

St. John's Kitchen



The kitchen table model



A Report By



ABSTRACT

St. John's Kitchen in downtown Kitchener serves and is nurtured by a diverse community that includes people who are experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness, or street involved. Interviews with over 60 patrons, volunteers, staff members, community partners and local funding agencies, situate St. John's Kitchen as an important gathering place and service access/navigation point with a long-term role of fostering an inclusive community where people are healthy, supported, and feel at home.

This report seeks to explore the role St. John's Kitchen plays through and beyond its cooperative daily meal service, as it increasingly takes its place in bridging to and positioning alongside the local street culture. In supporting people to thrive within the positive values of the local street culture, St. John's Kitchen adds an important dimension to the structure of local support systems. This dimension is becoming increasingly relevant, and the role of St. John's Kitchen is evolving, as an increase in the use of street drugs such as crystal meth creates higher and more complex needs among people who are a part of the local street culture.

INTRODUCTION

St. John's Kitchen is a gathering place for people in downtown Kitchener. It serves and is nurtured by a diverse community that includes people who are experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness, or street involved. For 30 years, people have come to St. John's Kitchen to be with others, to spend time with old friends, and to make new friends. Every day, 280-300 people share the hot meal offered at mid-day. While they are at St. John's Kitchen, people have access to showers, laundry, and a variety of services that support people with complex needs.

Established in 1985, St. John's Kitchen is a project of The Working Centre. Over 30 years, the model of St. John's Kitchen has evolved with the population it serves (its patrons), and with the collaborative and continually evolving network of social service agencies in the Region of Waterloo.

This report documents the model of St. John's Kitchen, its role in the local community, and its place within local systems of support in the Region of Waterloo. Particular focus is given to reviewing the role of St. John's Kitchen within the regional networks that support housing stability, health, and crime prevention and response.

Interviews with over 60 patrons, volunteers, staff members, community partners and local funding agencies, situate St. John's Kitchen as an important gathering place and service access/navigation point with a long-term role of fostering an inclusive community where people are healthy, supported, and feel at home.

Research and writing for this report was undertaken by Working Centre staff. We extend our gratitude to everyone who participated in interviews. We include interviewees' comments with permission, and we have endeavored to reflect the full breadth and integrity of feedback in order to build a true and nuanced understanding of St. John's Kitchen and its role in the local community.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION	2
SECTION 1: ABOUT ST. JOHN'S KITCHEN: BACKGROUND AND CURRENT CONTEXT	6
St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre	6
Philosophy and History of St. John's Kitchen	6
Services Offered at St. John's Kitchen	8
The Population Served at St. John's Kitchen	9
Current Context	11
SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	12
Abstract	12
Introduction	12
Culture	12
Belonging and Psychosocial Integration	16
Health and Belonging	18
Places	20
Community Hubs	22
Analysis: St. John's Kitchen in its Social Context	23
Outcome: The Kitchen Table Model	24
SECTION 3: ST. JOHN'S KITCHEN: THE KITCHEN TABLE MODEL	25
Introduction: A Cultural Model	25
St. John's Kitchen as a Gathering Place	26
A Values-Based Culture with Roots in the Local Street Culture	26
An Oral Culture	28
Values of St. John's Kitchen	29
St. John's Kitchen as a Community Hub	31
St. John's Kitchen as an Alternative Third Place	31
The Kitchen Table Model: Capturing the Culture of St. John's Kitchen	31
The Kitchen Table Model of St. John's Kitchen	32
Food on the Table: The Role of the Meal at St. John's Kitchen	33
<i>Bringing People to the Table</i>	33
<i>Setting the Tone</i>	34
Around the Kitchen Table: The Community of St. John's Kitchen	35
<i>Sharing the Daily Work</i>	36
<i>Relationships</i>	37
Serving the Kitchen Table: The Role of Staff at St. John's Kitchen	37
<i>Working Within a Values-Based Culture</i>	38
<i>Core Practice A: Listening</i>	40
<i>Core Practice B: Following the Whole Person</i>	43
<i>Core Practice C: Reflecting and Responding to the Person</i>	43
A Seat at the Kitchen Table: Feeding the Spirit	44
<i>Beauty</i>	45
<i>Memorials</i>	45

<u>Coming to the Table: Community Partners</u>	47
<i>Specialized Outreach Services (S.O.S.) and the Psychiatric Outreach Project (P.O.P.)</i>	48
ACCKWA	48
Sanguen	48
KDCHC	49
<i>Collaboration and Service Integration in the Circle of Care Model</i>	49
<u>Supporting the Kitchen Table Model: The Working Centre’s Administrative Infrastructure</u>	50
SECTION 4: ST. JOHN’S KITCHEN IN A SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE	52
Social Context of St. John's Kitchen	52
Relationship to Mainstream Support Systems	52
Structure of St. John’s Kitchen: Collaborative Supports Within A Common Gathering Place	53
<u>Long-Term Relationship Building</u>	53
<u>Information Sharing and Service Collaboration</u>	54
Role in Systems Supporting Health, Crime Prevention/Response, and Housing Stability	55
<u>1. Serving People's Basic Needs</u>	56
<u>2. Supporting People to Navigate Mainstream Systems</u>	56
<u>3. Hosting and Providing Culturally Integrated Services for People</u>	57
<u>4. Incubating System-Level Evolution Responsive to People’s Culture and Fundamental Needs</u>	59
<u>5. Fostering Mutual Support in Community</u>	60
Integration of Support Across Systems	61
SECTION 5: THE FUTURE OF ST. JOHN’S KITCHEN	63
Responding to Current Challenges Facing the Population Served at St. John's Kitchen	63
Current Funding Challenges and Needs	64
Frugal Innovation	65
Flexibility of Services and Funding	65
Reporting, Evaluation and Funding	65
Collaborative Conversation Going Forward	66
The Future of St. John’s Kitchen: A Co-operative Exchange for the Common Good	66
APPENDICES	
1. Values of St. John's Kitchen	68
2. The Role of Staff at St. John's Kitchen: Core Practice B: Following the Whole Person	69
3. The Role of Staff at St. John's Kitchen: Core Practice C: Reflecting and Responding	72
4. Discussion: Working Within a Values-Based Culture	77
5. Serving People's Basic Needs	79
6. Supporting People to Navigate Mainstream Systems	81
7. Hosting and Providing Culturally Integrated Services for People	87
8. Incubating System-Level Evolution Responsive to People's Culture and Fundamental Needs	93
9. Fostering Mutual Support in Community	97
10. One Place Among Many	101
BIBLIOGRAPHY	102
LIST OF INTERVIEWEES	105

Report Scope

When we interviewed community partners about St. John's Kitchen, we learned that in conversation, many people do not distinguish between the place of St. John's Kitchen and projects such as Street Outreach, Specialized Outreach Services, Hospitality House and Job Café. These are projects that weave through St. John's Kitchen, and that grew in part through conversation and collaboration at St. John's Kitchen. The fact that many people speak of these projects as extensions of St. John's Kitchen demonstrates the degree to which St. John's Kitchen is integrated in the network of local supports.

The scope of this report is the place of St. John's Kitchen itself. This includes all of the services offered directly by St. John's Kitchen at 97 Victoria St. N.

Other services that are based at St. John's Kitchen or that weave through St. John's Kitchen are included insofar as they relate to the place of St. John's Kitchen. Given the substantial engagement of community partners at St. John's Kitchen and their contributions to the place, this is a significant part of the report.

Language

The following are terms often used in the context of St. John's Kitchen:

- "The Kitchen"; "Soup Kitchen"; "The Soup": These are all terms used by people to refer to St. John's Kitchen. It should be noted that workers at St. John's Kitchen have always called it a "Community Kitchen" rather than a "Soup Kitchen," considering the language of community to be more genuinely reflective of the spirit of the place.
- Patrons: People who gather and access services at St. John's Kitchen.
- St. John's Kitchen Floor Staff / St. John's Kitchen Outreach / St. John's Kitchen Workers: These are all terms that refer to workers hired by The Working Centre, whose role it is to facilitate services and support people in the space of St. John's Kitchen.
- Community Partners: Agencies that work collaboratively with St. John's Kitchen, including agencies that base structured time and services there, agencies that base unstructured time there, and agencies that connect with St. John's Kitchen through broader regional networks.
- "On the floor": The whole floor space of St. John's Kitchen, excluding the kitchen area and the medical clinic. St. John's Kitchen outreach workers spend most of their time "on the floor."

SECTION 1 – ABOUT ST. JOHN’S KITCHEN: BACKGROUND AND CURRENT CONTEXT

St. John’s Kitchen and The Working Centre

St. John’s Kitchen is a part of The Working Centre’s community of projects and activities. Established in 1982, The Working Centre is a volunteer-inspired venture that seeks to give individuals and groups access to tools and opportunities to become involved in the building of community. For 30 years, The Working Centre has responded to people experiencing poverty and unemployment with collaborative projects. Today, The Working Centre serves 1500 Kitchener-Waterloo residents daily in diverse areas, including housing, employment, mental health, transportation, financial literacy, income taxes, small business start-up, and more.

St. John’s Kitchen is one of two founding projects of The Working Centre, the other being the Job Search Resource Centre located at 58 Queen St. South. The Working Centre considers the services provided by its core projects as being fundamental to its role in serving the community of Kitchener-Waterloo. These projects invite people who are impacted by poverty and unemployment into the web of supports offered by The Working Centre, and they anchor the work of the rest of the organization.

The Working Centre’s projects each have their own living cultures, which share common philosophical threads. Some foundational philosophical elements include creating places where everyone is welcome, and inviting people to participate in practical work that builds community. People who spend time in a project participate in ongoing conversations about the intersection of the philosophies and the day-to-day realities in the project. These conversations shape the incremental evolution of each project over time.

To learn more about the core philosophies of The Working Centre, see *J. & S. Mancini, Transition to Common Work, WLU Press, Waterloo.*

“The Working Centre provides an indispensable framework of philosophy, infrastructure, labour, and financing to help new projects mature ... Integration with a larger entity gives small, decentralized projects meaning and direction while still retaining the freedom to create their own culture with different volunteers, different ways of service, and different use of tools.”
– Joe and Stephanie Mancini, *Transition to Common Work* (page 141)

A Note on the Language of this Report: In the spirit of inviting people into the conversation, this report strives to use accessible language. Where new language has been developed as a part of this report, it has been created through a process of collaborative conversation (*see page 31, The Kitchen Table Model: Capturing the Culture of St. John’s Kitchen*). To honour and reflect the oral culture of St. John’s Kitchen (*see page 28, An Oral Culture*), much of this report is told through the words of interviewees.

Philosophy and History of St. John's Kitchen

St. John's Kitchen was established in January 1985. Its first location was at St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church in downtown Kitchener, already a local gathering place thanks to its role in hosting an Unemployed Workers' Centre operated by The Working Centre in the early 1980's.

The foundational philosophies of The Working Centre grounded the model of St. John's Kitchen as a place for people to freely and mutually support each other in community – different from a place of charity. St. John's Kitchen was intentionally nurtured as a place where:

- Everyone is welcome
- The daily work is completed through the cooperative participation of people using the space
- Culture grows organically from the values of people using the space

The daily hot meal was the first service to be offered at St. John's Kitchen, and it remains a core element of daily life in the space. From the beginning, people sharing in the meal participated in the preparing and serving of it. As people worked together, ate together, and had conversations together, a unique culture formed through the intertwining of the foundational philosophies of The Working Centre, and the values of people gathering in the space. Patrons of St. John's Kitchen have always identified to varying degrees with the local street culture, and this complex and non-homogenous culture has created the values base of the space.

The role of staff members at St. John's Kitchen has always been to understand the evolving culture of the space, and to support people as needed and wanted, within the norms and values of the culture. As part of this role, an intentional choice was made in the 1980's to decline recommendations by Waterloo Region's Health and Social Service Committee to create a list of patrons and to charge a fee for the daily meal. The ramifications of this choice have been significant over the years since. Most importantly, this choice has allowed St. John's Kitchen to grow into a gathering place that belongs to its patrons. However, it also created a barrier to government funding in the 1990's, meaning that for 25 years, St. John's Kitchen has had to fund its activities almost entirely through community donations.

In the early 2000's, changes in the local community led to more complex needs among people gathering at St. John's Kitchen. In response, St. John's Kitchen became involved in community partnerships to create new mobile outreach services, and then to work in close collaboration with those services. At the same time, community partners began to base some services at St. John's Kitchen, chiefly because the populations they served were already gathering there.

As St. John's Kitchen became a place where people were supported in more complex ways, it was agreed with St. John's Church that a new location was needed. After being hosted by St. John's Church for 23 years, in 2006, St. John's Kitchen moved to a new location at 97 Victoria St. North.

In its new location, St. John's Kitchen has continued to respond to the evolving needs of the population it serves. A medical clinic built into the back of the new space hosts health services delivered by a blend of community partners, and staff hired through The Working Centre.

Over the years, several larger projects have been incubated at St. John's Kitchen in response to the fundamental needs expressed by people gathering in the space. Some of these projects are now based in buildings around 97 Victoria St. North – these include the Hospitality House, Worth a Second Look Furniture and Housewares, Job Café, and the Community Dental Clinic. The documentation of these

projects is outside the scope of this report. This report does examine the role of St. John's Kitchen in incubating these projects, and how this role has significantly contributed to the capacity of local systems of support and care.

To learn more about the history and evolution of St. John's Kitchen, see *J. & S. Mancini, Transition to Common Work, WLU Press, Waterloo, Chapter 5 –St. John's Kitchen: Redistribution through Co-operation.*

Services Offered at St. John's Kitchen

Services at St. John's Kitchen are offered with the support of approximately 20 volunteers daily. Many patrons are also volunteers. The sharing of the daily work is a core element of community at St. John's Kitchen.

