York Harvest Food Bank, Griffin Centre, Second Harvest, FoodShare, Unison Health and Community Services, Circle of Care, Antibes Community Centre, Live Green Toronto, Toronto Public Health and North York Community House.

Much-respected BFN Food Action Team co-Chair Jeanny Gonzalez accepts a BFN Community Building Award from superstar BFN volunteer and community organizer Shannon Thompson.



MOVING FORWARD

The BFN has identified low minimum wage as a key issue in the Bathurst-Finch area. As a result, we have invited the Workers Action Centre to share their expertise on minimum wage at various BFN events. We partnered with the Workers Action Centre to run a workshop for BFN participants on minimum wage and workers rights. Following this session, we plan to connect with our area Member of Provincial Parliament and Member of Parliament to discuss this and related issues. In addition, the Food Action Team has met with our City Councillor about the need for expanded school nutrition programs.

PROGRAMMING

Access to Recreation and Community Space

IDENTIFYING ISSUES

Access to recreation and community space has been identified by community residents and service providers as a pressing issue in Bathurst-Finch. In 2011, Unison Health and Community Services conducted an environmental scan and identified access to recreation as the number one issue in the Bathurst-Finch catchment.

Until recently, Bathurst-Finch's one community centre, Antibes Community Centre, was one of the highest users of the recreation subsidy program, the Welcome Policy, city-wide. At the same time, in 2011, the subsidy program began freezing on a regular basis, and was often unavailable to those who qualified. As user fees continued to go up, and new fees were applied to formerly free programs like leisure swim, community residents and frontline workers reported increasing frustration with difficulties in accessing the community centre and associated programs. In addition, community groups consistently had trouble finding space to run programs and hold meetings.

TAKING ACTION

Some members of the BFN worked with community residents to map the process to making a community centre a 'Priority Centre,'—free for children, youth and seniors. The BFN raised the issue of making Antibes CC a Priority Centre at its candidates forum during the 2010 municipal election, securing a campaign promise from now-Councillor James Pasternak. For more than two years, community residents made deputations at City Committees and wrote to Councillors and Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff.

In addition, the BFN wrote to the Library Board, asking for Centennial Library to add Monday hours. The group also lobbied the school board to have Northview Secondary School named a 'priority school'—free for community groups.



Founding members of Community Recreation for All (CRIA) at the BFN Community Building Awards. From left: Jennifer Arango, Amy Katz, Karen Sun, Dominique Rivière, Desmond Cole and Mackenzie Kinmond. The BFN has worked with groups like CRIA, Worker's Action Centre, Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape, Health for All and many more to build our capacity and improve conditions in Bathurst-Finch.

IDENTIFYING ISSUES

CREATING INFRASTRUCTURE

In September 2012, Antibes CC began operating as a Priority Centre, free for children, youth and seniors. Centennial Library is now open on Mondays, and today Northview Heights Secondary School offers free space to some community groups.

FOSTERING COLLABORATION

Residents and community agencies in the Bathurst-Finch area supported each other in the work to make Antibes CC free for children, youth and seniors. Residents were offered support with deputations, letter-writing, speaking to media and meeting with policy-makers. In addition, some community agencies took public stands on the issue of access to recreation, writing opinion pieces and speaking to the media.

Fantastic health planner Jen Quinlan and dynamic BFN events volunteer Canan Edim at the BFN summer picnic.



Each year, the BFN goes skiing at Earl Bales Park. It's a perfect evening for beginners, with equipment and lessons provided. We also have volunteers and friendly staff on hand and provide interpretation and child care to make sure everyone feels comfortable giving it try.



PROGRAMMING

For two years, the BFN offered weekly free women's fitness with child care at Antibes CC. The BFN has also introduced recreational opportunities into other aspects of its programming. For example, the BFN women's committee has offered free dance classes and yoga sessions. Several BFN committees also run annual ski excursions at Earl Bales Park.

