



Not Far From The Tree
2020 Impact Report



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FROM
THE TREE**



2020: CRITICAL FOOD ACCESS

This season was like no other. When COVID hit in the spring, we saw empty grocery shelves, lines at food banks, and food insecurity skyrocket in our city. Despite the challenges that came with COVID, we knew we needed to step up to pick and share as much fruit as possible with the community. Thanks to your generous support, we were able to pick and share the harvest with hundreds of people in a time when it was needed most. Thank you for your critical support in making fresh fruit access possible during this challenging year.

SEASON BY THE NUMBERS

- A total **420 fruit picker volunteers** registered to help pick and share the harvest - a 40% increase from last season!
- **63 Pick Leaders** were trained, and led **198 picks** of **210 trees**
- Picked and shared **11,327 pounds** of fruit
- Donated **4,943 pounds** of fruit to **21 social service partner agencies** who collectively feed over 4,000 people
- On-boarded **4 new social service agencies** to receive fruit
- Hosted **5 group picks** with 3 different partner agencies, engaging 26 of their clients
- Planted a new orchard of **30 fruit trees** in Thorncliffe Park
- Provided **20 fruit trees to homeowners**, who were also trained virtually on how to plant and care for it over the long term
- Upped our total to **198,989 lbs** picked since 2008!

PICKING THROUGH COVID-19

This summer we sprang to action to create COVID guidelines that would ensure we could continue picking safely throughout the season. As shelves emptied, lines at food banks formed, and demand for food donations from our partner agencies increased, we knew we were committed to going ahead with the season to pick and share as much fruit as possible.

We created COVID guidelines for every step of the picking and sharing process, including picking up the equipment, running the pick, delivering the fruit to the partner agency, and dropping off the equipment following the pick. These detailed guidelines ensured that all our stakeholders - pickers, Pick Leaders, tree registrants, partner agencies, and storage providers were all following measures to ensure their safety and the safety of others.

Thanks to your support, we were able to stock all our 11 equipment sets with sanitation supplies, PPE, and cleaning products. All our Pick Leaders and pickers wore masks and maintained distance during the entire pick process. We're so grateful for their willingness to follow these guidelines, even through heatwaves, downpours, and while climbing trees and ladders. We also saw a **40% increase** in fruit picker volunteers joining us this season. With the city locked down, fruit picking was one of the few opportunities for people to safely get outside, connect with their neighbours and access fresh food without having to step foot in a busy grocery store.





TRAINING MORE PICK LEADERS

The volunteer Pick Leaders are the backbone of our programming. These are the trained volunteers who go the extra mile to pick up equipment, lead the fruit pick, deliver the fruit to the agency after the fruit pick, and then drop the equipment off following the pick. This year we saw Pick Leaders step up immensely to serve their communities in a time of need.

When the season started we pivoted our training process to ensure we could still recruit and train for this vital volunteer role virtually. A total of 63 Pick Leaders were trained virtually, 18 of which were new to the role this year. Instead of in-person workshops, we hosted virtual Zoom training sessions and set first-time Pick Leaders up on "Shadow Picks". Seasoned Pick Leaders would have a new Pick Leader shadow them on a pick to learn the ropes before leading one themselves. We found this system was an excellent way to train new volunteers quickly and efficiently without the need for in-person training sessions.

Collectively these Pick Leaders dedicated 568 volunteer hours to ensuring fresh fruit was picked and shared with their communities. One Pick Leader even led a total 30 picks this season! We are continually blown away by the generosity of these volunteers. Thank you for supporting their training and providing them the opportunity to give back to their community in a unique volunteer role!

"I love picking fruit that would otherwise go to waste. I grew up beside an Italian neighbour who grew tomatoes for sauces, grapes for wine, and a bunch of other fresh, delicious and beautiful vegetables. He would say, "Why spend money on subpar produce in stores when you could grow the best tasting vegetables ever!?" - Brian Maclean, Pick Leader



GROUP PICKS WITH PARTNERS

Later in the season we were able to host 5 group picks with three different partner agencies. These picks are important, as they provide a dignified opportunity for our partners to be directly involved in accessing fresh fruit in their own neighbourhood. Unfortunately this year the group picks did have to be limited in attendance numbers to allow for social distancing. Even so, we hosted a successful apple pick and pear with Na-Me-Res (the Native Men's Residence), a grape pick and pear pick with Alexandra Park Neighbourhood Learning Centre, and one apple pick with clients from Building Roots and the Moss Park Market.



Collectively these picks engaged 26 clients of our partner agencies, and resulted in **618 pounds of fruit** picked and shared. The participants took all the fruit from the picks back to their agencies to be distributed amongst additional clients.

"Participants absolutely love these picks. Many people don't realize there's even fruit trees in Toronto. It's always such an eye opening experience to realize there's food in their very own neighbourhood that we can pick." - Katie McLeod, Alexandra Park Neighbourhood Learning Centre



SUPPORTING PARTNER MEAL PROGRAMS

COVID meant more people than ever were accessing services provided by our social service agency partners. Many of our partners had an increased demand for food donations during this time. They were also experiencing challenges of their own, including closed facilities, COVID outbreaks, and increased need for their services as people faced evictions and job loss.

This season we made it our goal to get as many deliveries of fruit to our partners as possible. Thanks to the generosity of tree registrants and volunteers, we were able to donate over 1/3 of the harvest, a total 4,943 lbs, to 21 different social service agencies.

We had requests from 4 new partners to join our program and receive deliveries, including: Building Roots and the Moss Park Market, Portland Place, Aangen and the Church of the Holy Trinity. We were more than happy to get fruit deliveries to these agencies to incorporate into their meal programs.

Pictured above, Elizabeth from Mustard Seed used deliveries of grapes to make jam and juice to be included in free meals for clients distributed to the community Fridays through Sundays.