St. John's Kitchen is open Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. These are new hours – in winter 2014, St. John's Kitchen extended its closing time from 1:30 to 3:00, as part of a coordinated community response to the Out of the Cold closures.

Basic services offered directly by St. John's Kitchen are:

- Continental style breakfast every morning (self-serve breads, jams, coffee, and tea).
- Hot meal every day from 11:30 – 1:00, with flexibility. *Serves on average 280 – 300 people daily.*
- Meals to Go offered when available. *Serves on average 57 people daily.*
- Coffee and Tea available all day
- Clothes
- Personal items (including feminine hygiene items, soap, laundry detergent, razors)
- Showers. *Serve on average 8 people daily.*
- Laundry. *Serves on average 6 people daily.*
- Phone, faxing, photocopying
- Access to a breadth of community supports including medical, financial, and housing services. Includes support to navigate services and to connect with other service providers.
- Relationship-based personal support from St. John's Kitchen workers

All services offered by St. John's Kitchen are free of cost, and are flexible to the needs of every person. This means, for example, that people receive as much food as they ask for when they ask for it, and that people can access facilities like the showers and laundry at flexible times.

In addition to the services offered directly by St. John's Kitchen, a variety of services are offered by other agencies that base time at St. John's Kitchen. These services include:

- ACCKWA (support for people impacted by HIV, Safepoint Needle Program)
- Sanguen (support for people impacted by Hepatitis C, Safepoint Needle Program)
- KDCHC (once-a-week drop-in clinic for ID, nurse practitioners, chiropractor)
- Specialized Outreach Services (partnership between CMHA, Stonehenge, and St. John's Kitchen; includes peer outreach worker from Stonehenge, nurse, psychiatric nurses, social worker)
- Psychiatric Outreach Project (includes two doctors)

St. John's Kitchen also hosts community events, including concerts and memorials.

St. John's Kitchen is a wheelchair-accessible space.

The Population Served at St. John's Kitchen

The numbers in this section are conservative estimates. St. John's Kitchen has never asked people to identify themselves when they come in or when they use any of the basic services. This intentional choice maintains St. John's Kitchen as a place that is accessible, and that belongs to its patrons. It also preserves the integrity of the food service, which is first and foremost intended as a hot, nutritious meal that people share in the preparation, serving, and enjoyment of, rather than as a facilitator of social services. Staff members have done non-intrusive counts and estimates over several years, in order to build this picture of the population.

The people who gather at St. John's Kitchen are a diverse community, and spend time in the space for different reasons. Each day, approximately 280-300 people share the daily hot meal. Another 40 people will go to St. John's Kitchen to access the other services based there, or to meet friends and engage socially.

The Core Group

The core group of people who spend time at St. John's Kitchen, making up about 60% of the population served, are experiencing persistent homelessness or at risk of persistent homelessness. Most are men, aged between 25 and 55.

People in this core group use a high percentage of health, emergency, and police services. Staff members at St. John's Kitchen estimate conservatively that, in a one-year period, the supports at St. John's Kitchen contribute directly to diverting 30% of patrons from using emergency services – largely through preventive services, supported access to care, accompaniment, and a supportive community environment.

Overall Numbers

The number of people who spend time at St. John's Kitchen is higher than the 280-300 people who share in the meal on any given day. In a one-year period, approximately 900 unique individuals spend time at St. John's Kitchen. Of these 900:

- 500 people are regular patrons who go often to St. John's Kitchen, and who have been going for over a year;
- 200 people are new patrons;
- 200 people are part of a group of occasional patrons who move in and out of St. John's Kitchen over cycles of a couple of years. The 200 who spend time at St. John's Kitchen in a one-year period may come once a month, or once every couple of months in that one-year period.

Age

16-70 (Majority 25-60)

People who spend time at St. John's Kitchen range in age from 16 to 70, with the majority being between 25 and 60 years of age.

Among this group, there are people with no income, and people who are living on OW or ODSP. There is a small group who are transient.

Seniors

Seniors who spend time at St. John's Kitchen are generally working poor who have taken early retirement and who are living on OAS or CPP. With the regional push for increased access to healthcare in the last several years, staff members at St. John's Kitchen have seen an increase in the number of regular patrons reaching an older age. Whereas 5-8 years ago, many regular patrons did not live past their late forties, now, we are seeing more patrons living into their late 50's and their 60's.

Youth

Youth who spend time at St. John's Kitchen are generally over the age of 20. The main gathering place for youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness in the community is oneROOF, which serves youth specifically. The youth who go to St. John's Kitchen are generally in the higher end of the age range served by oneROOF.

Gender

Eighty percent of St. John's Kitchen's patrons are men, most of who are living outdoors, couch surfing, or precariously housed in market rent.

Historically, the main gathering place for women experiencing homelessness in the community has been the YWCA Emergency Shelter (formerly Mary's Place), which serves women, transgendered people, and families specifically. There are women who enjoy St. John's Kitchen and spend time there; however, most women in this group also seek services at YWCA.

Housing Stability

People who gather at St. John's Kitchen fall all along the housing stability spectrum. While the core group served are people experiencing or at risk of persistent homelessness, there are people who are experiencing transitional homelessness, as well as people who have housing.

Of patrons who have housing, some are stably housed, while others are precariously housed in substandard accommodation or rooming houses. In particular, patrons who are living on OW are often precariously housed, or due to rent demands are unable to afford the basic necessities and living conditions required for good health. Some patrons living on ODSP are in a similar situation.

Staff members estimate that 15% - 20% of St. John's Kitchen patrons are content in their homes.

Current Context

Over the last 3 years, from 2012-2015, there has been a shift in the challenges affecting the population served at St. John's Kitchen. A significant increase in the use of various street drugs, in particular crystal meth, has led to higher and more complex needs among the population. With increasingly more new faces, The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen are stretching resources in order to meet current needs. In interviews, this reality was consistently noted by St. John's Kitchen staff members and patrons, as well as community partners.

(For more on current challenges, see page 63, Section 5: The Future of St. John's Kitchen.)

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Abstract

Populations that include people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or street-involved have their own distinct cultures. These “street cultures” are complex and complete cultures that add meaning to people’s lives. Systems of support for people belonging to street cultures are more effective when they are integrated with the supports that people already have within their culture and community. When people’s culture and community are nurtured, this contributes positively to their sense of belonging and psychosocial integration, which are critical elements for mental and physical health. Communities and cultures that represent alternatives to mainstream culture are uniquely nurtured in Alternative Third Places, which are trusted gathering places characterized by acceptance and non-judgment. A place-based service delivery model that incorporates the qualities of an Alternative Third Place addresses the weaknesses of the Community Hub model, chiefly its slowness to evolve with the culture of the people it serves. The model of St. John’s Kitchen draws from these understandings.

Introduction

The previous section briefly described the make-up of the population served at St. John’s Kitchen, as well as the nature of St. John’s Kitchen as a gathering place and service access/navigation point. We understood that in order to describe the model of St. John’s Kitchen, we needed to develop language to write about the culture and dynamics of the population served, as well as about the function of St. John’s Kitchen as a place that supports this population. We looked first to the academic literature to review the current understanding of:

- The culture of populations that include people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or street involved
- The relationship between cultural identity and personal stability/wellbeing
- Belonging, inclusion, sense of community, and psychosocial integration
- The relationship between sense of belonging, psychosocial integration, and health
- The role of community gathering places, specifically Alternative Third Places, in fostering a sense of belonging and psychosocial integration for cultures representing alternatives to mainstream culture
- The role of the Community Hub model of place-based service delivery in our systems of support and care

Our focus in reviewing the literature was to understand how these elements intersect and interlock.

Culture

The academic literature increasingly recognizes that populations that include people who are homeless, at-risk of homelessness or street-involved have their own cultures, with unique values, norms and relationships. Indeed, Jerry Fast writes that the term “street culture” is “not a catch-phrase or interesting way of looking at street-related issues. Rather, it is a definable culture that is every bit as real as any other culture [one] will encounter.” (Fast, 2001, 1). (Note that some authors refer to plural “street cultures” or “cultures of homelessness,” while other authors refer to a singular culture.)

Megan Ravenhill examines the “culture of homelessness” in the context of the United Kingdom. She suggests that little has been written in general about street cultures, partially due to a lack of financial resources and partially due to fear from service providers that the people in the cultures might be judged and stigmatized. Nevertheless, she argues that we need to understand how these cultures attract and hold members – for these cultures have an “intensity, vibrancy and attraction” for those who belong to them (Ravenhill, 2008, 145).

Ravenhill writes that street cultures are unlike traditional cultures, which have a long history. They have emerged spontaneously in order to meet the needs of their members. She describes these cultures as “system[s] of beliefs, values and norms adopted” by those who belong to them (Ravenhill, 2008,145). A street culture is characterized by “dense social networks and reciprocity, with people experiencing anxiety and depression when they leave it or are denied access [to it]” (Ravenhill, 2008,146). Not everyone who is part of a street culture lives on the streets; many “are lonely and isolated in their accommodation.” As a result, there is usually a place off the streets where members of a street culture gather as a community (Ravenhill, 2008,154). The significance of such gathering places is discussed later in this literature review.

The literature identifies elements of street cultures that contribute significantly to people’s sense of personal resilience. Ravenhill names several of these. First, for people experiencing insecurity in mainstream society, the culture acts as a “counterbalance” by providing security and refuge (Ravenhill, 2008,157). Second, the culture both reinforces values and creates a unique community marked by acceptance (Ravenhill, 2008, 157) where members offer intense emotional support to each other. Third, the nature of street culture means that people are more tolerant and ready to listen to each other (Ravenhill, 2008, 162).

Kaitlin Philipps agrees that a street culture “can serve as a refuge for those who have been rejected by the culture of their past. [This] culture and community can be very close knit in order to meet the needs of its population” (Philipps, 2012, 18). Like Ravenhill, Philipps notes the positive qualities of street cultures. She writes that:

“the friendships that arise have a quality of understanding that the individual may not receive from mainstream society. They are able to relate to life circumstances and support each other. They gain trust through shared life experiences and the knowledge that the other has also suffered, and will not pass judgment.” (Philipps, 2012, 19)

A powerful example of the resilience that a community can draw from a street culture is the phenomenon among homeless youth known as street families (Oliveira & Burke, 2009; Smith 2008). In *Lost in the Shuffle*, an ethnographic study from the early 2000’s that looked at youth street culture in a major urban area in the northeastern United States, Oliveira and Burke describe how in order to survive, street youth form “new street families complete with pseudo parents, siblings and other extended family relationships.” These families help “scout out squats for sleeping and are instrumental in resolving conflicts” (Oliveira & Burke, 2009,157). They found that these adolescents “fashioned a defined culture of unprecedented freedom and baffling complexity that is neither seen nor imagined by mainstream society” (Oliveira & Burke, 2009,159). These families “offered tangible support through shared resources such as food, shelter, money and other basic necessities” (Oliveira & Burke, 2009,159).

In general, the literature ultimately views the strong levels of support that people experience in street cultures as a factor that prevents people from wanting to retain housing and to integrate in mainstream society. Ravenhill writes about people who are newly housed after experiencing homelessness,

“Those who had been entrenched in homeless culture were accustomed to years of intense social support and company 24 hours a day. As with those leaving the armed forces, prisons, and other institutions, withdrawal of this level of intense human contact appeared to cause distress, onset of mental health problems (depression) and feelings of isolation and loneliness. Rehoused people often lacked confidence, had rusty social skills, and found it difficult to deal with everyday tasks. This made it difficult for them to meet and make friends ... To deal with the boredom, isolation, loneliness and lack of support, many rehoused people (especially older men) returned to homeless day centres for companionship. This then trapped them within the homeless culture, in some instances up to eight years, making it difficult for them to enter housed society’s culture. This increased their vulnerability to further rooflessness. (Ravenhill, 2008, 194).”

Note: We were unable to find literature that explores a model of working within a street culture, in the place where they gather, where housing stability supports are also provided. To read more about this model in the context of St. John’s Kitchen, please see page 52, Section 4: St. John’s Kitchen in a Systemic Perspective.

Acknowledging the powerful place that street cultures occupy in the lives of people who belong to them, the literature emphasizes that a person’s street culture is integral to their sense of identity – and not a temporary condition. Fast writes that “being ‘on the streets’ is not a socio-economic condition or environmental circumstance. It is a way of thinking about yourself and your relationship to the world” (Fast, 2001).

Given that street cultures are integral to the identities of people who belong to them, the literature recommends that workers must understand that they are “doing cross-cultural work when reaching out.” Indeed, Ruth Davis recommends that “human services programs must be available that address the needs of the homeless from their own unique perspective” (Davis, 1996, 182).

Although the literature recommends that service providers should adapt their approaches to serve people in street cultures, we were unable to find literature that addresses how people who belong to street cultures are impacted by the way their cultures are perceived by service providers, and indeed by people in wider society. This is a significant question, given that there are strong indications in the literature that street cultures are viewed negatively, and that people who belong to street cultures are often rejected by mainstream society and stigmatized.

We looked to the broader literature on culture to gain insights into how, in general, societal perceptions of cultures impact people in those cultures. The broader literature emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting cultural identity, and of the crucial impact that such recognition and respect has on individuals’ personal stability and wellbeing.

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor writes about culture from the perspective of social thought. He argues that human identity is shaped in part by the presence or absence of recognition by others. “A person or a group can suffer real damage, real distortion,” he argues, “if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves”. Thus when

a culture is misperceived by society as constituting a lack or as being devoid of value, this can itself “be a form of oppression”(Kernohan, 1998, 27). In this way, respecting a culture is respecting the dignity of a community, analogous to respecting individual human dignity.

