



# Opening the Door to Opportunity

OPERATION COME HOME

STRATEGIC PLAN:  
2024 to 2027



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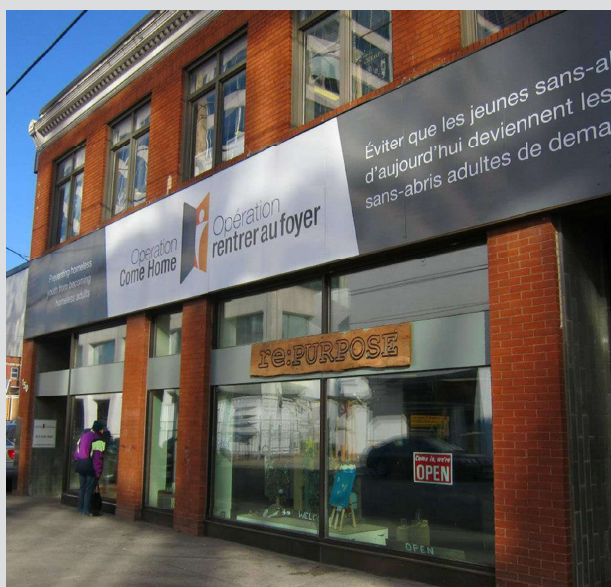
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## Message from the Chair of the Board

Chris Day

Operation Come Home occupies a unique space in Ottawa. While working actively and creatively - often on a shoestring budget - to serve ever-growing numbers of young people, our primary goal is to put ourselves out of business. We want to no longer be needed. But to get there, we first have to prevent homeless youth from becoming homeless adults. Our work is not yet done.

The good news is this: we continue to make great progress, and we are helping our young clients choose better paths all the time.

Whether that's helping them get their final credits to graduate high school, assisting in their search for a job or a decent place to live that they can afford, giving them valuable work experiences that they can take into a career, or getting off deadly street drugs, our successes are measured in individual lives improved and saved as well as in the metrics of strategic plans like this one.

OCH's incredible team of compassionate and effective frontline professionals makes all the difference. We salute and celebrate them. They will be the ones who bring this plan to life, and whose work will improve the lives of the young people they encounter.

All million-plus Ottawa residents have a stake in their success. As board chair and on behalf of my fellow directors, it is an honour to support their efforts. And we all look forward to a day - sooner than later - where we can say 'our work here is done.' Until then, onward ... with entrepreneurial drive and a healthy appetite for bold, innovative solutions.



# Executive Summary

Operation Come Home is looking forward to an ambitious three years. Our team will continue to innovate with the ultimate goal of helping our youth achieve their personal goals, and end their experience with homelessness.

This plan was developed in consultation with community stakeholders including other agencies, donors, organizations that provide funding, and crucially, the youth we serve. Our programming will continue to adapt in response to ongoing input from the young people that seek our services.

## Program Goals

- We will continue to support youth with their basic needs. We will grow by increasing services to offer more meals, personal care products, clothing, and immediate access to crisis support.
- Our team will work to expand our mental health and substance use counselling, to meet growing demand.
- New employment programming launched in the coming years will become more targeted to help youth move rapidly into specific sectors that interest them.
- We will increase the number of youth enrolled in our education programs, helping them complete high school while on-site at Operation Come Home.
- The capacity of our social enterprises will grow, increasing the number of paid positions for youth, and providing them with further opportunities to gain valuable work experience.

## Operations

- The board and management team will prioritize cost-of-living pay increases for staff, ensuring our front-line support workers can cope with growing inflation.
- We will continue to grow the number and variety of positions on our team that are filled by people with lived experience, which will increase the efficacy of our programs.
- Our team will develop new fundraising events and opportunities that appeal to Ottawa's changing population.
- We will support the growth of the Operation Come Home Foundation, and generate increased investments that support our youth to achieve post-secondary education.
- Our volunteers, staff, and clients will continue to speak out about issues that concern them, ensuring that the concerns of our youth are clearly heard at all levels in our community.

