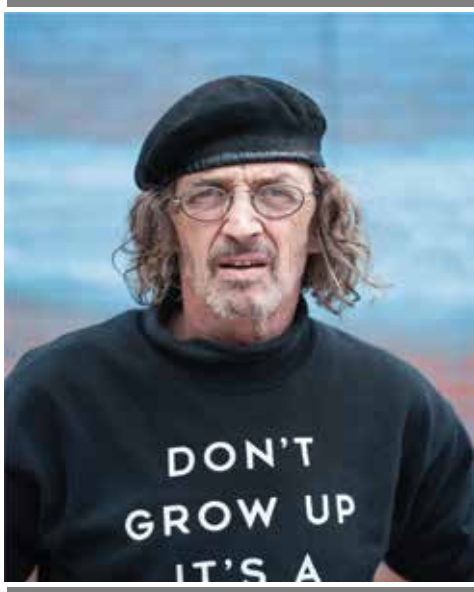


FINDING SUSTENANCE FROM FOOD...AND FAMILY

Darquis lives in a food desert. He goes to a United Way supported agency to eat better and spend time with his adopted family! ♦



My name is Darquis. I've lived in my neighbourhood for five years. A few months ago, I started going to a United Way supported agency to try and help other people and myself become part of the community again. Since having an accident a few years ago, I had isolated myself and needed to do something to get back into the world.

I left home when I was 15 because I didn't fit in. I was a figure skater, ballet dancer and musician in a small town that was all baseball and hockey. I travelled across Canada. I first moved to Toronto, where I met my wife. But when rent became too expensive, we decided to move.

I was in a major work-related accident—I was crushed by 800 kg of Plexiglas—and so can no longer work. Then my wife died and I found myself all alone with my son. She was my world and the rock of our family. I felt so alone. I started hiding out in my basement.

One day, I ran into a case worker from the agency at a food bank. She invited me to the agency's activities, but I didn't want to go. After she spent a few months insisting, I finally said yes. I couldn't believe it! I found a new family. It's as though I had come home.

We're the ones who decide how our home is managed. That's why we want to come here and do things. When I started working in the garden, they said, "If you have ideas, share them and we'll help you implement them." In fact, thanks to the garden, I feel like I'm back at work at a new job. I can't stand sitting around my house anymore. I feel like I have a purpose in life. And I want to show my son that you can overcome anything.

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We live in an area where there is nothing to eat, as the neighbourhood has no food markets. People who live here, and especially seniors, have nowhere to go to get healthy food. Most don't have a car, so the only option is to use public transit or paratransit, or ask a friend for a ride just to go to the grocery store. I'm doing better now, but five years ago, the idea of getting on a bus to run errands a few kilometres away was impossible. I had to go to the convenience store, which cost me double the price. That's what people do.

At the agency, we have a weekly booth that sells affordable fruits and vegetables. You can get a full paper bag for two dollars. Right now we just have sprouts, because we just launched the program. But by the end of the summer, we'll have tomatoes, cucumbers, celery—everything. We're trying to start a food system with a garden, market and purchasing group. When I get there, they always ask if I have food at home. If I've run out, they always find something for me in the fridge or pantry.



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