Parekh develops this intuitive comparison between the dignity of the person and the dignity of the culture into a robust ethic. He argues that “we might fruitfully approach the question of the proper attitude to other cultures along similar lines [to that of respect for persons]. A culture has two dimensions: a community whose culture it is and the content and character of that culture” (Parekh, 2000, 176). Respect for a culture means respect for the right of a community to have a culture as well as for the character of that culture. Respect for the right of a community to have a culture is based on the belief that humans should freely decide how to live, that a culture is bound up with a person’s identity and story, and that it can hold significant meaning for a person. As for the character of the “culture itself, our respect for it is based on our assessment of its content and the kind of life it makes possible for its members” (Parekh, 2000, 176). He furthermore states that “since every culture gives stability and meaning to human life, holds its members together as a community, displays creative energy, and so on, [it] deserves respect” (Parekh, 2000,177).Respect for culture does not mean that every area of a culture is worthy of respect, as there are elements in cultures that may not be worthy of respect. It means that one can only arrive at a conclusion of what these negative elements are “after a sensitive and sympathetic study” of a culture from within (Parekh, 2000,177). After such a study, the negative aspects of a culture can be understood in context, and the positive aspects can be respected for what they bring to the community.

In his Massey Lectures, the anthropologist Wade Davis describes the importance of nurturing cultural diversity, as a way of honouring the unique wisdom held by each culture. Yet, Davis comments, “the destruction of a people’s way of life, is in many quarters sanctioned and endorsed as appropriate development policy” (Davis, 2009, 170). Extrapolating meaning about culture in general from different historical experiences, Davis states that “culture is not trivial ... It is a blanket of comfort that gives meaning to lives. It is a body of knowledge that allows the individual to make sense out of the infinite sensations of consciousness, to find meaning and order in a universe that ultimately has neither” (Davis, 2009, 198). In light of the significant role that culture plays in people’s understanding of life, Davis reflects that “to lose a culture is to lose something of ourselves” (Davis, 2009, 202).

As a whole, the broader literature suggests that it is important to recognize people’s culture, to respect the meaning that culture brings to people’s lives, and to be wary of the significant detrimental impacts that can result when a culture is viewed negatively. The implication for serving people who belong to street cultures is that people’s cultural identities should be respected and nurtured, while supports are offered in a culturally relatable way.

Culture

1. Street cultures are real cultures with systems of beliefs, values and norms.
2. For people who belong to them, street cultures contribute significantly to a sense of personal resilience.
3. The strong levels of support that people experience in street cultures are not available for them outside of street cultures. This dynamic contributes to cycles of homelessness.

Culture, cont.

4. Systems of support and care need to be culturally relatable.
5. Respect for a culture means respect for the right of a community to have a culture, as well as for the character of that culture.
6. “To lose a culture is to lose something of ourselves.” – Wade Davis

Belonging and Psychosocial Integration

The importance to people of having a culture, and of that culture being treated with dignity and respect in wider society, speaks to the significance of having a sense of belonging. Belonging is understood as the sense in which a person feels indispensable and integral to the group (Hagerty et al, 1992, 173). It is felt not only to people and cultures but also to groups, objects, organizations and, as the next subsection discusses, to places (Hagerty et al, 1992, 174). In general, when people feel they belong somewhere, they develop an emotional attachment to the place and its people (Garcia, Giuliana, and Wiesenfeld, 1999, 728).

Sense of belonging is related to, but not identical to, inclusion and a sense of community (KWCF, 2014). Inclusion is about people having equal access to resources and voices being heard. In its 2014 report about belonging, the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation noted that people report being included, but lacking a sense of belonging. A sense of a community is a distinct concept, also – it can be defined as a feeling that members worry about each other, a sense that the group as a whole is concerned about its members, and a “shared faith that the needs of the members will be satisfied through” being together (Garcia et al, 1999, 730). Neither inclusion nor sense of community are identical to belonging, but both are necessary pre-requisites for belonging.

Belonging is a fundamental human need. Psychologists Leary and Baumeister declare that “human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong.” On Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, belonging is third only after food and shelter. It is necessary for the wellbeing of individuals and also for the strength of groups and organizations (KWCF, 2014, 9). It is important for community groups and organizations because “when people feel a strong sense of belonging to a group, they are more willing to contribute and take ownership of the group’s struggles” (KWCF, 2014, 9).

Belonging is an essential element in “psychosocial integration,” a concept which integrates belonging to a wider group with individual needs for freedom and autonomy (Alexander, 2008, 58). In his book *The Globalisation of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit*, Bruce Alexander writes that psychosocial integration is key to personal and societal wellbeing. The prolonged loss of psychosocial integration, which Alexander calls dislocation, is painful to individuals and socially destructive. Mainstream free-market culture creates a loss of psychosocial integration on a society-wide scale.

“Psychosocial integration’ is a profound interdependence between individual and society that normally grows and develops throughout each person’s lifespan. Psychosocial integration

*reconciles people's vital needs for social belonging with their equally vital needs for individual autonomy and achievement. Psychosocial integration is as much an inward experience of identity and meaning as a set of outward social relationships. **An enduring lack of psychosocial integration, which is called dislocation,** ... is both individually painful and socially destructive ... Although psychosocial integration denotes interdependence between a person and society, it is experienced on several other levels as well ... It is quite often experienced as connection with the divine, because members of viable societies usually share a way of understanding the unseen world beyond mundane space and time that surrounds their social world ... Polanyi, an economic historian, recognized that the individual's soul is an essential part of the experience of psychosocial integration of individuals in their communities ... Whereas individual people can become dislocated by misfortunes in any society, including tribal, feudal, and socialist ones, and whereas the downfall of any society produces mass dislocation, only free-market society has produced an unprecedented, worldwide collapse of psychosocial integration ... To the degree that labour, land, credit, goods, education, medicine, entertainment, etc. are traded in free competitive markets, dislocation becomes inevitable for everybody. This is because competitive free markets work efficiently only if each buyer and seller takes the role of an individual economic actor, pursuing his or her individual enrichment – however he or she personally defines it – competitively and acquisitively ... To the degree that Western civilization approximates a free-market society, dislocation is not the pathological state of a few but the general condition ... Because dislocation makes parents desperate and families dysfunctional in Western society, it affects children as much as it affects adults who participate directly in commerce.”*

*– Bruce Alexander, *The Globalisation of Addiction: A Study in the Poverty of the Spirit*, 58-62*

The central focus of Alexander's book is to describe the role of dislocation in feeding addictions of all kinds in our society (whether they be related to substance use, consumerism, work or other behaviours). However, he also notes that dislocation has a catastrophic impact on other levels of human experience (Alexander, 2008, 392). Dislocation creates a general poverty of the spirit, which is different than material poverty. Indeed, while people experiencing material poverty can live with dignity if they are members of an integrated society, people experiencing poverty of the spirit feel demoralized and degraded no matter the state of their material wealth (Alexander, 2008, 60).

Street cultures are in many ways born out of people's experiences of dislocation within mainstream culture (Philipps, 2012). In response, they foster elements such as personal resilience, freedom, and strong levels of mutual support. In this way, for people who identify with them, street cultures play a vital role in building a sense of psychosocial integration.

The alternatives offered by street cultures promise to yield broader insights for society in general. Indeed, Alexander argues that while structural changes in our political and economic systems are necessary to restore psychosocial integration for people (Alexander, 2008, 388-92), beyond these changes, the "magical" ingredient needed to restore people's spirits in mainstream Western society is a cultural transformation (Alexander, 2008, 392).

“The kinds of social change that are needed to avert a rising tide of addiction and the other catastrophes cannot be achieved fast enough to save the day until the underlying philosophy changes in the minds of the great majority of people ... World society will change at a gallop when its world view changes, but its world view will not change until a galvanizing alternative philosophy appears, together with images, ceremonies, music and metaphysics that can give it

life in human hearts. The ability to create these magical pieces of the puzzle lies miles beyond the prosaic imaginations of rationalistic academics like myself.”

– Bruce Alexander, *The Globalisation of Addiction: A Study in the Poverty of the Spirit*, 58-62

In this light, a broader effort to document the content of street cultures would be of merit (however, it is outside the scope of this report).

Belonging and Psychosocial Integration

1. Belonging is related but not identical to inclusion and sense of community.
 - Belonging – A sense in which a person feels indispensable and integral to the group.
 - Inclusion – Where people have equal access to resources and their voices are heard in the decisions that affect their lives.
 - Sense of Community – A feeling that members worry about each other, that a group is concerned about its own, and a shared faith that the needs of the members will be satisfied through being together.
2. Belonging is a fundamental human need.
3. Psychosocial integration integrates belonging to a wider group with individual needs for freedom and autonomy, and is important for overall wellbeing.
4. Prolonged loss of psychosocial integration is called dislocation. Mainstream free-market culture creates dislocation on a society-wide scale.
5. Street cultures foster elements that repair the spirits of people who have experienced dislocation within mainstream culture.

Health and Belonging

Sense of community and sense of belonging have a strong and positive impact on people’s health. Research shows that in general, the stronger our community ties, the less we experience colds, heart attacks, cancer, depression and premature death of all sorts (Putman, 2000, 326). In fact, the positive contributions to health made by social ties rival the detrimental effects of smoking, obesity, elevated blood pressure and physical inactivity (Putman, 2000, 327). In Canada, people reporting strong community connection generally self-report a higher perception of their own health (Shields, 2008, 55).

Conversely, lacking a sense of community and sense of belonging leads to increased mortality. In general, people who are disconnected from a community “are between two and five times more likely to die from all causes” (Putman, 2000, 327). This correlation arises from a few factors. First, social networks furnish tangible assistance for people. Second, they reinforce healthy norms. Finally, and most intriguingly, good social relationships have positive physiological effects on people (Putman, 2000, 327).

Sense of community and sense of belonging have a particularly strong impact on people’s mental health. A lack of belonging is associated with vulnerability to depression (Vandemark, 2005, 245) while social connectedness is “protective of mental health” (Call to Action, 2008). In Ontario, “people reporting a strong sense of community belonging were two times as likely to report excellent or very good mental health” (Gold Standard, 2007).

Sense of belonging and mental health interact powerfully when it comes to how people experience stress. Being socially disconnected is “chronically stressful” for people, and this leads to harmful biological responses (Ross, 2002, 35). Continuous stress causes “physiological tensions,” weakens resistance to disease, and disrupts hormonal and metabolic systems. This makes people more vulnerable to serious illnesses such as “cardiovascular and immune system diseases, and adult-onset diabetes” (Mikkonen and Raphael, 2010, 10). Chronic stress can also cause biological reactions that strain the body and cause ‘fight-or-flight’ reactions. Stress is particularly detrimental if there is no non-stressful environment available for someone to recover in (Mikkonen and Raphael, 2010, 10).

There is a strong relationship between belonging, stress and depression. Some researchers argue that “stress and depression form a vicious cycle whereby the one aggravates the other” (Choenarom et al, 2005, 18). Additionally, sense of belonging “has negatively correlated with both stress and depression” (Choenarom et al, 2005, 19). Studies have shown that belonging has a “direct effect on depression,” whereas other social supports only have indirect effects. Likewise, lack of belonging is one of the strongest predictors for depression (Choenarom et al, 2005, 20).

When sense of belonging and sense of community are balanced by a sense of personal fulfillment – i.e. when psychosocial integration exists – people experience a richness of the spirit which improves their psychological wellbeing. Bruce Alexander argues that this psychological wellbeing leads directly to a decrease in addictive behaviour. He notes the existence of “at least one documented example [of] abrupt decrease in dislocation followed by a decrease in addiction [on a societal scale].” He thus argues that restoring psychosocial integration after dislocation is an effective treatment for addiction (Alexander, 2008, 129).

This review of the research indicates that fostering an overall sense of belonging, community, and psychosocial integration is an important intervention in people’s physical and mental health, including in the vicious stress-depression cycle, and in relation to addictive behaviour. It is therefore clear that systems of support are more effective in creating positive health benefits when they foster belonging and psychosocial integration.

Health and Belonging

1. Sense of belonging contributes positively to people's physical and mental health.
2. Belonging has a direct positive effect on stress and depression.
3. Psychosocial integration directly reduces addictive behaviour.
4. Fostering a sense of belonging, sense of community, and psychosocial integration is an important intervention in people's physical and mental health.

Places

Places play an essential role in helping people to establish and maintain a sense of belonging, community, and self. Studies show that people have emotional relationships with places, just as they do with other people (Fields, 2011, 264). Furthermore, when people feel a sense of belonging in relation to other people, those personal relationships are often embedded in particular places (Vandemark, 2005, 245). In this way, belonging is not just integration into a dense social network – it is also about attachment to meaningful places in our lives (Vandemark, 2005, 245). As Fullilove writes, a sense of belonging “depends on strong ... relationships with nurturing places” (Fullilove, 1996, 1517).

Conversely, when people lose their sense of place, they also experience a diminishment in their sense of belonging and sense of self. This in turn produces anxiety and depression, and diminishes social and functional abilities necessary for life (Vandemark, 2005, 244). When there is a “disturbance in these essential place relationships,” this can lead “to psychological disorder” (Fullilove, 1996, 1517). In fact, attachment to place seems to have the same kinds of emotional dynamics as attachment to persons. Just as “disruption in attachment to person leads to difficulty with separation and commitment... similar problems appear to follow the loss of a beloved place” (Fullilove, 1996, 1519).

Ray Oldenburg, in his classic text *The Great Good Place*, argues for the importance of what he calls “Third Places” in our communities. These are places such as neighbourhood pubs, coffee shops and community centres. These places “host the regular, voluntary, informal and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (Oldenburg, 1989, 16).