Above all, Operation Come Home is a results-driven organization with a dynamic, responsive, and forward-thinking approach. We remain dedicated to finding solutions that empower youth to achieve their goals.

# Health and Wellness

Operation Come Home helps more than 700 youth each year, ensuring they can maintain their health and well-being while they are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

This includes support for basic health needs such as food, clothing, personal care products, dental health and access to medical services. Beyond their immediate health needs, our youth also face challenges due to past experience of trauma or mental health issues. The rise of dangerous opioids, and the widespread availability of illicit substances, increase these challenges.

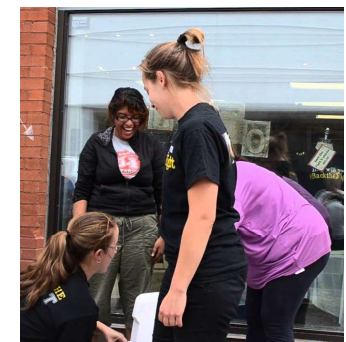
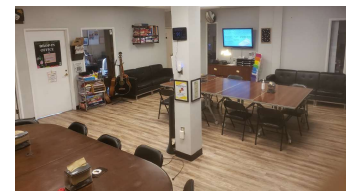
## Community Context

- Basic necessities are harder for youth to access due to increased demand across the system. As one example, Food Bank usage rose 68% in 2023, relative to pre-pandemic levels recorded in 2019 .
- Our city is in the midst of a widespread substance use challenge. Overdoses have increased more than 170% over the past five years and street-involved youth are at higher risk of harm .
- Community mental health services are at-capacity, with all ongoing support programs currently operating with lengthy waiting lists.
- Youth are spending long periods of time within the homelessness system. Each day increases the risk of exposure to events that cause trauma.

## Our Goals

- Ensure all youth who come to Operation Come Home receive support for their basic needs and can access daily counselling in our drop-in Resource Centre.
- Develop and grow community outreach efforts to secure free or sponsored basic necessities for our clients
- Offer mental health, substance use, and harm reduction programs, and increase our efficacy by ensuring all staff receive trauma-informed and cultural sensitivity training

ACTION	TARGET FOR 2026	OUTCOME
Operate our drop-in Resource Centre during peak periods	750 clients receive regular help each year	Youth receive help with basic necessities and crisis supports
Increase daily crisis support counselling	Offer 4800 instances of crisis support	Youth receive support to address immediate needs
Increase ongoing mental health support	Provide 150 youth with ongoing support each year	Youth receive support to maintain mental health and well-being
Offer substance use and harm reduction programs	550 youth receive help to reduce or end risky substance use	Youth experience fewer harms and improved health and well-being



# Housing

Operation Come Home helps youth find and maintain their housing. Our team supports youth to reunite with family, find new places to live, or resolve conflicts that cause housing insecurity.

Our priority is to help youth avoid the experience of homelessness as an adult. Our team operates according to a housing first philosophy, in which youth in need of new homes are provided with options that are unconditional, integrated in community settings, and offered alongside wrap-around supports.

## Community Context

- Ottawa faces significant shortfalls in affordable rentals, and the situation will take many years to improve. The Alliance to End Homelessness estimates an additional 15,000 housing units per year are needed. As of December 2023, Ottawa has only 5,000 new units in development.
- Youth experiencing homelessness experience significant stigma when looking for housing, which has worsened as demand for affordable housing has increased. Landlords are increasingly selective about their tenants and restrict the number of youth they will support.
- Youth in the system report challenges understanding the City of Ottawa process, and often experience uncertainty regarding the status of their applications for housing support.

## Our Goals

- Continue excellent partnerships with the City of Ottawa and the Ministry of Community, Children and Social Services, to provide youth with housing supports.
- Expand diversion programs like Reunite that keep youth out of the homelessness system.
- Expand HousingWorks and our master leasing program, to increase the number of rental units available to youth.
- Work with the Alliance to End Homelessness and other partners to convene a committee of peer youth with lived experience of homelessness to refine our housing program, and provide advice to the sector on ways to improve the housing situation for clients.

