

East Scarborough Boys & Girls club making a difference

William Doyle-Marshall

When Ron Rock assumed the job of Executive Director of the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club about two years ago, he conducted an informal survey among parents, children and youth in the community and the youth told him, "Nobody wants to hire us. We don't have the skills. We don't know how to access the systems to get employment opportunities."

East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club provides services to children and families who live in Toronto's east-end. The 401 bounds the community on the north, Kennedy Road to the west,

the lake on the south and the Pickering Town line at the east.

Of course there are some overlapping of children who might come from just outside of the catchment area.

The Kingston-Galloway neighbourhood, considered by many as a war zone and high crime community, is located in the middle of the club's service area. Questioned about the community being a bit quiet within recent times, Rock responded promptly "May be that's positive because the club has traditionally provided some solid recreation, physical activity programmes for that community." However, in the last year and a bit it has been maintaining those as a

basic, core services. Some new services have been integrated into its programmes such as a portable resource centre, employment training and referral.

During his initial survey, the young people told Rock that it was difficult to get employment or marketable skills. As an experienced social worker, the former City of Toronto employee knew that people are often reflections of their environment. "So if a kid grows up living in an environment where there is continuous

upheaval or where there is crime, that child sees that in some cases as the norm," the administrator reflected.

With constant, rapid growth, the club's administration is considering expansion plans to meet the neighbourhood needs.

Many residents of the club's catchment area are considered disadvantaged and in many cases are isolated. While they may not be poor or receiving social welfare - there are situations where both parents are working - sometimes there is just not enough money to be able to meet the needs of the family.

Some households might consist of single-parent families.

Recognizing that there are families in the area who might not be able to come to the club to access the resources, the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club has purchased a mobile recreation vehicle, loaded up with basketball standards, ramps for skate boarding, computers and all kinds of games.

"We take it out to those areas that we consider to be isolated or where families might be more disadvantaged, where they cannot come into the club for service," Rock emphasized. Arrangements are made with apartment buildings, shopping malls and schools to

open up the facility on specific evenings or weekends. The proud administrator calls the experiment an interesting and innovative way of taking services to communities as opposed to communities always having to come to a physical location for service.

"What we are saying is that we can service more people by going to them as opposed to waiting for them to come to us. We are servicing them right in their community, in their local area, right where they live, right in their neighbourhoods," Rock explained.

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