

**A United Way hub helped Nafisa feed her family and find a community**

**When Nafisa first arrived in Canada she was isolated and struggling to make ends meet. Then she found the Rexdale Community Hub**

Nafisa has spent her adult life championing human rights. In Afghanistan, she worked for the United Nations and the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission, making life better for women and children.

But some people didn’t approve of her work or how her family lived. Her husband was badly beaten and died of a heart attack a short time later. Her daughter’s safety was threatened because she attended an American school, ultimately escalating to a kidnapping attempt. After that, Nafisa knew things had to change.

“The next day I packed my whole life in one suitcase and started my journey to Canada.”

When they got to Toronto, Nafisa and her daughter stayed in a basement room where they slept on their clothes, using a winter coat as a blanket. Her Ontario Works cheque went mostly to rent, with just $200 left over to cover all other expenses. The strain took its toll.

“I was struggling with my mental health when I was really having financial problems,” she says. “My daughter was asking for support, and I couldn't support her.”

Then Nafisa was connected to the United Way-funded Rexdale Community Hub. She first saw a doctor at the hub’s health centre, then was connected to Delta Family Resource Centre, another United Way-funded organization that ran a food pantry at the hub. Nafisa started getting groceries there to fill in the gaps—and started volunteering there, too.

When the pandemic hit, the hub continued to be there for Nafisa and her daughter. Nutritious, culturally relevant food baskets were delivered to their door every week, which made a huge impact.

“This food program is really important because it connects people to the community and gives them a sense of security,” says Nafisa. “It helped me manage my financial situation and also gave me some peace of mind that I had everything, especially for my daughter.”

Throughout the pandemic, Nafisa continued to volunteer, helping with everything from packing food baskets to sewing masks. Today, she has a job at one of the hub’s programs, which has provided her with even more financial security.

All of this has helped Nafisa become happier, healthier and more comfortable in her new home.

“Volunteer work brought me out of my isolation and anxiety,” she says. “When I had just come to Canada, I felt such loneliness but now I know that I'm not alone. I have a lot of people who are like family members I love. I receive a lot of love, hugs and kindness. It saved my life.”

Hundreds of people like Nafisa come through the hub’s doors every year for after-school programs, for someone to talk to, for help making ends meet. And more people have been coming in for food support, especially over the past few years.

“Before the pandemic, we had a few people coming to the hub asking for food,” says Amra, the Executive Director of Rexdale Community Hub. “Now, seniors come and ask for food. Children, youth come to the hub, they ask for food. Mothers ask, ‘do you have any baby formula?’ It’s a very frightening reality.”

But the hub is rising to meet this surge in need. They’re connecting people to food programs and to services like housing support, employment programs and settlement support.

“The hub brings all these great things to the community due to this infrastructure that United Way created,” says Amra. “We engage everyone in the community and build capacity through initiatives like the Food Access Committee. It’s not just us as an organization talking about food security, everyone in the community is talking about it. What the issue is and how the issue should be addressed.”

This combination of work is essential to United Way’s approach to addressing food insecurity. Meeting immediate food need *and* connecting people to the programs and supports that get at the underlying issues, all while helping to reduce food insecurity through our research, advocacy and policy work.

None of it would be possible without the work of people like Amra and Nafisa. They’re a key part of the United Way community, thousands of people working together to improve life for everyone in the GTA.

“I'm very proud that I have done a lot of volunteering with United Way's funded programs,” says Nafisa. “And I’m proud to be part of this community.”