ACTION	TARGET FOR 2026	OUTCOME
Support youth to secure new housing through traditional landlord-tenant agreements	30 youth at minimum secure new apartments each year	Youth experiencing homelessness achieve permanent housing
Where possible, reunite youth with family members to divert them from the system	40 youth are reunited with family each year	Youth are diverted from prolonged involvement in the homelessness system
New units are secured for youth through master leasing	16 new units are acquired for master leasing per year	Affordable housing supply improves for youth served by OCH



# Employment

Helping youth find stable, long-term employment is one of the most impactful actions we can take to improve their future well-being.

Employment improves youth resilience, provides them with structure in their lives, gives them greater dignity and autonomy, and improves their financial outlook.

## Community Context

- Employment programming is well-supported by the city, the province, and the Federal Government. There are many employment programs available to youth across the city. We focus on youth in extreme poverty and those experiencing homelessness.
- Hybrid work arrangements have caused uncertainty in neighbourhoods like Centretown, where retail and food service businesses depend on people working and visiting downtown. These businesses historically provided employment for our youth. Additional worries about a possible recession cause many employer to hold off on investing in new staff.
- Sectors like construction, tourism and consumer retail are forecasting strong employment demand in the coming years. Aging workers are retiring and new projects are being planned that will open up employment opportunities at all skill levels.
- OntarioWorks and Employment Ontario are merging in 2024, leading to program changes that may impact how clients are able to access Government support.

## Our Goals

- Continue to provide employment support that helps youth achieve employment in fields they choose.
- Launch new employment programming at Operation Come Home that support youth to achieve employment in specific sectors, providing access to specific training that helps them obtain their chosen job
- Create specific initiatives that help youth find jobs in growing sectors such as tourism, construction, and consumer retail.

ACTION	TARGET FOR 2026	OUTCOME
Provide individualized help to youth to obtain stable, full-time employment	71% of participants obtain full-time work	Youth are supported to find and maintain full-time employment
Create targeted programs that help youth obtain employment in specific sectors	Three new program streams created	Youth find employment in high-demand sectors like construction, tourism and consumer retail
Continue offering direct employment through social enterprise ("SE")	40 youth each year obtain paid employment in SEs	Youth obtain their first jobs and improve their ability to achieve future goals



# Education

People with lived or living experience of homelessness are significantly less likely to achieve their high-school diploma relative to the general population. Fewer still move into post-secondary education.

This lack of educational attainment has significant long-term impacts. Without a high-school diploma, youth experience challenges achieving their goals of independence and financial stability. Operation Come Home works to improve this long-term outlook by making education accessible.

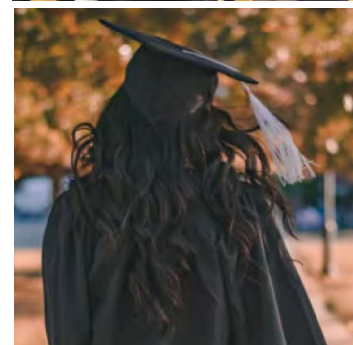
## Community Context

- The drop-out rate of youth experiencing homelessness is 53.2% compared to the Canadian national average drop-out rate of 9.4%.
- Youth experiencing homelessness face unique challenges and barriers that prevent them from achieving success in the traditional system, due to sleeping in shelters and difficulty finding transportation
- Operation Come Home provides an alternative high-school for youth under 21 who are experiencing homelessness, called the John Bosco Achievement Centre.

## Our Goals

- Increase the number of youth enrolled in John Bosco Achievement Centre and seek ways to ensure success by providing supports like basic necessities and scholarships.
- Help older youth achieve high-school diplomas through other community programs, including attending OCSB's adult high school programs and virtual education programming like that offered by OCSB or TVO ILC.
- Grow our scholarship investments so that Operation Come Home can increase the number of scholarships provided to youth clients interested in post-secondary education.
- Increase the number and variety of educational enrichment activities which students can join, such as field trips, community events, and opportunities to learn about different careers.

