

2022 - 2024

ANNUAL REPORT

SUMMARY OF OUR TWO INAUGURAL YEARS
APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2024



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INTRODUCTION

Raising the Hope (RTH) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to fostering mental health awareness, reducing stigma, and supporting marginalized individuals through empathetic listening and culturally informed services. Under the Canada **Not-for-Profit Corporation Act**, our mission is *to raise hope in people living with mental health, addiction, isolation, and low or under-housing*. Our vision is to contribute to the development of a society where every individual has equitable access to mental health care and social services regardless of race, immigration status or economic background.

The core values include:

1. Respect
2. Partnership and Collaboration
3. Excellence
4. Optimization of Resources



The organization aims at supporting new immigrants, refugees, Canadian residents, international students, and seniors in greater Toronto and in other parts of Canada.

The services we offer include empathetic listening, raising awareness of mental health, addiction, and isolation by addressing stigma and barriers to access services, referring to appropriate services, and building volunteers. This not-for-profit agency has already started working within the Bangladeshi community and will expand its program into other ethnic-racial individuals and communities based on the agency's work experience, research, demands and funding.

ACTIVITIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Community Consultation and Engagement

On June 24, 2023, RTH Community Services launched the first event as a public community consultation on the topic of Mental Health and Isolation located at Lobongo Fine Dining in Scarborough, Ontario. The turnout of the event exceeded expectations and resulted in success with active participation of community members from different age groups and professions. More than **40 participants** attended, including representatives from various non-profit agencies, community leaders, journalists, faith-based leaders, youth groups, and medical professionals and psychiatrists.

Key recommendations and action items emerged from the stakeholder consultation:

- Proposal for an elderly home for the Bangladeshi community
- Arranging more workshops on building awareness on mental health and suicide among youth in Bangladeshi community including faith/religious based counselling
- Targeting specific community and specific issues to work with
- Building up a team of experts in the mental health field
- Establishing collaboration with other community agencies for support and referral
- Finding alternative sources of funding and suggestions on accessing government funding at different levels

The event helped us better understand where services are most needed and how we can shape our efforts to truly reflect the voices of those we serve.

2. Direct Services

Individual Support Services:

We conducted more than **50 one to one telephone call support**, offering empathetic listening with each call lasting up to **30-60 minutes**. Each telephone support session concluded with appropriate referrals and regular follow-up provided. The topics covered were:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Newcomer Barriers and Stress
- Domestic and Emotional Abuse
- Joblessness
- Hopelessness

Face to Face Support:

Facilitated more than 5 face-to-face visits that needed deeper support to individuals and family members dealing with anxiety, depression, situational stress, and emotional abuse.

3. Volunteer Development

As one of our core pillars, we continuously aim to connect and support community members through a network of dedicated volunteers who are passionate about our initiative in helping break the stigma around mental health issues and encourage open dialogue. We conducted **3 community conversation circles** throughout the year and maintained consistent participation from **10 volunteers** who continued their engagement throughout the period.

4. Training for Growth

Through the **Capacity Building Project for Racialized Organizations (Catholic Crosscultural Services)**, our leadership team took part in training from September 2023 to February 2024.

- President: 11 sessions attended
- Vice President: 8 sessions attended
- Finance Director: 1 session attended

The learning from this training is being implemented to design by-laws, improve financial management documentation, enhance proposal writing skills, and build relationships with donors. Overall, this training is helping to strengthen governance within the agency.

Volunteer Skills Development: Two volunteers attended a Documentation Skills workshop hosted through the Toronto Hostels Training Centre, arranged by Catholic Crosscultural Services (CCS), Toronto.

5. Community Outreach

International Student Support: Organized 2 greeting and meeting sessions for international students in Toronto to address their challenges including lack of housing, limited part-time job opportunities, and environmental adjustment difficulties. More than 20 participants attended these sessions.

Digital Presence: Established a website and Facebook page to share information and resources about mental health issues periodically, expanding our reach and accessibility.

KEY OBJECTIVES AND INDICATORS

Our primary objectives in Year 1 and 2 focused on:

Empathetic Listening: Establishing our capacity to provide compassionate, non-judgmental support to community members experiencing mental health challenges, isolation, and other difficulties. This was achieved through our telephone support program and face-to-face visits.

Community Circle Development: Building sustainable community conversation circles that create safe spaces for adults and eventually children to discuss mental health openly and access support.

Volunteer Network Building: Recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers who can serve as community ambassadors and support providers.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Funding Challenges

As a new organization, Raising the Hope Community Services faced significant funding challenges in its first year. Limited financial resources constrained our ability to:

- Expand community conversation circles to meet demonstrated community demand
- Provide adequate compensation or support for volunteers
- Implement comprehensive mental health training programs
- Reach broader communities beyond our initial focus area

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Community Engagement Barriers

Stigma and Awareness: Despite our efforts, we encountered persistent stigma around mental health issues within communities, which sometimes limited participation in our programs. Educational work remains ongoing to address misconceptions and encourage help-seeking behavior.

Volunteer Recruitment: Finding sufficient volunteers with the time, commitment, and skills needed for mental health support work proved challenging. Many potential volunteers expressed interest but faced barriers including work commitments, lack of training, and uncertainty about their role.

Community Ignorance: Overcoming lack of awareness about mental health resources and the importance of early intervention required more intensive education and outreach than initially anticipated.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Looking ahead to Year 3, our priorities include:

Seed Funding Development: Actively pursuing seed funding opportunities to establish a more sustainable financial foundation for our core programs.

Program Expansion: Growing our community conversation circle program to meet identified community needs and expanding services to additional ethnic and cultural communities.

Organizational Strengthening: Continuing capacity building efforts to improve governance, financial management, and program evaluation systems.

CONCLUSION

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Community Circle Development: Building sustainable community conversation circles that create safe spaces for adults and eventually children to discuss mental health openly and access support.

Volunteer Network Building: Recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers who can serve as community ambassadors and support providers.

*Prepared by: Raising the Hope Community Services Board of Directors
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