

# SHARING THE SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY



**The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated extraordinary changes in our work. Our response has focused on homelessness, food distribution, housing, job searching, and income tax support.**



## St. John's Kitchen

220 people receive take-away meals based out of the Worth A Second Look garage. During the morning the parking lot has the feel of an outdoor drop-in centre. Inside at St. John's Kitchen another 180 people (mostly people without shelter) are able to access washrooms, showers, laundry, meals, and harm reduction supplies, when so many other doors were and still are closed for this group. We have collaborated with the Region of Waterloo to create this bold response during COVID. This is front-line service that embraces COVID risk, combined with a philosophy of never-saying-no to each request/situation as people have lived raw in outside spaces.

## 600+ Meals Daily

We are now preparing 600+ meals a day. Our model of food preparation and distribution has changed substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Where formerly we focused on the 300 meals served at St. John's Kitchen, we have now doubled our meal production. We have a separate daily distribution for those who have housing in addition to the meals served at St. John's Kitchen for those who are unsheltered. We have also delivered meals to our housing projects like Hospitality House and Water Street House and to the people in motels who we support. We are now set up to serve breakfast, lunch, and supper at the University Avenue residence. The Foodbank of Waterloo Region has helped to provide thousands of pounds of surplus food, which our kitchens are now turning into hearty nutritious takeout meals. We have converted Maurita's Kitchen on Queen Street into a commissary kitchen and with the daily help of volunteers we have doubled the number of meals we provide.

## Outreach & Support to Motels

We have been supporting over 40 people in motels, bringing meals, bringing healthcare, problem-solving intense and complex health, mental health, legal, and survival needs. It has been an interesting experiment, where people in motels have stabilized with the more focused help we have offered – wound care, regular food, and problem-solving when issues emerge. All of this complements the community of connections and support that we provide through St. John's Kitchen, street outreach, support with concurrent mental health and substance use issues, financial problem-solving, housing support, and links to employment and income support options, plus access to housewares and clothing.

## University Avenue Residence

Since November of 2019 we have been advocating for the growing unsheltered population. It was a quick yes when the Region invited us to manage an 80-unit student housing building. The idea was floated in mid-August, and by early October, we had all 80 beds ready for people who have not been able to stay in shelters or maintain housing. We are shaping this space within the Region of Waterloo's homelessness strategy that provides a range of wrap-around supports for this type of housing. People will have their own rooms, with a lock on the door, and share washrooms and dining/gathering places.

## Water Street House

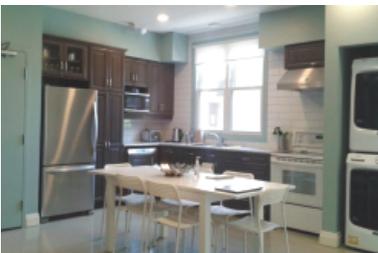
Water Street House has opened, and we are learning so much as we engage in this work. 6 of 8 beds are now filled with people actively navigating their housing, health, substance use, and general wellbeing. We are working to fully welcome and accept the person, their reality of substance abuse, the expressions of trauma, and the work together to make a safe and healthy space for everyone. Staff people celebrated the joy of serving pancakes for a young man who has been unable to eat fortifying food for such a long time. Small steps gradually invite people into wellness and acceptance.

## Access to Healthcare

Equitable access to healthcare has been an important part of our ongoing work. We collaborated to create an isolation unit for COVID symptomatic people, continued to adapt our health care services, treated wounds, prevented infections, responded to mental health issues, supported the emerging ShelterCare, and helped people to be as well as possible. We have worked actively to support the development of the Inner City Health Alliance, which is now a formal part of the locally approved Ontario Health Team with a priority on homelessness.

## Employment and Income Support

The pandemic has created major changes in the labour market. For the first three months there was minimal job searching but as our employment counsellors became more available through our revamped resource centre we were able to provide both in-person and on-line support for job searching. The Income Tax clinic changed their focus as many people used the clinic to understand their options for the different COVID government support programs. During this period over 1000 online income tax forms were completed with the help of volunteers.



Your generous support helps to strengthen our community response

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November 2020

Dear Friends,

Before the COVID shutdown, the 35 projects of The Working Centre community were woven together as an integral community of supports with over 1500 daily visits supported by 500 volunteers.



All of that changed on March 17th and every day since, our work has focused on keeping open the basic services of food, shelter, outreach, employment, and financial supports.



Each day you can see that work come alive. You see it when an outreach worker is helping a young fellow challenged with mental health issues who has camped outside all summer and is now supported as he gets settled into his room at the new University Avenue Residence. You see it later that same day when another outreach worker takes the time to support a mother who is grieving the loss of her son after a tragic overdose as she gathers her son's belongings.



You see the same kind of compassion with the St. John's Kitchen workers who have supported the 80 - 90 people who have been camping around our 97 Victoria location during the pandemic. This situation of growing homelessness is fueled by the combination of substance use, mental health instability, and a lack of affordable rental options. What can we do in the face of so much frustration and so few options? We have offered food, washrooms, water, showers, primary health care, and laundry, but most of all we have supported people into other housing, befriending and walking together as people search for alternatives.



Since May, we have divided St. John's Kitchen in two ways: providing about 200 people with packaged meals each day between 11:00 - 1:00 from the Worth A Second Look parking lot; and supporting a drop-in for those who are unsheltered, providing food, washrooms, showers, and laundry for up to 180 people each day. In many respects, the campus of St. John's Kitchen has never been busier, and it is a testament to the complexities faced by people without shelter or access to community resources.



Our response during the pandemic has also included completing the construction and opening of the Water Street House and the quick response to the Region's invitation to operate and manage a student residence for up to 80 people who are unsheltered with few options. In total our intensive supportive housing is providing shelter to over 150 people.



On Queen Street, our Employment Resource Centre has remained open in a more limited socially distant way as our income tax clinics and financial supports have provided valuable updated information as so many income programs have been changing. On average, we have supported 60 people every day through this work.



During this time our cafes, Recycle Cycles, and the Green Door used clothing boutique have remained closed. The Hacienda Sarria Market Garden and our greenhouse have produced a full harvest and Worth A Second Look was able to open in July, helping people outfit their new housing. Our Job Café projects have been able to continue their good work of downtown street sweeping, evening garbage pickup, and Discovery Teams in downtown Kitchener and Waterloo.



Your donations have helped us reweave our creative projects to serve the pressing homelessness issues that continue to grow. Supporters of The Working Centre have proven, year after year, that community donations are vital in responding to local issues. We are grateful for your ongoing support in building our community of support.



Sincerely,

Joe Mancini,  
Director

*We share our quarterly newspaper Good Work News with our contributors. Learn more about our community-based initiatives by visiting our website at [www.theworkingcentre.org](http://www.theworkingcentre.org)*

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