The characteristics that make Third Places unique are their nature as neutral ground, their role in equalizing people, their accessibility and accommodating spirit, their low profile, their playful mood, the presence of regulars, the importance of conversations in the spaces, and the sense that they are a home away from home (Oldenburg, 1989, Chapter Three). These characteristics make Third Places unique in holding relationships and fostering a sense of belonging and a sense of community.

Oldenburg writes that the role and function of Third Places within communities cannot be adequately supplied by other groups or agencies within society. They play a role in holding vital relationships that other societal institutions cannot substitute for (Oldenburg, 1989, 9). Yet all too frequently, these places and their essential roles are forgotten by social reformers and urban planners alike (Oldenburg, 1989, 23).

Some researchers note that Third Places, as important as they are, can exclude certain populations. For example, places dominated by mainstream culture may not welcome people who belong to alternative cultures and offer them meaningful ways of participating. (Fields, 2011, 259-260) In such places, stigma can put up barriers for integration. Given the essential role of Third Places in holding relationships, these researchers advocate for the importance of 'Alternative Third Places.' Feelings of rejection from mainstream places can lead people to "seek out 'places of refuge' that in turn become all the more meaningful as sites of belonging." These new gathering places become Alternative Third Places, characterized by a greater sense of non-judgment and acceptance (Fields, 2011, 261). Fields writes that these "safe spaces to simply be, without judgment or need to explain behaviours ... can become a much-needed source of acceptance of self and others" (Fields, 2011, 266).

As places that foster belonging and community for people, including people who experience stigma in mainstream culture, Alternative Third Places play a role in nurturing cultures that are alternatives to mainstream culture. As explored earlier, it is important that cultures are nurtured and respected, because experiencing cultural identity fosters a sense of belonging and sense of self – i.e. a sense of psychosocial integration.

Given that Alternative Third Places are key to fostering a sense of belonging, a sense of community, and psychosocial integration for people who belong to alternative cultures including street cultures, it is important for our systems of support and care to nurture these non-judgmental and inclusive gathering spaces in our communities. The research linking sense of belonging and psychosocial integration to physical and mental health indicates that, simply by existing, these places help to improve people's overall wellbeing. With the existence of these trusted gathering places where people are already experiencing positive health benefits, the question for our systems of support is: What lessons can we learn from the culture of people using these spaces as we work to improve access to services for this population?

Places

1. Places play an essential role in helping people to establish and maintain a sense of belonging and sense of community.
2. Third Places
 - Play a role in fostering belonging and relationships that other societal institutions are not capable of.
 - Host the regular, informal gatherings of people outside the context of home and work.
 - Are characterized by, among other things, equality between people, conversations, and a playful and informal atmosphere.
3. Alternative Third Places are characterized by being inclusive and non-judgmental, and play an important role in nurturing cultures that are alternatives to mainstream culture.
4. As trusted gathering places where people are already experiencing positive health benefits, Alternative Third Places have a role to play in our systems of support.

Community Hubs

In an effort to better understand the role of places in our models of service delivery, in 2015, the Province of Ontario created a Community Hub Framework Advisory Group to “develop a framework for adapting existing public assets to become community hubs.” (Office of the Premier, 2015).

The Community Hub model is a place-based service provision model that is currently expanding within our systems of support and care. Community Hubs aim to develop “effective multi-service partnerships” (Community Development Council Durham, 2010, 15) by allowing interrelated services to be co-located in a common space.

For people accessing services, some of the benefits of the Community Hub model are:

- Access to many different services
- Greater awareness of services that are available in the community
- Better co-ordination between systems of services and referral

(Community Development Council Durham, 2010, 16).

Critics of the Community Hub model note that common weaknesses of Community Hubs are that they are professionally driven, lack community engagement, and foster a sense of deficiency among the people they serve. In a review of the Community Hub model, Ginette Lafrenière writes that, “Often the community ‘needs’ are determined by the professionals leading the initiative and community engagement is an afterthought... A power imbalance may be established early and become difficult to overcome.” (Lafrenière, 2013, 19). Ebersöhn & Eloff note that the dominant needs-based approach used by professionals to design Community Hubs “creates mental maps of communities that encourage its members to think about themselves as fundamentally deficient and as powerless victims of their circumstances.” (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006, 462).

A major critique of Community Hubs is that fundamentally, they do not address the underlying issues that impact the people they serve. Lafrenière writes that, “[Hubs] do not address root causes and macro level policy issues ... Hubs do little or nothing about the core issues that they are interested in responding to: poverty, inequity, housing, and transportation barriers.” (2013, 20).

The weaknesses of the Community Hub model arise from its lack of responsiveness to the community and culture of the people it serves. The Community Hub model does not build upon the supports that people already have in their cultures, nor does it evolve with cultures as they change.

The literature indicates that the Community Hub model has strong positive elements, which can best serve people when they are incorporated in a model that also actively includes the people being served, invites and hears their thoughts on the issues that impact them, and fosters creative responses to those issues.

The Community Hub Model

1. A place-based service provision model that includes interrelated services co-located in a common space.
2. Concrete benefits for people accessing services include access to multiple services, greater awareness of services available, and better coordination between services.
3. Critics note that Community Hubs often lack community engagement, foster a sense of deficiency among the people they serve, and do not address the underlying issues that impact the people they serve.
4. The positive elements of the Community Hub model can best serve people when they are incorporated in a model that is responsive to the culture of the people it serves.

Analysis: St. John's Kitchen in its Social Context

St. John's Kitchen exists within the context of a society where free-market culture is dominant. It supports a population that identifies (to varying degrees) with the local street culture, and its model is informed by the values and best qualities of this culture (*see page 26, A Values-Based Culture with Roots in the Local Street Culture*).

Street cultures are in many ways born out of people's experiences of dislocation within mainstream culture. In response, they have evolved to nurture qualities such as freedom, personal resilience, and strong levels of mutual support. These elements of street cultures foster a sense of psychosocial integration for people, and they cannot be replaced by other support structures – because a person's culture is the medium that helps them make meaning out of life.

Furthermore, systems of support that are not integrated within the support structures of people's own cultures are not successful. One example of this is the failure of housing stability supports that do not nurture people to maintain their connection to the supports they receive within their own street culture (Ravenhill, 2008). This lack of cultural integration is also a weakness of the community hub model, which is professionally-driven, lacks community engagement, and does not address the underlying issues impacting people.

There is a need for effective supports that are culturally integrated, and that build on the positive benefits to health and spirit that people receive within a place, community, and culture where they feel a sense of belonging. St. John's Kitchen fills this space in our local community, as an Alternative Third Place that welcomes everyone, as a place that nurtures people to thrive within the positive elements of the local street culture, and as a place that provides culturally integrated services.

Outcome – The Kitchen Table Model

The core of the model of St. John's Kitchen is the unique way in which it nurtures people to support each other within the positive elements of the local street culture. All services and supports at St. John's Kitchen are based within this cultural foundation. Collaboratively, we developed the concept of the Kitchen Table model as a way of describing the model through which St. John's Kitchen's cultural foundation is built and evolves.

The image of the Kitchen Table holds a strong resonance, as a place that brings people together on equal ground to share food and conversation, and to offer support to each other. As Wendy Sarkissian writes in *Kitchen Table Sustainability*, "At the kitchen table, people do not use big words or complex terminology to tell their stories or voice their fears. Instead, we can speak from our hearts, using information, intuition and common sense."

Conversation around the Kitchen Table is frank and lively, as people share their daily joys and frustrations. It is also creative and collaborative. In the words of Leonard Sweet, the author of *From Tablet to Table*, "The table is not just a place for food, but a place for stories and ideas to mingle, interact, attract each other, argue with one another, and procreate." (2015).

The place of the Kitchen Table captures the life and culture of St. John's Kitchen. To read more about the Kitchen Table model, see *Section 3 – St. John's Kitchen: The Kitchen Table Model*.

"On the table, as you have noticed over the years, there is always a candle ... In other words, our conversation should always go on with the certainty that there is somebody else who will knock at the door, and the candle stands for him or her. It is a constant reminder that the community is never closed."

– Philia. The Rivers North of the Future, The Testament of Ivan Illich as told to David Cayley, p. 146-152.

SECTION 3: ST. JOHN'S KITCHEN: THE KITCHEN TABLE MODEL

INTRODUCTION: A CULTURAL MODEL

The model of St. John's Kitchen is a cultural one. It has evolved incrementally through the intertwining of the foundational philosophies of The Working Centre, and the values of people gathering in the space of St. John's Kitchen.

The foundational philosophies of The Working Centre ground the model of St. John's Kitchen as a place for people to freely and mutually support each other in community. These philosophies have nurtured St. John's Kitchen to be a gathering place where:

- Everyone is welcome;
- The daily work is completed through the cooperative participation of people using the space;
- Culture grows organically from the values of people using the space.

The framework created by the philosophies of The Working Centre nurtures the culture of St. John's Kitchen to grow organically from the values of the people who gather there. It is in this context that, over 30 years, the people who make up the community of St. John's Kitchen have shaped the place and its culture.

"It's not that we as service providers have created this place. The community created this place, and now service providers come here."

– Street Outreach Worker

The culture that the community of St. John's Kitchen has built forms the model within which people gather, are supported, and support each other in the space.

The foundational work for this report was to build the language to write about this cultural model. This sub-section describes the culture of St. John's Kitchen, and how we developed the language of the Kitchen Table model.

A Shared Philosophy: Fixed and Mobile Outreach Services Through St. John's Kitchen

This report focuses specifically on the role of St. John's Kitchen as a place, and the supports that exist at St. John's Kitchen in a fixed capacity. However, it is important to note that the fixed supports at St. John's Kitchen are closely integrated with mobile outreach services delivered through St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre, which also support people in the same population. These mobile services are delivered in partnership with other agencies in the region, and include Street Outreach, Streets to Housing Stability, At-Home Outreach, and Specialized Outreach Services / the Psychiatric Outreach Project.

Fixed and mobile outreach workers hired through St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre bring the same philosophies and approaches to their work. They meet together as one team, and maintain continuous communication in order to support people in an integrated approach.

(To read more about the complementary roles of fixed and mobile outreach supports through St. John's Kitchen, see Section 4: St. John's Kitchen in a Systemic Perspective).

St. John's Kitchen as a Gathering Place

St. John's Kitchen is a gathering place where everyone is welcome. People do not need to fulfill any requirements, or even give their names, to participate in the space. People can be in the space when they are under the influence of substances. These characteristics are fundamental to the culture of St. John's Kitchen, making it an accessible place for people to gather, eat a hot meal, have conversations, make friends, and share daily activities.

Nine patrons of St. John's Kitchen participated in interviews for this report. Every patron interviewed named more than one reason for spending time at St. John's Kitchen – as was anticipated, given the wide range of services and supports offered in the space. Significantly, the single most talked about reason for spending time at St. John's Kitchen (and the single reason mentioned by every patron interviewed) was the nature of St. John's Kitchen as a gathering place.

“The outreach workers are great. They help people. There's lots of facilities for people here ... There's a doctor here, there's the ID clinic with Doug Rankin. There's a washer-dryer and showers. They supply soap for the showers, so there's no need to be dirty. When I come I volunteer, and I get the hampers sometimes ... It's a gathering place for everybody. People come and eat with us.”

– Two St. John's Kitchen Patrons

“It's a place you can come to meet people and they have good help here. When I first came, I was new – I'm from B.C. – and I didn't know anyone. Then I got to know people here. I volunteer here sometimes. The staff are really nice. The food is good.”

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

“It's wonderful. Keeps people fed. It's a place to express yourself and communicate with others ... There's another guy here, we're thinkers. We talk about how to make the world a better place.”

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

In its nature as an inclusive and non-judgmental gathering place, St. John's Kitchen creates space for people to express themselves and build relationships with other people. For people gathering in the space, these elements nurture a sense of self, community, and belonging.

“There's a definite community, camaraderie, and sense of belonging and caring at St. John's Kitchen ... I know that a large number of people who are living on a low income and may be experiencing homeless or struggling with substances use or mental health issues know that they are accepted at St. John's Kitchen – and that has created a culture of inclusiveness.”

– Community Partner

A Values-Based Culture with Roots in the Local Street Culture

More than being a gathering place where people feel a sense of inclusion and belonging to community, St. John's Kitchen is a place that people feel belongs to them. This is because a fundamental element of the framework of St. John's Kitchen is that its culture grows out of the values of people who gather there.

“People come to St. John’s Kitchen because the cultural norms were created by the people themselves.”

- Specialized Outreach Services Worker

“There’s a respect here. There’s a bit of a sense of ownership, of being part of it.”

- St. John’s Kitchen Volunteer

Cultural growth and change at St. John’s Kitchen occurs through a continual process of listening and conversation around the values of people who make up its community. This living dynamic allows the culture of St. John’s Kitchen to thrive through the very best elements that people bring with them into the space.

Many of the values that form the cultural base of St. John’s Kitchen have roots in the local street culture, because this is the main culture that people in the core population served at St. John’s Kitchen identify with. It is important to note that the local street culture is a complex and non-homogenous culture that people identify with in different ways, and to different degrees. Some patrons of St. John’s Kitchen connect to a transient lifestyle within the local street culture, while other patrons connect to the community and values of the local street culture while maintaining a housed lifestyle.

It is an important reality that the local street culture remains strongly relevant for patrons of St. John’s Kitchen who are housed. As noted in the Literature Review, when people belonging to street cultures enter housing situations that separate them from their cultural context, they often experience depression, isolation, and loneliness. This is because cultures play an irreplaceable role in providing support to their members and helping people make meaning out of life. Just like belonging to any culture, belonging to a street culture is not a socioeconomic circumstance – it is a way of understanding the world. (*See page 12, Literature Review: Culture*).