ACTION	TARGET FOR 2026	OUTCOME
Register youth in educational programming at Operation Come Home	Engage 150 youth to complete credits	Youth have better long-term prospects for health, employment, well-being, and housing
Help youth graduate with their high-school diploma	20 youth graduate	Youth have increased opportunities to achieve their life goals.
Host field trips and enrichment activities for youth to learn about community	90 activities hosted	Youth learn more about career opportunities, community involvement





# Social Enterprise

Many youth who come to Operation Come Home lack employment experience. Finding work in the community is challenging due to their work history and lack of high-school diplomas.

We operate social enterprises that support these youth with paid employment, and which can serve as co-op experiences to get them closer to high school completion.

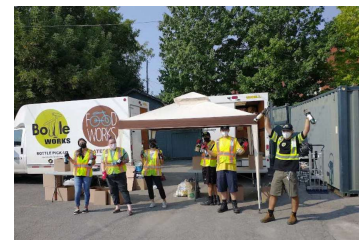
## Community Context

- In 2023, 602 youth at Operation Come Home sought employment assistance, of whom 50-60% lacked past employment experience
- Operation Come Home has three active social enterprises, BottleWorks, FoodWorks, and HousingWorks, that together provide employment to 50+ youth each year
- Social enterprises are well-regarded in Ottawa and recognized for their special role in creating positive outcomes for equity-seeking groups. Many large organizations have established procurement policies that emphasize social enterprise, while others have new policies in development.
- New, dedicated grant programs for social enterprise are announced each year, and established organizations like the Trillium Foundation provide support for Social Enterprises, with an emphasis on new initiatives / start-ups. It is challenging to find funding for mature social enterprise operations.
- The Federal Government has a social finance fund specifically aimed at providing loans to Social Enterprises through intermediary financial institutions.

## Our Goals

- Expand our current activities in FoodWorks for growth and greater financial stability
- Expand HousingWorks to offer a landlord-centred cleaning and apartment turnover service
- Continue to innovate and adapt our SE strategy to take advantage of new opportunities for our youth

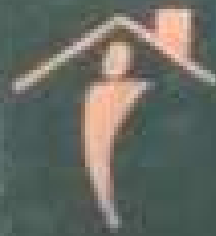
ACTION	TARGET FOR 2026	OUTCOME
Create new social enterprises or adapt existing activities to employ a greater number of youth	60 youth employed annually by 2026	Youth receive paid work and the opportunity to build their skills and resumes
Achieve financial stability for FoodWorks, BottleWorks, and HousingWorks	2026 SE budgets cover 80% of their expenses through sales	Social enterprises are more resilient and less dependent on outside funding
Support youth to achieve employment after working in our SEs	75% of youth move into full-time employment	Youth are supported to achieve their career goals



# MASTER LEASING: A NEW APPROACH TO OBTAINING HOUSING IN PRIVATE MARKET SETTINGS



## MEET OUR HOUSING FIRS TEAM



HOUSING  
BASED CASE  
MANAGER



HOUSING  
SPECIALIST



PEER  
SUPPORT  
WORKER



## Master Leasing Through HousingWorks

According to a recent study by Carleton University, 31 affordable apartment units are lost in Ottawa for each new unit created. This loss of housing supply directly impacts Ottawa's most vulnerable people, who face increasing challenges finding new homes. The challenges are even greater for youth experiencing homelessness, who face stigma and discrimination due to their experience of poverty.

To help youth find new apartments, we started HousingWorks. Through HousingWorks, our organizations signs new leases with landlords, and we then sublet these units to youth.

This approach has several advantages. For landlords, it means they can receive assurances that rent will always be paid on time, that administration for these apartments is straightforward, and that they always have someone to call in case challenges come up.

For youth, this model provides more access to housing, and reduces the stigma they experience. The units they occupy are also protected for the long term. If a young person leaves their unit, to move in with a partner or relocate to be closer to work, Operation Come Home can provide their apartment to the next youth who needs it.