THE IMPACT:

At Margaret's House, a women's residence, fruit was shared amongst their three, 24/7 hour locations. Throughout the season, Margaret's received 22 donations, for a total 587 lbs of fruit. Fruit was incorporated into take out meals provided in their drop-in and respite centres.

"We were very happy with the donations - baking was plentiful this year! We believe that medication alone does not aid in recovery, it requires multiple approaches including a healthy diet full of fruits and vegetables. Not Far From The Tree assisted us in ensuring that participants in our programs had access to healthy meals that included a diversity of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables!"

Na-Me-Res, the Native Men's Shelter, accepted donations at two of their sites, where they feed approximately 60 people daily. They received 23 donations for a total 492 lbs of fruit. The fruit was incorporated into deserts, daily packed lunches and snacks.

"It has been such a positive experience to work with NFFTT because it allows clients to access fresh fruit which isn't always accessible due to budget constraints. The kitchen staff were able to make baked goods and sauces from scratch as opposed to buying them. Clients also enjoyed going and picking the fruit themselves - it was informative and engaging for clients to participate in the process of feeding themselves".



PLANTING FRUIT TREES FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

As soon as COVID hit in the spring it became immediately clear that access to local food is a critical component of healthy, resilient communities. We were inspired by the mass movement of people who turned to growing their own food for not only themselves, but also the community. Victory or "resiliency" gardens sprang up in cities all across North America, seeds flew off the shelves, and nurseries ran out of stock. It was inspiring to see, and we wanted to join in this movement with a focus on fruit trees.

In May we launched a fruit tree giveaway, and gave 20 households a new plum, cherry or pear tree via contactless delivery. Everyone who received a fruit tree also attended an educational webinar on how to properly plant and grow it. The ultimate goal of this project is to replenish the aging urban orchard with young fruit trees that can be shared with the community in 10+ years. Planting fruit trees now will set up communities to be more resilient in the future. We need to prepare now for edible landscapes that will feed cities and help mitigate the current and future impacts of climate change.



GROWING A NEW ORCHARD

In the spring, we donated 30 fruit trees to an edible landscape project led by summerlunch+ and Thorncliffe Park Urban Farmers around the Thorncliffe Park Tower communities. With COVID it became abundantly clear that access to local, healthy food is critical for community resilience. We think that everyone in Toronto should be in walking distance to a fruit tree, and wanted to take action to make this possible - especially for Tower communities who don't have access to backyard space.

The Thorncliffe Park Urban Farmers report that members of the community have "adopted" the trees, and have stewarded them well over the summer by providing regular watering. We look forward to helping steward these trees so that they provide bountiful harvests for the community in just a few short years!



Someone is building a fruit tree orchard in the middle of Toronto





PROTECTING TORONTO'S FRUIT TREES

We've been ringing the alarm on the state of Toronto's fruit trees for a few years now. The orchard is aging, and trees continue to die or be cut down every year due to disease and old age. In 2020, a total 48 trees were reported as dead or cut down. There's of course more that have gone unreported. If we want to ensure we have a harvest in the future, we need to act now to care for the remaining trees and replenish the orchard with new, young healthy fruit trees.

Many of the aging fruit trees are also not healthy. A significant number remain unpruned, and others are showing signs of pests and disease. This year the urban orchard saw significant damage from apple codling moth. This pest burrows into apples, leaving them bumpy and deformed.

We are continuing to educate tree registrants on how to properly care for their fruit trees. In 2020 we launched a comprehensive pruning guide on our website. It's critical that tree registrants learn to properly prune their fruit trees to ensure long-term health.

This winter we also plan to educate and support tree registrants in how to band their trees in the winter to prevent apple codling moth damage. Additional volunteers will be trained to support this initiative.



ADVOCATING FOR THE BEST USE OF PUBLIC SPACE

This summer a coalition of environmental and grassroots organizations called upon the city to allow for immediate access to public golf courses for free public use during the pandemic. Not Far From The Tree signed on as endorsers to this coalition. We support the need for a dialogue to be had not only about the specific issue of golf courses, but also the bigger issue about how city land should be used, and who has access to it. Public land should be in the interest of public good, and all city land should be open to consultation on the best uses that prioritizes the needs of local communities. We also see great potential for unused or underused spaces to be turned into community gardens or community orchards where people have access to growing their own food.

In cities like Copenhagen and Los Angeles, there are initiatives to plant thousands of fruit trees in public spaces to provide fresh, nutritious food and also expand access to green spaces and tree cover. We see a huge potential for the City of Toronto to adopt similar initiatives, and will continue advocating for the planting of fruit trees as a way to increase food access and ensure food sovereignty for all neighbourhoods in Toronto.



LOOKING FORWARD:

With food insecurity skyrocketing, 2021 will be just as challenging for so many people. Partners are continuing to see unprecedented demand for food. Next season we plan to focus once again on our fruit picking and sharing program to get as much fruit to as many people as possible. One of the primary focuses of 2021 will also be registering more trees to our program, as more trees registered means more fruit is available to pick. Our goals include the following:

- Register 100 new trees to our program
- Train at least 30 volunteers as "Tree Scouts" to find and register new trees with the program
- Recruit and train at least 20 New Pick Leaders
- Focus on picking more fruit around the edges of our operating area
- Plant an additional 30 fruit trees across Toronto
- Provide virtual educational opportunities for tree registrants and volunteers related to tree care and maintenance - specifically winter pruning and apple moth prevention.
- Continue to deliver as much fruit as possible to our partner agencies, and where possible, bring their clients directly on fruit picks

A huge thank you for your support during this critical time.

If you have any questions about this report
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*Not Far From The Tree is a project on
MakeWay Charitable Society's shared
platform*



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