St. John’s Kitchen is a place where people who identify with the local street culture, whether they are housed or not, thrive within the supports of the culture’s best qualities.

“We don’t ask people to check their culture at the door in order to come in here. We as a community help hold a culture that draws on many of the positive values of street culture.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Worker

The best qualities of the local street culture include its own set of ethics, and particularly strong, caring and supportive relationships between people. As a source of belonging and wellbeing, the local street culture is nurtured and appreciated by people who identify with it.

“A couple of months ago, I was interviewed on CTV. I gave \$20 to a homeless person. The guy from CTV asked me, “Aren’t you homeless?” I said, “So?” We’re one big family. We stick together. We get used to one another. You know, we all sleep together at Out Of The Cold. If somebody’s hurt, we all support each other. It’s a good community and family. There were lots of people that I didn’t like at first, then I got to know them, and now they’re my friends. I don’t have a family, so this is my family.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Patron

The philosophical framework of St. John’s Kitchen means that the elements of the local street culture reflected there are positive ones. There are also negative issues impacting the community that identifies

with the local street culture. These issues include petty crime, substance use, volatile behaviour, and stigma from those outside the culture. It is important to note that these issues exist in complex intersections between mainstream cultures, street cultures, and individual experiences. Only a thorough and sensitive documentation of the local street culture from within can illuminate how each of these issues intersects with cultural understandings.

Community partners interviewed expressed that it is important for people to be supported within the local street culture, and that there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of the culture.

“The culture is such a huge part of everything that you’re trying to understand. I don’t know how you get to that point besides a separate report. The power of that culture is very important to individuals and the group. [Question: Do you think the concept of the population we serve having a culture changes the way we think about supporting people? If so, how?] It has for me, from my experience working with Mental Health Court and Drug Treatment Court. It has made me realize that you can’t approach these folks with the same set of, “This is how we’re going to do it, and this is what we expect.” That’s why these courts are coming up – there’s a recognition in the legal system that we have to come to this population with more...out-of-the-box thinking. There is much more to be learned, and we are just starting to figure it out.”

– Linda Elliott, Assistant Crown Attorney, Region of Waterloo

Although a thorough documentation of street culture in the community was outside the scope of this report, we recommend further conversations to understand this important aspect of life for this population.

“Rediscovering a new appreciation for the diversity of the human spirit, as expressed by culture, is among the central challenges of our time.”

– Wade Davis, *The Wayfinders*

An Oral Culture

St. John’s Kitchen has an oral culture – a dimension that rises from its street culture roots. The culture of St. John’s Kitchen becomes rich through the sharing of stories, and is kept alive through continual conversation.

“People long to tell their narrative and weave their story with others. It’s that kind of reciprocity that is central to St. John’s Kitchen. It’s not that, ‘I want to help you’ it’s about mutual exchange ...There are some people who never tell their story. For others, it takes time. It happens organically.”

– Leslie Morgenson, Writer and Former St. John’s Kitchen Worker

“We learn stories of each other’s families and the lives we live. Plus you can eat at the same time.”

– Two St. John’s Kitchen Patrons

Conversation is the medium through which knowledge and relationships are built at St. John’s Kitchen. Through informal conversations, patrons learn about services that are available, workers learn about issues or trends that are impacting the population served, and people get to know each other and build

relationships of trust. This trust itself is passed on through conversation, when trusted friends or workers vouch for others.

“It’s an oral culture here in the community. What they learn from the world is what they learn from others – not from books. Whatever I do or say will get around the community in no time. I had to build consistency, because everyone talks. Word of mouth is more powerful here than in other places. I had to intentionally back up what I told people. People expect you to hold to your word.”

– Dr. George Berrigan, physician at S.O.S. / P.O.P, interviewed at St. John’s Kitchen

“People talk to each other at St. John’s Kitchen. Someone will say, ‘Go to The Working Centre, or go to Sue.’ It helps with credibility.”

– Sue Collison, Hub Worker (Money Matters and Housing Desk at The Working Centre, based at St. John’s Kitchen one morning a week)

St. John’s Kitchen maintains its integrity through conversation. It is only as people express their experiences of the space and their wishes for it, and hear what others have to say, that the space remains rooted as a gathering place where everyone is welcome, and that belongs to its community.

“If we’re going to have this place be everyone’s place, we have to have constant conversation and dialogue.”

– Coordinator, St. John’s Kitchen

Values of St. John’s Kitchen

The values of St. John’s Kitchen form the cultural base within which daily life and work take place there.

“This place holds a value system that people acknowledge and choose to be here to participate in.”

– Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver, interviewed at St. John’s Kitchen

As the basis of an evolving oral culture, values at St. John’s Kitchen are never codified, and indeed expressions of them fluctuate in response to trends and changes over time. It is through a continual process of dialogue around values that the community of St. John’s Kitchen negotiates these changes.

“Concepts come up and down in terms of being more or less expressed depending on what’s happening over time ... We are in dialogue constantly, negotiating around values, and carefully listening to people, supporting their right to be heard and understood.”

– Coordinator, St. John’s Kitchen

As patrons, volunteers, staff members and community partners engage in daily life at St. John’s Kitchen, they develop an intimate and personal understanding of the values of the culture. Interviewees talked about the values very much in their own words. Some people named specific values, while others shared broader reflections that illustrated values. Many words came up repeatedly, and some came up just once or twice over our interviews.

Patrons in particular most often expressed values conceptually through stories in their interviews. Concepts that patrons expressed included non-judgment, acceptance, inclusion, friendship, family, giving back, dignity, and respect.

“People treat each other with respect ... You get a couple of outbursts once in a while. That’s just people getting riled.”

–St. John’s Kitchen Patron

“I love the staff. They keep me in line, remind me that I’m not an animal. In prison they’re always moving you here and there. Here they treat you like a human.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Patron

“When I first came here, I was a pretty angry man. This place has helped me to see that there’s more to life than watching television. This place helped me feel accepted in being myself. Of course, after being myself for awhile, people get annoyed at me. But I get along with most people here. I’m not mainstream. This place helped me feel empowered. There’s a variety of services here – I went to the doctor, got on to ODSP. In general in society, people should respect each other more. But this place has made me feel empowered and feel like myself. Because before that, my life was unsustainable.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Patron

Cultural Values of St. John’s Kitchen

Values gathered by talking to patrons, volunteers, staff members and community partners who spend time at St. John’s Kitchen. The value that was talked about the most as a fundamental element of St. John’s Kitchen was respect.

- Respect
- Authentic integrity
- Welcoming
- Freedom
- Unconditional love
- Relationship-building
- Generosity of spirit
- Trust
- Walking with
- Honour
- Dignity
- Reciprocity
- Non-judgment
- Trust

“It’s about the deep truth of our own wisdom and experience.”

– Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver, on values at St. John’s Kitchen

This is a list of the values most often mentioned by interviewees. For a full list of values gathered through our conversations, see page 68, Appendix 1.

St. John's Kitchen as a Community Hub

When planning this report, we intended to describe the model of St. John's Kitchen as a community hub. A community hub is

"a conveniently located public place that is recognized and valued in the local community as a gathering place for people, and an access point for a wide range of community activities, programs, services and events." (Rossiter, 2007, 2).

Some core elements of a community hub are: accessible space for both formal and informal activities, key services to meet community needs, coordination between service providers, and the fostering of informal social networks among hub users. (Dyson, D. & Eddleson, A. 2011). *(To read more about the Community Hub model, see page 22, Literature Review: Community Hubs.)*

"Community hub" describes a part of the role that St. John's Kitchen plays within the local community. However, this language does not capture the fundamental element of the model of St. John's Kitchen, which is its culture. To more aptly capture the culture of St. John's Kitchen, we needed to seek other language.

St. John's Kitchen as an Alternative Third Place

As a public place where people gather and feel a sense of ownership, community, and belonging, St. John's Kitchen can be described as an Alternative Third Place.

Alternative Third Places are familiar gathering places that are characterized by acceptance and non-judgment. They play an important role in fostering belonging and community, because they are places where everyone is welcome – including people who experience marginalization or stigma in other public places.

"Due to poverty, I'm not part of any club or group. This is that public space that serves that need – sitting around with others, talking about what's going on in the world, what's possible in the world. I see quite a few people on the street that I met here. It's a good community-building place."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

The unique characteristics of Alternative Third Places mean that they are able to hold relationships in ways that other societal institutions are unable to – and they have an important role to play in our systems of support *(see page 20, Literature Review: Places)*.

"Alternative Third Place" captures the kind of gathering place that St. John's Kitchen is. The place is further given life by the unique culture of St. John's Kitchen, and the spirit of shared productive conversation and activity that occurs there.

The Kitchen Table Model: Capturing the Culture of St. John's Kitchen

It's like the Table brings peace. There's an integrity to sitting around the Table. It feels like if you're going to meet someone at the Table, you come in peace.

– Leslie Morgenson, Writer and Former St. John's Kitchen Worker

We started the process of building language to describe the model of St. John's Kitchen by talking with St. John's Kitchen workers about how they experience and understand the place. The idea of using the language of the "Kitchen Table" to describe St. John's Kitchen came up. We held a focus group with workers to explore this idea in more depth.

In the focus group, St. John's Kitchen workers listed the following characteristics of the Kitchen Table:

- Creating a space and letting the experience happen.
- Respecting complexity
- Ownership by the community
- Service
- Values-based space

We found that the complex and yet easily navigable space of the Kitchen Table aptly captures the culture of St. John's Kitchen. People come to the Table in peace and with respect for the Table, and sit together as equals. People can engage with others as little or as much as they want to. Food and conversation is shared. The experience unfolds informally and naturally. Stories are told. It's a place that fosters friendship and family, and people feel that it belongs to them.

"The Kitchen Table is about stories and storytelling. Stories hold complexity. They're collective and individual. Personal and shared."

– Street Outreach Worker

Some interviewees noted that "Kitchen Table," like any description, is imperfect. For example, experiences of life around a family kitchen table are varied, perhaps particularly among members of the St. John's Kitchen community. Nevertheless, almost all interviewees agreed that "Kitchen Table" is the description that most aptly captures the culture of St. John's Kitchen.

THE KITCHEN TABLE MODEL OF ST. JOHN'S KITCHEN

The culture of St. John's Kitchen is like a gathering around the Kitchen Table. It is through conversations and intimacy around the Table that strangers become friends and ideas take form. From these relationships and ideas, community grows and culture evolves.

The model of St. John's Kitchen rises from the culture of the Kitchen Table, and supports it to thrive in all its vibrancy.

The following sub-sections describe the model of St. John's Kitchen:

- [Food on the Table: The Role of the Meal at St. John's Kitchen](#)
- [Around the Kitchen Table: The Community of St. John's Kitchen](#)
- [Serving the Kitchen Table: The Role of Staff at St. John's Kitchen](#)
- [A Seat at the Kitchen Table: Feeding the Spirit](#)
- [Coming to the Table: Community Partners at St. John's Kitchen](#)
- [Supporting the Kitchen Table Model: The Working Centre's Administrative Infrastructure](#)

Food on the Table: The Role of the Meal at St. John's Kitchen

The food service at St. John's Kitchen is offered with the help of 20 volunteers daily. About 10 times a year, volunteer groups come in to host meals using their own recipes. Many patrons also volunteer in the food service – indeed, this is a core element of the model of St. John's Kitchen (*see page 36, Sharing the Daily Work*).

Food is offered at St. John's Kitchen in the following ways:

- Continental style breakfast every morning (self-serve breads, jams, coffee, and tea).
- Hot meal every day from 11:30 – 1:00, with flexibility. *Serves on average 280 – 300 people daily.*
- Meals to Go offered when available. *Serves on average 57 people daily.*
- Coffee and Tea available all day

The bulk of the food prepared and served at St. John's Kitchen is provided through the Food Bank. Many generous amounts are also donated by individuals and businesses. Items that cannot be obtained from the food bank, such as sugar and flour, are bought in bulk.

Outside of people who participate regularly at St. John's Kitchen, in the wider public, the fact that St. John's Kitchen serves a daily meal is the most commonly held piece of knowledge about the place.

Bringing People to the Table

The offering of food is integral to the model of St. John's Kitchen. In many cases, it is the hot meal that brings people into the space, and gathers them together around the Table. Significantly however, once people start to go to St. John's Kitchen for the meal, they find other reasons for continuing to spend time there – reasons that begin to feel more important to people than the food.

"The food is not incidental. You couldn't take it out of the space. There's a commonality to gathering at the table with friends. You take time to pause, to be refreshed, and then to get on with the rest of the day."

– Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver, interviewed at St. John's Kitchen

"People have a misconception that St. John's Kitchen is just about food. I think that more often people come because they're lonely. But it's true – if you want to get people together in any context, you bring food. The offering of food is basic. It's an offer of conviviality and good will."

– Leslie Morgenson, Writer and Former St. John's Kitchen Worker

"I came here for the meal at first, then started helping out ... There are lots of new faces here. People who are new to K-W come for lunch here, and learn that they have other facilities here. They can get their paperwork filled out, do their photocopying, etc. It's easy to meet people here. There are all kinds of people. There are some quiet people, and some more active people."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

As discussed earlier, the main reason that people spend time at St. John's Kitchen is to gather together with others (*see page 26, St. John's Kitchen as a Gathering Place*). The food and coffee offered at St. John's Kitchen are integral to how gathering occurs in the space. Sharing food and coffee has an equalizing and grounding effect that fosters relationship-building between people.

“Getting coffee together equalizes the playing field.”