This new model is already paying dividends, both for the youth we serve and for our broader community. In the coming years, we aim to broaden and expand this work across the City.



Alicia Martinez, Operation Come Home's master leasing coordinator, is always ready to talk to landlords interested in signing up. To reach her, email [alicia@operationcomehome.ca](mailto:alicia@operationcomehome.ca).

**OTTAWA HAS MORE THAN 15,000 RENTAL UNITS ELIGIBLE FOR MASTER LEASING.**

ADOPTING THIS APPROACH UNLOCKS PRIVATE-SECTOR SOLUTIONS TO OUR CITY'S HOUSING CHALLENGES.



# Human Resources

Operation Come Home has a dynamic, dedicated team that is committed to finding innovative solutions. Our ability to maintain this culture depends upon continuing to hire high-quality, motivated staff members to fill roles.

## Community Context

- Recruiting new staff for Operation Come Home is becoming more challenging, due to many leaving the field or being recruited by larger organizations.
- Staff at Operation Come Home must deal with added stressors due to the nature of the funding we receive. Grants are often time-bound, and renewed only at the last minute, leaving staff feeling uncertain of their future job stability.
- Hiring people with lived and living experience is becoming more important to funders, and a key source of innovation that is driving continued program improvement
- Though our benefits are competitive with other charities, Operation Come Home pays less on average than what employees receive in the same positions at larger social work organizations.

## Our Goals

- Offer cost-of-living pay increases for staff, enabling them to better manage inflation and help keep organizational wages competitive in the sector.
- Strengthen our culture of engaging people with lived experience
- Position Operation Come Home as a place for career growth and learning for newcomers to the field
- Continue to engage in programs that provide summer job, practicum, co-op, or volunteer positions, as a source of recruitment.

ACTION	TARGET FOR 2026	OUTCOME
Continue to include wage and cost-of-living increases in grant applications	All full-time staff have supported COLA annually	Staff are better compensated and more likely to continue at OCH
Invest in training and development opportunities for staff	Offer all staff core trainings, and opportunities for expanded learning	Staff experience growth in their ability to support their clients
Prioritize hiring people with lived and living experience of the challenges clients face	20% of staff have lived or living experience	Clients generate better connections rapport Programs are more effective



# Funding

Operation Come Home strives to be a nimble, focused organization that fills gaps in services for youth. Through our social enterprises, program design, and community engagement, we foster a results-based culture that takes well-considered risks and encourages innovation in the sector.

Our operational goals reflect this culture, as we seek to maintain our status as a lean and effective front-line organization. Doing this will require continued innovation in our community fundraising, which covers one third of our overall budget.

## Community Context

- Expected decreases in government funding will likely lead to challenges as priorities shift to deal with challenges in health care, Canada's aging population, climate change, and other priorities.
- Ottawa is experiencing a long-term decline in the proportion of households supporting charities, which mirrors national trends. Corporate giving is flat across the sector
- Large fundraising campaigns, like that for the new Ottawa Hospital, risk diverting resources away from social services in favour of large capital projects
- Many donors are increasingly choosing legacy giving opportunities, through bequests, insurance, and gifts of assets.

## Our Goals

- Innovate our fundraising efforts by creating new events and opportunities that appeal to Ottawa's changing population
- Create new relationships to funders and partners that align with our values and goals
- Increase revenues from social enterprises
- Support the Operation Come Home Foundation to generate increased investments for programs that support our clients.

ACTION	TARGET FOR 2026	OUTCOME
Create a new annual fundraising event that has broad appeal	New event created, raising \$50,000 in net revenue	Operation Come Home's reach and donor base grows
Create opportunities for donations through legacy gifts	Create a new website, pamphlets, and information	More revenues are raised through legacy giving
Generate new investments for the Operation Come Home Foundation	New major giving achieved to support investments	Our investment portfolio grows, increasing the number of scholarships we can offer



# Community

As a community agency delivering front-line services, Operation Come Home has the ability to see the impacts of policy decisions first-hand. We often share the challenges and opportunities we see with decision-makers in Government, the non-profit sector, and the business community.

