

OVERVIEW

Through a broad range of partnerships, Brander Gardens ROCKS connects families living in the Brander Garden's Capital Region Housing Complex and surrounding high-density housing to a range of accessible (in neighbourhood), wrap-around supports and opportunities that promote social inclusion, community connection and enhanced quality of life. Specific supports have been developed that target different members of the family:

Children and Youth are offered after-school programming, tutoring and academic support, in-school reading support, access to community soccer, fitness and recreation, music and art, summer activities, leadership and employment.

Parents and Tots are offered early childhood development/ literacy, and parental supports and connections through Peanut Butter and Jam, and the Centre for Family Literacy.

Adults are offered financial related supports including the Make Tax Time Pay Program and the WECAN food basket program

The **Whole Family** is offered opportunities to benefit and connect to neighbours and the broader community through community suppers, and community gardens.

1. MANDATE

BG ROCKS leverages the resources and capacities of participants, neighbours, community organizations and institutional partners within and outside of Brander Gardens and the greater Riverbend area to provide a web of support that promotes the wellbeing and social inclusion of the most vulnerable in our community. Our programming is designed to celebrate our diversity and provide opportunities for families and neighbours to connect and build relationships amongst each other. Our supports and opportunities are targeted at all members of the family, are based on what families say is most important to them, and build on families and the community's assets and resilience.

2. VISION

BG ROCKS' vision is to create a community where diversity is celebrated, neighbours know one another, and all children and families flourish.

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of BG ROCKS are to promote the following protective factors for children and families living in our community:

- Deeper connection and sense of belonging to neighbourhood and community and opportunity to access and equitably participate in community facilities and activities (children, youth and families)
- Reciprocal intergenerational and intercultural sustained friendships and relationships with neighbours (children, youth and families)
- Engagement in pro-social activities that enhance participants' sense of resilience and of being valued, contributing members of the community (children, youth and families)
- Increased access to quality early childhood development and school readiness opportunities and the development of parental mutual support networks(pre-schoolers and parents)
- Improved academic competence and confidence in school leading to greater success in school and ultimately high-school completion (children and youth)
- Connection to resources and supports that result in increased understanding and capacity to manage personal finances and build assets (adults and youth), increased individual capacity to obtain and retain employment that provides for basic economic security (youth), and increased access to healthy, affordable food (families)
- Increasingly caring and connected community that cares about our neighbours, celebrates diversity, and ensures that programs and services are responsive, inclusive and welcoming to all who live in the neighbourhood (community residents and organizations)

4. BELIEFS AND VALUES

Importance of Social Connection:

BG ROCKS believes that there is a strong link between social connectedness and wellbeing. When people feel connected to a supportive community, when they know their neighbours and when their neighbours know them, people are less likely to experience stress, depression, loneliness and isolation. Social connectedness is one of the cornerstones of individual and family resiliency, and helps support strong communities, families and individuals.

Importance of Recognizing and Celebrating Diversity:

BG ROCKS is committed to not just incorporating diversity but changing who we are and how we operate to ensure that our work is truly intercultural, intergenerational and creates the “Us” of reciprocal neighbourliness across income levels, religions, family types, abilities, etc.

We act on these values by:

- Intentionally “Creating space for Intercultural and Intergenerational Connection”
- “Celebrating Together”
- Creating a “Philosophy of Us”
- Grounding our work in a “Relationship Based” model
- “Caring for One Another”
- Believing that “Everyone can Contribute”
- Creating space and mechanisms for “All Voices to be Heard”

5. HISTORY

Brander Gardens ROCKS (Reaching Out to Community Kids), was born out of conversations around a kitchen table that began in 2010. The first participants at that table were a couple of neighbours, a social worker from the City of Edmonton, the Community Librarian from the Riverbend Branch of Edmonton Public Library, and the coordinator of the Riverbend Community League. All had a vision of being able to work collectively to provide opportunities that would enrich the lives of children living in the Capital Region Housing Complex in Riverbend.

Our first fledgling steps were to run a reading program under an umbrella in a little space in the complex, followed by a Family Fun Day in May 2010 that the kids helped organize, and where we asked families to identify their priorities from a wish list of potential supports. Based on their input and the passion, commitment and determination of a growing number of people around the table, we were able to run a Green-Shack Program within the complex in the summer of 2010 and begin a one day/week after school program in Riverbend Junior High in January 2011.

By 2012 the collaborative had grown to include individuals from the Terwillegar Riverbend Advisory Council, the Riverbend United Church and the United Way of Alberta Capital Region, and the opportunities to build relationship amongst one another and provide supports for children and families had grown exponentially.

By 2016, programs and activities for vulnerable families available through BG ROCKS included after-school, academic tutoring, summer programs, gym nights, field trips and access to community soccer for children and youth; access to early childhood development programs for mums and tots; access to youth leadership opportunities; access to financial empowerment and food security programs for families; and opportunities for all to connect and make friends with neighbours through regular community suppers and community gardens.

Our success and growth can be attributed to the willingness of all who have come to the BG ROCKS Collaborative Table over the years, to leverage their relationships and networks in ways that enable us to collectively respond to the desires and realities of the most vulnerable in our community. We believe that

together - we can build on our individual and collective gifts and assets to create a neighbourhood where diversity is celebrated, neighbours know one another, and where all kids and families can flourish.