– Dr. Sujay Patel, Medical Director of Specialized Mental Health, Grand River Hospital

“St. John’s Kitchen is a place to go for a conversation, a coffee, a chat – it’s informal. It’s just like dropping in for a coffee with a friend. I’m not seen as a worker, per se. The atmosphere is less threatening. I feel like I’m being invited into their kitchen.”

– Sue Collison, Hub Worker (Money Matters and Housing Desk at The Working Centre, based at St. John’s Kitchen one morning a week)

Sharing food is a way to celebrate together. Occasions like Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter at St. John’s Kitchen are marked by special meals. In interviews, patrons talked about their enjoyment of these shared occasions.

“They have different things here. At Christmas, they give out presents to everyone. They have Thanksgiving, Christmas dinner. On special occasions everyone gets along, and the food’s good. You hear everybody getting along and not fighting.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Patron

Setting the Tone

The food service at St. John’s Kitchen is often the first service that people encounter in the space, and because of this, it has a significant role in setting the tone for the space. It invites people into the broader web of services offered at St. John’s Kitchen by modeling the culture of the place, and how services in general are delivered there.

Values that underpin the serving and receiving of food at St. John’s Kitchen include respect, dignity, and equality.

To receive food, patrons, volunteers, staff and community partners all stand in line together, and sit down together for the meal. This shared experience sets the tone for interactions in the space.

“You bring a non-judgmental attitude, you stand in line, share the food, chat in the laneway – it’s about choosing to participate in the space, free of outcomes and expectations.”

– Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver, interviewed at St. John’s Kitchen

Practices for serving food at St. John’s Kitchen include giving people as much food as they ask for, offering a vegetarian option, respecting people’s choices to have the whole meal or just a portion of it (such as dessert) and engaging in conversation with people about their experiences of the food.

“People can take as much food as they want. It’s not just feeding the body, it’s also feeding the spirit. There’s dignity in allowing yes to be yes and no to be no. Vegetarians are also honoured – that gives dignity to people’s choices.”

– Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver, interviewed at St. John’s Kitchen

"I was surprised by the generosity of the portions. We gave people what they asked for with a smile. My natural inclination was to feel a sense of scarcity, to want to ration the portions to ensure that there was enough for everyone. I found this sense of generosity and abundance refreshing."

– Reflection by a St. John's Kitchen Volunteer

The abundance in which food is offered at St. John's Kitchen, and the respect for people's choices of meal, have a significant role in setting the tone for service delivery in the space. St. John's Kitchen workers wish for patrons to feel invited to share their needs freely in the space, and to feel comfortable to ask for anything (*see page 72, Appendix 3 – Reflecting and Responding*). When this sense of invitation is established, workers are able to build a relationship with a person and to follow him or her as a whole person (*see page 69, Appendix 2, Following the Whole Person*). By setting a tone where people's needs are respected and responded to, the meal service helps to create an environment where people feel invited to ask.

Around the Kitchen Table: The Community of St. John's Kitchen

As a gathering place, St. John's Kitchen brings people together first and foremost as members of a community. Within this community, people identify with different roles as patrons, volunteers, workers, and community partners. However, these roles overlap considerably. As discussed earlier, sharing food and coffee, with its equalizing effect, is an element in this process (*see page 33, Bringing People to the Table*). Other elements that foster this overlapping of roles are the sharing of the daily work, the intimacy of relationships, and the sense that as a gathering place St. John's Kitchen belongs to its community.

"The emphasis is not on The Working Centre or St. John's Kitchen that owns this place. There's shared ownership. For a new staff member, it's important to recognize that the people they're seeing here have been here longer than them. Staff shouldn't be held over participants ... People don't fall into categories of staff-volunteer-patron. It's more like, everyone is a community member. Sometimes staff are not the best at fulfilling certain roles. Someone else might be better at breaking up a fight than the staff are."

– Street Outreach Worker

The fluidity of community members' roles is honoured by the design of the space at St. John's Kitchen. The cooking space is open to the main dining space, inviting people to participate in both spaces.

"The open kitchen is intentional. It makes things fluid, so that people can easily talk to the staff or volunteers."

– Street Outreach Worker

"With the open kitchen, I'll be out on the floor and some guy will say to me, 'That woman wiped her forehead and didn't wash her hands.' I will go back and ask her to wash her hands, and he will see that. When people see that something they say is acted upon, that is affirming to people who aren't very often affirmed."

– St. John's Kitchen Worker

“I like to see my food cooked. I don’t like others touching my food.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Patron

Sharing the Daily Work

Community members share the daily work of St. John’s Kitchen. From serving the meal to mopping the floors to practicing non-violent intervention, people contribute where they are needed and able. In particular, the roles of patron, volunteer, and staff member overlap as people work together to keep St. John’s Kitchen running each day.

The food service is a major area where work is shared at St. John’s Kitchen. With just one staff person facilitating the food service each day, the work of preparing, serving, and cleaning up after 280-300 meals is done by 20 volunteers – a group which includes people who are also patrons.

“Everybody pitches in and helps out ... They feed you – why don’t you help them back.”

– Two St. John’s Kitchen Patrons and regular Volunteers

Volunteers at St. John’s Kitchen come from a diversity of backgrounds. They include patrons, people with a family connection to St. John’s Kitchen, and people with no prior connection to the space. Intentional practices are designed to make volunteering accessible. These practices include not requiring an application, and not keeping a volunteer list or schedule. The absence of a formal volunteering structure means that people can engage spontaneously, and when they do engage, they do so in a generous spirit. On days when the number of volunteers falls short, more patrons step in to help with the work.

“A lot of clients want to reposition themselves prior to appearing before a judge. I often recommend to them that if they go to do volunteer work, that will show remorse and commitment to their community. While other places may not be willing to take these difficult-to-serve clients, I know that there’s always room at St. John’s Kitchen, and that they won’t be turned away.”

– Stephanie Krug, Criminal Defense Lawyer

“Gretchen welcomed me and got me set up as a new volunteer. After stowing my jacket in a locked closet, I was given a hair net, ‘to enhance my natural looks’ as Gretchen said with a smile. Gretchen asked me about myself and we chatted for a bit as I got situated. There were few volunteers who had shown up yet and she had no guarantee whether more would arrive. She didn’t keep a schedule and preferred to operate that way. She didn’t want people dragging their feet in because they had committed to come in. Rather, she wanted people to show up because they really wanted to be there. She was sensitive to the fact that this energy affected everyone in the space and that it makes a real difference when people show up because they have chosen to be there.”

– Reflection by a Volunteer

“Volunteers don’t have to come in every day, and there’s no official list of volunteer names and numbers. It’s a place where people can come when they want, to be really engaged in what they’re doing. It just happens. And when it doesn’t, people step up from the floor to make and serve the meal.”

– Specialized Outreach Services Worker

Relationships

The community of St. John’s Kitchen is held together by strong and supportive relationships between people. Interviewees talked in terms of love, friendship and family when describing relationships with others in the community.

“We’ve been coming here for 8 years and we love it here. Everybody seems to be a family.”

– Two St. John’s Kitchen Patrons

“There is a sense of home here. There’s family, care, community, empathy, unconditional support. It’s a partnership.”

– Clarence Cachagee, Shelter to Housing Stability Worker, interviewed at St. John’s Kitchen

The familial quality of many of the relationships among community members at St. John’s Kitchen adds another layer of blending and complexity to community members’ roles. People spending time at St. John’s Kitchen often identify with distinct roles; however, as in a family, roles are fluid and can shift with circumstances and time. As relationships are built over years, people develop an intense level of intimacy and mutual trust.

“The language of ‘family’ rings more true to me than the language of a Table. Family changes and grows, and you can be the family member who sits alone in the corner but is still welcome.”

– Street Outreach Worker

“When someone blows up at me, that actually means the person trusts me. He knows that I won’t respond in kind, or out of fear.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Worker

Strong relationships between community members at St. John’s Kitchen form the base from which staff members are able to support people. When strong relationships and mutual trust exist, people are more respectful of the space and others in it, access more supports, and are better supported by staff members (see page 69, Appendix 2: *Following the Whole Person*).

“The model of St. John’s Kitchen is relational. The stronger the relationships, the better the Kitchen functions.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Worker

Serving the Kitchen Table: The Role of Staff at St. John’s Kitchen

Staff members at St. John’s Kitchen work within the values-based culture of the place. Workers are a part of the community, and serve the people of the community by building relationships with people,

learning about the things that are important to people, and facilitating outcomes that people want. Such outcomes can include supporting people to access and navigate services, as well as being a personal support to people. Within this approach there are no formal rules or policies. There is continual conversation around values, and an ongoing process of evolution as needs shift over time. Core elements of this approach are listening, following each person as a whole person, and responding flexibly to needs that arise.

"We're led, by continuing to listen to people. We're constantly re-examining how we go forward in the context we're in. We ask, 'Is this going to allow dignity for people?'"

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

Staff members at St. John's Kitchen take turns sharing the work of facilitating the food service and the work of supporting the community on the floor. Relationship-based work means that staff get to know who people are, and how best to support each person.

Working within a Values-Based Culture

"As staff here, we learn the values of the community and draw people into them."

– St. John's Kitchen Worker

For staff members, being a part of the community of St. John's Kitchen means learning and living the values of the culture. It means working within those values, rather than instituting rules or policies in the space.

"When I first started at St. John's Kitchen, I just listened for 9 months. Then I started talking to people, and asking them, 'If this is your place, what would you like?' What I heard back was that people wanted a place built on honour and respect. The idea of having no rules came up again and again, as well as having no physical or verbal violence. Next I asked, 'What do you want me to do?' The answer was, to listen, and to facilitate outcomes – to make things happen when people wanted them to ...Our role is to be an ear, a narrator, an advocate, a safe place for people to be, and to be part of the community and what they have. There is no separation between the people we serve and staff. The only thing we ask people is to have a conversation with us."

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

The dynamics of working in a values-based model often give rise to complex ongoing conversations. Ultimately, these conversations contribute to building strong relationships of trust.

"In a policies-based space, there's friction where people have to fight to get what they need. We're trying to be open and transparent together. People like to see that we're not hiding things. If someone asks whether we have something, we always say, 'Let's go and check the closet together.' People respect that."

– St. John's Kitchen Worker

Every culture forms norms of its own. At St. John's Kitchen, the norms of the culture provide the framework that defines how values are lived in the space. Within the culture of St. John's Kitchen, values are expressed differently than they are in mainstream culture. For example, the value of respect at St.

John's Kitchen is expressed not in terms of politeness, but in terms of understanding and accepting people as they are.

"People can use foul language and still be respectful. Respect at St. John's Kitchen comes out as a deep understanding of people's stories and spaces in the community. People coming from different places – for example those coming from drug culture and others who are not part of drug culture – can get frustrated at each other, but they give each other grace."

– St. John's Kitchen Worker

Forms of behavior that fall outside the norms of St. John's Kitchen include using drugs in the space, having drug paraphernalia out, engaging in physical or verbal violence, and wearing bandanas (due to gang connotations). Patrons we interviewed expressed respect for the norms of the culture. When people engage in behaviours that fall outside the norms of the culture, both patrons and workers bring people into conversation around that behaviour.

"I've been here 2 years, and been kicked out of here once. Tom [St. John's Kitchen Worker] asked me to leave and I left because I was wrong. If I'm ever asked to leave for using, I'll leave, because I don't want other people doing that here, either. It's not right to use here."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

"I try to tell others, 'This is what happens if you do this. If you drink, you'll end up getting into fights.'"

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

"When you work with people at St. John's Kitchen, you play the role, but you're not coming to them from a position of power. You're on the same level as the person you're walking with. That's why it works so well. Many patrons haven't had positive experiences with authority. There is an acceptance of behavior at St. John's Kitchen. There's lots of grey area. There's no black and white. You don't want to go past the grey area, though – you'll get in trouble. And not from the workers! ...The collective group has the ownership, and they police that themselves. You don't want to take a bagel without using tongs!"

– Sue Collison, Hub Worker (Money Matters and Housing Desk at The Working Centre, based at St. John's Kitchen one morning a week)

The approach of working within the values-based culture of St. John's Kitchen is an evolving one. The transition to this fluid model has occurred incrementally, in small moments.

"When I started here, we didn't allow people to put the tables together. I remember going to people who did that and asking them not to do so. One day, a family came in, and started putting two tables together. I said to [the then-coordinator] Arleen, 'Should I go and talk to them, or will you?' Arleen said, 'Gretchen, why can't you put two tables together?' I said I didn't know. So Arleen said, 'Let's just not say anything.' And that was the end of that rule."

– Long-term St. John's Kitchen Worker

Though small moments can be pivotal, underlying such moments are a set of **core practices** that St. John's Kitchen workers engage continually. These practices are:

- A: Listening
- B: Following the Whole Person
- C: Reflecting and Responding to the Person

Through these practices, workers at St. John's Kitchen live their various roles in the space as servants, facilitators, listeners, narrators, advocates, friends, substitute family members, and members of the community. In a space that is full of dynamic activity, the core practices help staff members to find solid ground in their work, by bringing focus back to the people and values of the community. When workers feel grounded within the community, they are able to support people in a concrete and genuine way, and to facilitate change with fluidity when needs arise. The sub-sections that follow describe how workers approach the core practices.

Core Practice A: Listening

"We need to be able to continually look at the different ways we listen to people's lives, trends in the community, gaps in service, and ways to move forward with people. We truly believe that people have answers within themselves. They just need the opportunity to speak."

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

Listening is a continual practice that nurtures respect for the people in the community of St. John's Kitchen, and for the community's ownership of the space. By listening and by inviting people to participate in open-ended conversation, workers are able to facilitate mutual understanding between people. Patrons interviewed talked positively about their experience of being heard at St. John's Kitchen, and of participating in conversation as equals.