In the year ahead, we will continue working collaboratively with municipal, provincial and federal governments in a transparent, non-partisan approach that recognizes the contributions that public servants and elected officials make in ending homelessness. Consultations with our youth, staff, and community members identified several priorities we will address in the next three years.

## Advocacy Priorities

**Address the Shortfall in Basic Needs Social Assistance:** The current level of support offered by social assistance programs like OntarioWorks and ODSP is not enough to meet basic needs. We encourage our colleagues in Government to increase the contributions from these programs. Greater investment will help youth experiencing homelessness escape the cycle of poverty.

**Support Housing Initiatives that Foster Community Integration:** People with lived experience of homelessness benefit most when they can obtain housing in traditional community settings, rather than in purpose-built facilities intended only for people in the social system. Prioritizing solutions that help vulnerable people integrate into the community, such as our master leasing program, will yield significant long-term success.

**Increase the supply of affordable housing:** Social housing has an important role to play in our community, but attention needs to be paid to private market support, so that new units become available for all. Governments at all levels should prioritize programs that increase the supply of affordable housing in Ottawa.

**Ensure Transparency in the System for Youth:** When working within the coordinated access system, youth are unaware of the status of their files, and the time it will take to obtain housing. Increasing transparency from the City and community agencies will reduce uncertainties and help youth plan for their future.

**Increase the City of Ottawa's Housing Allowance:** The City of Ottawa provides support for people with experience of homelessness through allowances that help them to pay their rent while getting back on their feet. The current maximum allowance someone can receive falls far short of the market price for studio and bachelor apartments in Ottawa. Increasing the maximum allowances will enable more people to obtain housing.

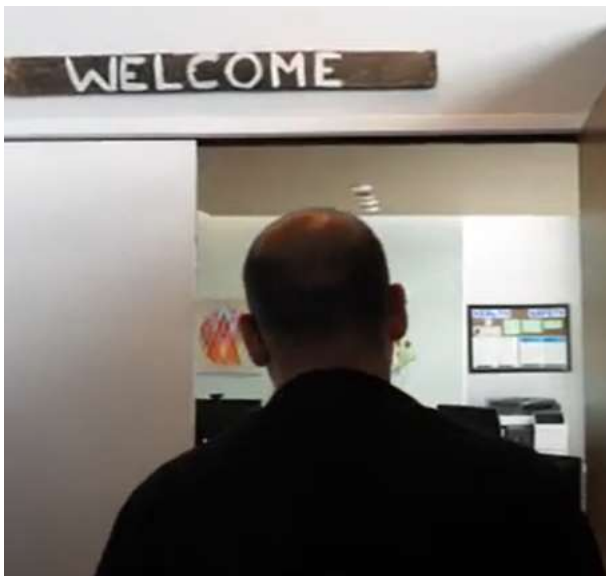
**Human Trafficking and Sex Work:** Our community is a hotspot for human trafficking, with many vulnerable youth at risk of exploitation each year. Creating programs that educate Johns on the harms of illicit sex work, and increasing resources that help police find and prosecute those responsible for human trafficking, will help keep youth safer.

# Informed by Youth

Operation Come Home's 2027 strategic planning process began with focus groups, surveys, and research conducted with our most important stakeholders: our youth. Their voices informed the priorities of this plan and will continue to shape our work at every phase: inception, planning, implementation, development, closure, and evaluation.

Staff need to realize that every day we're out here... on the streets... It's tough. It's depressing. Having places to go where we can escape that makes a huge difference. You need to have programs like field trips or other things that get people out of downtown. It helps.

-Jacob, 20 years old



"One of the worst things is not knowing where you are at while you're waiting for a worker. The city should be more open about where you are in the process (for housing support)."

-Josh, 22 years old

"Employment help should be targeted, like... don't waste my time, you know? If I have a good resume I shouldn't have to sit in a workshop for it. And if I don't want to touch alcohol I don't need SmartServe."

-Emma, 19 years old



# Board of Directors



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2024

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2027

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