

# Riverdale Neighborhood House, New York, USA



## Description

Riverdale Neighborhood House (RNH), founded 150 years ago as a Bronx settlement house, now serves over 6,000 community members annually through programmes spanning early childhood, after-school enrichment, teen internships, college prep, arts, fitness and senior support. Established five years ago, RNH's Food and Farm Hub has grown into a vital resource addressing food insecurity and advancing sustainability.

The Hub includes a teaching garden, a pollinator garden, a youth-run farm stand, a neighbourhood fridge, food distributions, a monthly pop-up community café, a teaching kitchen, cooking classes, a teen internship programme, and organic waste composting. RNH continues to evolve and respond to the needs of its local community, fostering inclusion, resilience and connection for all ages.

“ Simple, tangible gestures can open communication and create independence and dignity. ”

– RNH Executive Director, Andrew Belton

## Spotlight

RNH is evolving from a traditional place-based community development model to a dynamic place-making approach. This shift moves beyond serving a geographic area to actively shaping vibrant, inclusive places that nurture community identity, engagement and shared ownership.

This means transforming programs into community-driven hubs. For example, the Food and Farm Hub is not just a service addressing acute need for food access, it is also a safe and welcoming gathering space for people to connect with each other. Place-making includes designing spaces that invite participation e.g. teaching garden, youth farm stand, pop-up community café, food distribution and where residents can build agency and co-create solutions.

This approach emphasises **social connection, equity and inclusion across generations, cultures and economic backgrounds**. Financial stability underpins this mission. RNH achieves resilience through a blended model of philanthropic support, fee-for-service income and a steady income stream as an education programme provider for local government. In an era of deepening inequality and divisive politics, RNH fosters a sense of place and belonging.

## Activities

Food surplus redistribution

Market bag programme (i.e., food parcels)

Neighbourhood fridge

Teaching garden

Community café

Youth farm market

Hot meals

Volunteering and employment opportunities

Cooking classes

Education programmes for all ages

Composting

Community classes (e.g., art, fitness)

Skills development, internships programmes

Music and community events

# Impacts



## Food security and economy

- RNH supports over 4,493 people (2025) in accessing affordable, healthy food by redistributing 19,400 kg of food (38,800 meals) through distributions, the Neighbourhood Fridge, and the youth market. It supplied 1,384 kg to the Fridge, sold 4,045 kg of produce at cost, and grew 560 kg in the teaching garden. The temporary Market Bag programme provided weekly parcels to 100 households, distributing 574 kg, alongside café-prepared meals.
- Employs staff and trains over 100 volunteers in growing, cooking, distributing and selling food
- Generates income, e.g., with the market, and invests it back into Food and Farm Hub activities/programmes
- Facilitates connections and support for other smaller organisations and businesses through a community anchor model, e.g., partnerships with local business donating surplus
- Fosters food citizenship, agency and ownership, e.g., teens' internships



## Sustainability and resilience

- Uses food surplus (19,400kg/year) and prevents food waste, avoiding 26 metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>eq
- Enhances biodiversity by cultivating 41 crop varieties in the teaching garden and maintaining 94 plant species, including a pollinator garden and restoration areas in the Riverdale Park
- Improves soil quality by composting
- Reduces greenhouse gases by producing and using seasonal, local food



## Access and demand for healthy, local food

- Provides land and facilities for food growing, e.g., teaching garden
- Develops food growing and cooking skills, e.g., teaching garden supports 8 teenage interns and 4 adult volunteers
- Raises awareness on the benefits of healthy, local food: Power of Produce (POP) club
- Offers and supports purchase of locally grown, seasonal, healthy food



## Health and wellbeing

- Enables social connections and community engagement via social events (e.g., Seniors Splash, Music in the Garden), classes and courses (e.g., Skills Share workshops)
- Improves emotional wellbeing and mental health
- Improves health via physical activity (e.g., swimming pool, fitness classes) and access to healthy food

# Takeaways



Bringing together groups from different generations, cultures and economic backgrounds can be challenging, yet it creates transformational impact. This approach exemplifies a scaling deep strategy: shifting norms, beliefs and behaviours to foster lasting change.



The diversity within RNH's membership not only strengthens social cohesion but also enhances financial resilience, underpinned by the sharing and transfer of skills and resources.



Adopting a community anchor approach (e.g., community-led, multi-purpose, responsive to local context, support and coordination of network of grassroots food justice organisations) significantly extends reach and impact, serving as an effective strategy for *scaling out*.

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For more information visit the project page, [Global Food and Environment Institute](#) or contact [Dr Effie Papargyropoulou](#) at [E.Papargyropoulou@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:E.Papargyropoulou@leeds.ac.uk).