"The staff respond when you voice your opinion here. They'll sit and talk to you. They'll say, 'Maybe we can do it this way' They'll voice their opinion. You have the right to say your opinion, and they have the right to say theirs."

– Two St. John's Kitchen Patrons

Informal conversations at St. John's Kitchen are a key element in providing supports to people. Through everyday conversations over coffee or a meal, workers learn about who people are, hear what people need, and build relationships to be able to support people.

"Like any kitchen table, you don't know what one conversation at St. John's Kitchen could lead to. You could start talking about housing, and in the conversation, you could mention that you don't have a physician. That could lead to another connection."

– Juan-Carlos Gomez, Clinical Social Worker, Grand River Hospital

"Time spent having conversations with people at St. John's Kitchen is important to the work. Harm reduction is about more than giving out supplies. It's about building relationships and trust so that you can have honest conversations about drug use and other issues. Conversations lay the base for that relationship."

– Jess Halliday, Outreach Coordinator, ACCKWA

As workers listen to what patrons are saying, they continuously reflect on patterns and changes in their conversations with people to understand any broader issues affecting the community of St. John's Kitchen as a whole. When these broader issues arise, workers are intentional about bringing people together for shared reflection and conversation.

An approach that has significantly supported these broader conversations at St. John's Kitchen has been the First Nations' tradition of Circles. In the Circle, everyone has a voice. The facilitator introduces the significance of the Circle, and what it means to show respect to the Circle. Conversation moves around the Circle, and anyone can speak or pass on his or her turn. The framing of conversations in this way helps people to reflect on values, and creates a calm and deeply respectful space where everyone is heard. Circles at St. John's Kitchen have helped to move fractious conversations away from polarization, and toward a sense of shared experience and responsibility.

Since 2003, the people of the community of St. John's Kitchen have gathered for six Circles. Issues that have been discussed include respect between age groups, substance use issues impacting the community, and reactions to the community's presence on downtown streets. Following Circles, responses have included St. John's Kitchen community members taking ownership of the issues as a group, and workers helping to take conversations into the wider community.

"Five years ago, there was a discussion about moving people off the street. The guys were indignant. Staff heard and supported them. Circles were done, and workers took the conversation into the wider community and advocated for people's ideas."

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

With the role of the listener, comes an ethical commitment to the roles of the narrator and the advocate. Listening to people at St. John's Kitchen and reflecting their voices in the way that they need is a valued and enduring piece of serving the community. How this happens changes with shifts in the community over time.

"I was hearing people say, 'I don't have a voice. Nobody is listening to us.' What I could do for people in the capacity of outreach was minimal as I was still working with the whole group...I didn't even have the time to sit and listen to everyone. There was a person already volunteering who I knew was a writer and a poet. She said that she wanted to do some volunteering that was something other than in the kitchen. I said, 'Great! Because this is what I'm hearing from people, that they want someone to tell their story to.'...She would listen and write up their stories, in whatever way they needed. Some would be written up in Good Work News, others would be taken home or letters written. Sometimes she would sit and just listen."

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen, speaking about the role of the narrator at St. John's Kitchen in Spring 2000

By listening to people at St. John's Kitchen and serving in the roles of narrator and advocate, workers help to connect conversations happening on the ground with conversations at the system level. *(To read about the role of St. John's Kitchen in system-level responses, see page 52, Section 4: St. John's Kitchen in a Systemic Perspective.)*

Circles at St. John's Kitchen – Interview with a Facilitator

I'm the messenger who brings the Circle together. I facilitate and the Circle does the work for me. I've co-facilitated Circles at St. John's Kitchen before, and this last one, I was asked to do. It was to get people talking about some of the issues and values.

The Circle is connected. It flows. Everyone in the Circle is equal. There's no-one in front of you, no-one behind you, no-one above you, and no-one below you. Everyone's voice is valued as an equal. The Circle has a protocol. Everything is sacred. When you bring medicines into the Circle, and you open the Circle, everyone comes into the Circle in the same way. It makes everyone united. It brings the elements of the ancestors, the spirit helpers, all of the things we're related to, and the people together as one.

Circles have been around for a very long time. It's the way that communities address problems within the Nations' culture where it's done through consensus. An issue or problem will come to light in the Circle, and it will be discussed until it can be resolved as one mind and as one voice.

But because the Circle is connected, it's all about acknowledging, when opening the Circle, the importance of how sacred each of us is as an equal in creation. It's about acknowledging the four medicines, the four seasons, the four colours of man, the four stages of life, the four quadrants that make up a spiritual being having a human experience. It's about acknowledging our ancestors and the struggles they overcame that allowed us to be here today. It's about acknowledging our connection to the air, to the food we eat, and to the importance of men and women. It's about acknowledging our connection to the sun, to the stars, to the moon, and everything beyond. Our life is a circle. We start off as a baby, then we go through the youth, the adult, the elder, and if you complete the circle, you cycle back to being like an infant.

Every Circle is as unique as its surroundings and the circumstances of why it's held. It's my responsibility to bring the significance of the Circle and the medicines.

St. John's Kitchen is very unique. There's so much energy that flows through the place – good and bad energy. But it's a place of community, where everyone is accepted, where everyone has a voice, where everyone is respected. There's a sense of community. Even family. It's a place where people can have a sense of belonging.

The Circle will run itself and take care of the people in it. It's a powerful and safe place to speak, to connect, and to be.

My role is to facilitate the Circle. What happens afterwards, I can't say. I would hope that there would come a time of reflection, where people can process what was said.

– Clarence Cachagee, Shelter to Housing Stability Worker, House of Friendship

Core Practice B: Following the Whole Person

"Our reason for being is to meet you as a person and determine how to help you as that person. You don't have to come and fit our program. Our program fits you. That's why St. John's Kitchen has grown so much – by just trying to meet people's needs as a whole, as those needs are noticed."

– Don Gingerich, Worth a Second Look Furniture and Housewares (also a project of The Working Centre)

A key element of how people are supported at St. John's Kitchen is that each person is followed as a whole person. In the same way that people participate in the community of St. John's Kitchen as complex and whole individuals, people are supported in their full complexity by workers. This means honouring and respecting each person's spirit and dignity, as well as committing to finding creative and flexible means to support each person in the way that works best for them.

"St. John's Kitchen is a place for community members to simply be. That's it. By being, a more genuine self is able to be nurtured. The services people are able to rely on are likely to be responsive to that sense of self."

– Juan-Carlos Gomez, Clinical Social Worker, Grand River Hospital

Strong relationships and deep respect for the dignity of each person lay the foundations for the **person-directed** approach at St. John's Kitchen. As trust grows in a relationship, informal conversations deepen and people begin to share more about their lives. The goal is to be present with people in their humanity, discussing options for direct support, and providing support to help people access and navigate services as they choose. Conversation moves in the direction the person wants it to move.

"Person directed' means to be able to have a conversation with a person, and be cued by the person to move to the place where they want to move in the conversation."

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

In a person-directed approach, the role of the worker is to **walk with** a person and support them to live in the decisions they make. Workers hold a deep respect for each person's agency, and offer ongoing support free of requirements and expectations. This means that as soon as people enter St. John's Kitchen, regardless of their history in the place or their life choices and circumstances, they are in a place of support.

To read more about the dynamics of following the whole person at St. John's Kitchen, see page 69, Appendix 2: Following the Whole Person.

Core Practice C: Reflecting and Responding to the Person

Supporting people in their full complexity requires thoughtful responses – not reactions. This means that workers need to engage in deep listening and reflection before taking an action. Reflection occurs on a social dimension – "What fundamental issues are causing this situation for the person?" – as well as on an ethical dimension – "What is the right thing to do, within the values of the culture?" After workers have responded to a situation, they continue to listen to people and to reflect on the situations that

result from their actions – and this ongoing reflection process informs how they continue to move forward.

Following and supporting the whole person means that responses to people’s needs at St. John’s Kitchen are varied, and are tailored to each person. Committing to this broad spectrum of support requires openness to creative thinking and conversation.

In order to nurture an openness to creativity and to continually ground their work within the values of the culture, St. John’s Kitchen promotes a shared set of **practices for daily work**. Some of these practices are:

- Never saying no
- Being in touch with the mood on the floor
- Continually communicating with other workers
- Practicing invitational communication
- Working with people to practice non-violent intervention

To read more about the dynamics of reflecting and responding to the person at St. John’s Kitchen, see page 72, Appendix 3: Reflecting and Responding.

Discussion: Working within a Values-Based Culture

Overall, interviewees talked positively about the culture-based approach that guides St. John’s Kitchen. There was general agreement that this approach both nurtures people through positive relationships, and helps services to better support people in their needs.

To read about interviewees’ reflections on working within a values-based culture, see page 77, Appendix 4: Discussion: Working Within a Values-Based Culture.

A Seat at the Kitchen Table: Feeding the Spirit

*“Without the Kitchen, we’d be lost.”
– St. John’s Kitchen Patron*

St. John’s Kitchen is a place where people feel a strong sense of **inclusion, community, and belonging**. These elements came through in interviews as people expressed feeling accepted, being heard, and having a deep sense of mutual care and support for each other. As discussed earlier, by being a place where people who belong to street culture feel a sense of home and a sense of ownership, St. John’s Kitchen plays the role of an **Alternative Third Place** (see page 31, *St. John’s Kitchen as an Alternative Third Place*).

More fundamentally, being a part of the community of St. John’s Kitchen offers deep nurture for people’s spirits. It is this element that truly allows people in the community of St. John’s Kitchen to thrive and to be fully themselves.

*“St. John’s Kitchen feeds the spirit. It goes beyond community. It’s something nebulous, intangible. It’s the space we give people to be fully alive in the abundant sense they’re capable of.”
– Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver*

Beauty

A significant element of daily life at St. John's Kitchen is seeking and nurturing beauty. Beauty is a fundamental human need. When people feel surrounded by beauty, they are more comfortable, more open, and more able to build relationships with others.

Most basically, beauty at St. John's Kitchen is nurtured through care for the space. The design of the space is open and bright, with large windows, plants, and artwork. Workers continually care for the space, keeping it clean and clear of vandalism. The degree of care that workers put into maintaining the space in turn encourages the community as a whole to care for it. Instances of damage to the space are rare.

"When they built this place, they made it beautiful and bright, honouring that the human spirit needs substance and beauty. We don't often honour that as a need in humanity, but it is."

– Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver, interviewed at St. John's Kitchen

"People want to come into a welcoming space. St. John's Kitchen is warm, welcoming, there are lots of plants. There's a feeling associated with a place. At St. John's Kitchen, it's a feeling that you belong. The furnishings, structure, and layout make people feel comfortable in the space and make it easier for people to build relationships there."

– Van Vilaysinh, Manager, Housing Services, Region of Waterloo

Beyond caring for the physical space, nurturing beauty at St. John's Kitchen means sharing meaningful moments with people. Often, these moments are unexpected and come up in the day-to-day activity of the place. A simple conversation or shared time of quiet can feed the spirit.

"It may be an experience of words but more often it is in the quietness of sitting together sharing those moments that the presence of beauty becomes visible. We recognize that we share this human experience and that we are not alone. This is a moment of beauty ... We seek beauty intuitively because we need to. Without beauty we have no symmetry, no balance to the ugliness that is often life."

– Jennifer Mains, "Seeking Beauty" in Good Work News, December 2012

Memorials

Nurturing of the human spirit occurs not only in the regular day-to-day life of St. John's Kitchen, but also through intentional celebrations of life and community. The intentional gatherings that were talked about the most by interviewees were the memorials that are held throughout the year at St. John's Kitchen.

The realities of housing instability, illness, and addictions mean that deaths happen often in the community of St. John's Kitchen. On average, the community loses 12-15 people each year. People are honoured individually, as well as in a once-a-year celebration of life. Like other traditions at St. John's Kitchen, memorials grew out of the culture of the place, and a need within the community.

"In the beginning, Jennifer, Gretchen and I were going to lots of funerals...One funeral was for a baby, whose parents ate at the Kitchen. The minister said two sentences: 'We're gathered here

under very sad circumstances. This should never have happened.' We kept waiting, expecting him to continue with his sermon. But he didn't say anything more. Then an amazing thing happened. Friends of the family started to get up, and to give their own tributes. They delivered the sermon the minister didn't give. After that, we started to have our own memorials."

– Leslie Morgenson, Writer and Former St. John's Kitchen Worker

Memorials held at St. John's Kitchen are informed by the culture of the place. They are lively gatherings that always include an open mic, where anyone can get up and speak, whether they have words prepared or whether words come to them in the moment. Beyond these common threads, each memorial is built around the life of the person being remembered.

"We have an open mic, and the memorials are created around the person we are honouring. Sometimes there's drumming. Sometimes we go around and people throw up a word that describes the person. For an older woman who passed away, we threw a tea party ... We hope and attempt for there to be no obstacles for people. When people arrive drunk, we don't ask them to leave. The memorials bring out some of the most surprising eloquence that I've ever heard – people give spontaneous, heartfelt, lovely tributes."

– Leslie Morgenson, Writer and Former St. John's Kitchen Worker

Many people have supported memorials at St. John's Kitchen over the years. For the past few years, memorials have been hosted by Margaret Nally, a spiritual caregiver and long-time member of the St. John's Kitchen community. In order to craft a memorial for someone, Margaret spends time with their friends and family members, understanding the person's story. We heard that people appreciate and need this time of reflection. For family members, many of whom have not been a part of the community of St. John's Kitchen, it is a time of learning about their loved one's community, and of sharing the multidimensional aspects of their loved one's life that the community has not been a part of. For patrons of St. John's Kitchen, it is a time of processing their grief with the support of people they trust, in a space where they feel comfortable.