MOVING FORWARD

Residents and workers in the Bathurst-Finch area have articulated their commitment to working with other communities across the city to increase access to recreation. The group would also like to see free adult programs re-introduced at Priority Centres.

CREATING INFRASTRUCTURE

Sharing Information

Community conversations, scans and surveys consistently report that lack of information is a barrier to accessing services in Bathurst-Finch. As a result, the BFN has held several **agency fairs** to foster interaction between local frontline workers and area residents. Frontline workers and area residents also work together on committees, and these informal relationships help to break down barriers, increase trust and generate personalized referrals to appropriate services.

The BFN has also worked with JVS Toronto, the Local Immigration Partnership, Bernard Betel Centre, Toronto Public Health, Circle of Care, Downsview Services for Seniors and Unison Health and Community Services to organize **networking events** for both area community agencies and residents. Most recently, the BFN seniors committee organized a **health fair** bringing together area elders with a variety of service providers.

Finally, the Youth Service Network has created its own **referral resource** for neighbourhood youth workers, and provides monthly opportunities for youth workers to share information.



Toronto Employment and Social Services and YMCA information tables at Bathurst-Finch Community Day.

The Bathurst-Finch Network has identified advocacy as one of our key strengths. We continuously gather information from community residents and workers in the context of our meetings, programs and events. This information led us to start the **Bathurst-Finch Free School**, which is run through the events committee and has explored issues including refugee health care; changes to immigration policy; the provincial budget; the city budget and minimum wage. Free school sessions are accompanied by opportunities to talk directly to policy-makers through **candidates forums**, deputations to City Council and meetings with local politicians.

Some committees have taken leadership in advocating around specific issues. For example, the BFN seniors committee was instrumental in advocating for the extension of a housing supplement for seniors. The seniors committee also worked to bring a Community Bus to the Bathurst-Finch neighbourhood, travelling with area seniors to City Hall to speak to Councillors about the importance of access to transportation. Today, the work to bring a Community Bus and other neighbourhood-level improvements continues through the **Age Friendly Project**. The Age Friendly Project aims to make Bathurst-Finch a wonderful place for youth, seniors and everyone in-between, and is moving towards practical action on issues like transportation, pedestrian safety and more.

Residents and community workers involved in the BFN have also benefited from training in anti-oppression, addressing violence against women and community-based research. Organizations that have come to Bathurst-Finch to share their skills and knowledge include Health for All, Worker's Action Centre, Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape, Campaign 2000, Social Planning Council, Building Blocks and Access Alliance.

BFN members
and mother-
daughter team
Nargis Noori (left)
and Muslema Noori.



Fantastic BFN
volunteer and founding
member Lisa Levin.



Bathurst-Finch
Network 2013

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CONTACT US

The BFN can be reached at bathurstfinchnetworkbfn@gmail.com

You can also find us on Twitter at @BFN3 and at
<https://sites.google.com/site/bathurstfinchnetwork>

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Chair, ESL Committee: Sarah Crossley

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Thank you now and always for the hard work, inspiration, skill and determination you put into the BFN: Beatriz Alas, Farah Ameri, Cleofe Bangsoy, Hannah Bontogon, Oleksandra Budna, Tod Debling, Joe Durand, Canan Edim, Audrey Egan, Michael Friedman, Julia Fursova, Elmira Galiyeva, Gillian Kranias, Patience McCabe, Leila Mojtahedi, Muslema Noori, Nargis Noori, Marina Novinskaya, Judith Otto, Jen Quinlan, Farnaz Rostami, Anton Samarkin, Mino Shajareh, Shannon Thompson and Gillian Watson.

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BFN, my sunshine

The BFN community is my sunshine

It sends colour to the BF area and far away

When you are in tears

It blows your heartbreak away

When you are surrounded by darkness in the night

The BFN comes around and casts its light

It is for the area an umbrella when it rains

It helps you when you are in pain

It holds you in times of need

It is your bandage when you bleed

When you are lonely and times are rough

It loves you more than enough.

Farah Ameri,
community resident and member of the BFN events committee