"I spend time with the person's close friends and family listening deeply to the underlying streams of the relationships. I craft the stories back to the community, and they own them."

– Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver

"Inviting people to say something at the memorial helps them to process it – they think about what they're going to say."

– St. John's Kitchen Worker

Patrons talked about the memorial services as treasured occasions that affirm the lives of people who have been friends and family to them. By honouring the deep bonds that hold the community together, memorials nurture a needed sense of resilience and mutual care in at-times unrelenting seasons of loss.

"They have the memorials really nicely set up for the people in the community and they really care about the people that come here. We're all sort of like a family. It's important because they share memories. People bring stuff, stand up and talk about the person. I like it. We're going to one on April 16, about a buddy of ours who passed away. We called him the big bear. He wouldn't even hurt a flea."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

"To me, the memorials at St John's Kitchen say, 'You belong to us, we belong to you, and we care about your family.'"

– John Lougheed, Director, Spiritual Care, Grand River Hospital and Regional Cancer Program

Coming to the Table: Community Partners

"It felt like we were being embraced when people started to come here from other agencies. We embraced back."

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

St. John's Kitchen thrives thanks to the presence of community partners in the space. Agencies basing both structured and unstructured time at St. John's Kitchen work together to support people in an integrated Circle of Care model.

Eight out of the nine patrons interviewed mentioned services offered by community partners as a reason for accessing St. John's Kitchen. Those patrons did not distinguish between services offered by community partners in the space and services offered directly by St. John's Kitchen. This speaks to the important role of community partners at St. John's Kitchen, and to the fluidity with which workers from different agencies collaborate to support people within the Circle of Care model.

Many community partners spend unstructured time at St. John's Kitchen. In particular, local mobile outreach services base significant time in the space, connecting with people they support and with workers from other agencies.

This section focuses on the role of community partners that base regular structured time at St. John's Kitchen. These partners are ACCKWA, Sanguen, KDCHC, and Stonehenge (through the S.O.S. partnership). During the time they spend at St. John's Kitchen, workers from these agencies work on the floor, in the small office with windows facing the floor, or in the fully equipped medical clinic that is separate from the rest of the open-plan space.

Community partners base services at St. John's Kitchen in order to:

- Meet people in a place where they are already gathering
- Serve people in a place where a foundation of trust has already been built
- Become part of a network of agencies that work together collaboratively

"St. John's Kitchen is a natural place to locate because so many people in the population we serve are already accessing the Kitchen for other services. The folks at St. John's Kitchen have been doing their work for a long time, so they have credibility built up with the population we are serving and other agencies in the area. So by locating there, we can become part of that network and we're easier for people to access."

– Kerry Manthenga, Clinical Director – Community Services, Stonehenge Therapeutic Community

"We continue to stay at St. John's Kitchen because people feel comfortable there, know to go there, and implicitly trust anything happening there because of the integrity of the space."

– Jess Halliday, Outreach Coordinator, ACCKWA

“If we weren’t at St. John’s Kitchen, we wouldn’t be able to reach the people we need to reach, and financially, it would be very difficult for us as an organization.”

– Violet Umanetz, Manager of Outreach, Education & Prevention, Sanguen Health Centre

Specialized Outreach Services (S.O.S.) and the Psychiatric Outreach Project (P.O.P.)

S.O.S. and P.O.P. are complementary projects delivered in partnership with Stonehenge and CMHA, and through St. John’s Kitchen itself.

S.O.S. supports people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or street-involved, and who have concurrent disorders. This is a population whose needs traditional services struggle to meet – even traditional outreach services. S.O.S. supports based at St. John’s Kitchen include nurses, psychiatric nurses, a social worker; a peer outreach worker is provided through Stonehenge Therapeutic Community.

P.O.P. is a project of The Working Centre and St. John’s Kitchen that funds two doctors who work alongside S.O.S. staff. P.O.P. doctors support people who either don’t have access to medical treatment, or who are unable to maintain a relationship with a family doctor. Patients must be referred by an outreach worker from any agency. When a referral is received, a patient’s needs are assessed by a nurse. Based on the assessment, patients are either reconnected to their previous physician, connected to a new family physician, or referred to a P.O.P. physician. There are currently two P.O.P. physicians who work 28 hours/week altogether to meet the needs of those people who are unable to fit within the traditional structure of family physician care, or who require the relationship-based care of an outreach worker to seek medical care.

In addition to the main clinic at St. John’s Kitchen, P.O.P. also operates mobile clinics at House of Friendship on Monday afternoons and Emmanuel Church on Tuesday afternoons. P.O.P. occasionally carries out house calls.

ACCKWA

ACCKWA supports people who are infected, affected by, or at risk of HIV. The agency’s main offices are located at 639 King St. W. #203, Kitchener. Workers from ACCKWA base time at St. John’s Kitchen Monday – Friday from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. ACCKWA workers use this time to build relationships with people and to offer supplies and information as part of the Safepoint Needle Program (in partnership with Sanguen).

Sanguen

Sanguen supports people who have, or who are at risk of Hepatitis C. The agency’s main offices are located at 29 Young St. E, Waterloo. Services offered by Sanguen at St. John’s Kitchen include the Safepoint Needle Program (in partnership with ACCKWA), Naloxone opiate overdose reversal training, Hepatitis C testing and ongoing Hepatitis C treatment. Sanguen workers also support people in broader ways (such as connecting to housing and ODSP), and use their time at St. John’s Kitchen to build relationships with people that make this level of support possible.

KDCHC

KDCHC operates a mobile walk-in clinic at St. John's Kitchen on Tuesdays from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. The agency's main offices are located at 44 Francis St, Kitchener. KDCHC's services at St. John's Kitchen include support obtaining identification (the "ID Clinic"), medical care offered by a nurse practitioner, and foot care offered by a chiropodist.

Collaboration and Service Integration in the Circle of Care Model

The complexity of needs of many people in the population served at St. John's Kitchen means that people need the support of multiple services in the space. Community partners work collaboratively in an integrated Circle of Care model. The lead agency for a person's care is determined by the person's needs and relationships.

"People have lots of mental health and addictions issues, concurrent issues, legal, criminal issues. People have very few social supports. They're isolated, living in rooming houses, and they don't have social backup – usually if you needed to get to an appointment, your family would drive you ... When I first started here, I told a guy to go to the hospital, because he was in heart failure. Later, he told me that he walked the whole way. That was a big shock to me. That made me more aware of connecting people to outreach – they provide that social aspect of support that people need ... We're trying as an outreach team to meet people's needs holistically. It's a circular effort and the centre is the patient."

– Dr. George Berrigan, physician at S.O.S. / P.O.P

In the integrated Circle of Care model, staff members from each agency are aware of their specific personal roles. However, the high level of collaboration between workers means that patrons can approach any worker in the space, without knowing their agency association or specific role, and still receive support – either that worker will support the person directly, or they will introduce the person to another worker who can support the person more appropriately.

"People who are experiencing homelessness don't think about who you work for, or your title. They care about whether you've been a support to them ... With a hub like St. John's Kitchen, agency associations start melting away."

– Rob Smith, BA, MSW, Service Resolution Coordinator-Whatever It Takes Program, Lutherwood Housing Services

The easy approachability of workers from different agencies in the space of St. John's Kitchen means that people build relationships with multiple workers. Having relationships with multiple workers is important to a person's support, because it means that support is readily available from a trusted source when a need arises, and because people value having a choice of worker to approach in a given situation. In this context, workers communicate with each other continuously in order to surround people with a circle of support while avoiding duplication of services.

"We collaborate with St. John's Kitchen staff all the time. We work on getting consent from the client to get as many people involved as possible, so there's consent to contact me or Alice, or Elly, or Kelly, when things come up. We see who people have a strong connection with. They may spend more time with one outreach worker, but then we're all there to be a support when

needed. We work in parallel. We check in with clients that we have consent to talk to each other about, and we look at how we can best support them in our roles.”

– Abby Horst, Sanguen Health Centre

Community partners at St. John’s Kitchen share some elements of philosophy and approach, but each partner brings its own unique organizational culture. Community partners interviewed identified the key elements that make collaboration fluid in this context as mutual respect, flexibility, strong relationships between workers, and continual conversation with the person being served at the centre.

“Because I’m out in the community a lot, walking with different people, my program needs to be flexible and open to flow as well. It makes it easy for an outside agency to come in and offer services at a place that is more open and less rigid.”

– Jess Halliday, Outreach Coordinator, ACCKWA

Supporting the Kitchen Table Model: The Working Centre's Administrative Infrastructure

The Working Centre supports all of its varied projects through its unique administrative infrastructure.

“Our model is flexible and agile, so that it can be responsive to the needs of people. Working particularly with this population, it’s important to maintain that flexibility and ability to adjust and adapt rapidly.”

– Coordinator, St. John’s Kitchen

The model through which St. John’s Kitchen serves its patrons is only possible with the support of The Working Centre’s responsive administrative infrastructure. As discussed earlier, in order to walk with people in a person-directed approach, St. John’s Kitchen workers need to be able to support people flexibly, as unique situations continually arise (see page 43, *Reflecting and Responding to the Person*). Over 30 years, The Working Centre has developed an administrative model that bridges rules-based systems and the complexities of people’s lives, in order to respond to people’s needs with flexibility, agility, and accountability.

“Here are some examples of moments that arise each day: A fellow who is involved with outreach and the Job Café receives a large settlement of money but doesn’t have a bank account. Can we store his money and make it accessible to him when he needs it? When he needs it quicker than anticipated, can we return it to him without judgment or frustration? An Employment Counsellor is working with someone who needs work boots in order to start a new job tomorrow. Can we make this purchase happen in time? The Café calls and needs change. Do we have enough small bills on hand? Outreach Workers call and need a cheque right away because someone’s hydro is about to be cutoff. Can we fit this into a flex fund or can we loan the person money? Someone from the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers needs to pay for a training course online or a Youth Entrepreneurial Program participant needs to spend some of their microloan but is unable to float the money up front. The types of questions are endless and each one of these moments means that we stop our regular day-to-day work and try to follow in thoughtful ways to make sure that we are being responsive to the situation while still holding our funding commitments and the necessary paper trail.”

– Rebecca Mancini, ‘Details and Relationships’ in Good Work News, June 2015

The Working Centre’s administrative model starts from an understanding that change and unplanned situations are the norm, and that administrative work must align with on-the-ground work to respond to people’s needs in an adequate and timely way. This means starting from “Yes” – when significant needs arise, resources are available to respond. Responses are tailored to each person and situation, and continue to evolve as circumstances change. Things are always different from one day to the next, because people’s lives change quickly.

The flexibility with which people are supported in The Working Centre’s projects is facilitated by workers in administrative bridging roles, who navigate how to meet people’s needs while also maintaining accountability and meeting the complex requirements that come with The Working Centre’s diverse funding base. On-the-ground workers are buffered as much as possible from this system of rules and requirements. A key practice is not giving workers a budget – rather, they are given a range to work from, which is always flexible. In this way, workers on the ground can focus on supporting the people they are walking with, while people in bridging roles navigate the rules. When a complex issue arises, workers in bridging roles and workers on the ground think together about how to respond. Workers on the ground do not have to assume the role of advocating on someone’s behalf –the conversation is not about whether support for someone is possible, but about how that support can best be provided.

The Working Centre’s flexible administrative model not only allows St. John’s Kitchen workers to respond to people’s unique one-time needs, more broadly it allows the organization to respond rapidly to wider trends impacting the population served at St. John’s Kitchen as a whole. As workers at St. John’s Kitchen walk with people, they see and hear about the fundamental issues that are impacting people, and they reflect this knowledge back to The Working Centre. As the community changes, The Working Centre’s model enables timely and creative responses that meet needs on a population level. Responses have come out of this process to support people in areas including housing stability, work, physical health, mental health, and oral health.

“St. John’s Kitchen has developed creative ways to work through challenges that people have with housing stability. This creativity happens through conversation between people that work there and the people that go there. There is the trust of people who are going there, to be able to say, ‘I have this problem,’ and the ability of The Working Centre to respond to it. It’s a place of creativity and innovation because it’s so in touch with people.”

– Van Vilaysinh, Manager, Housing Services, Region of Waterloo

The role of St. John’s Kitchen in responding to people’s needs at a bigger-picture level is explored more deeply in the next section, *St. John’s Kitchen in a Systemic Perspective*.

SECTION 4: ST. JOHN'S KITCHEN IN A SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE

St. John's Kitchen plays an integral role within Waterloo Region's systems of support for people who are experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness, or street-involved. Its unique dual role as a gathering place that nurtures people in their spirit and culture, and as a trusted service access/navigation point, is fundamental to the capability of local systems of support to meet people where they are at, to offer integrated supports for the whole person, and to respond to people's evolving needs on the ground. In particular, St. John's Kitchen provides essential capacity for systems that support people in areas of health, crime prevention/response, and housing stability. Within the structure of these systems, St. John's Kitchen sustains a crucial dimension of service that nurtures people to thrive within the irreplaceable supports of their own culture and community.

SOCIAL CONTEXT OF ST. JOHN'S KITCHEN

St. John's Kitchen is a gathering place where everyone is welcome. It supports a population that identifies (to varying degrees) with the local street culture, and its model is informed by the values and best qualities of this culture (*see page 26, A Values-Based Culture with Roots in the Local Street Culture*).

As discussed in the Literature Review, the local street culture represents an alternative to mainstream free-market culture. In many ways, it is born out of people's experiences of dislocation within mainstream culture – and in response, it has evolved to nurture qualities such as freedom, personal resilience, and strong levels of mutual support. These elements support people who belong to the local street culture to build a sense of belonging to a close community, balanced by a sense of personal freedom and fulfillment. Bruce Alexander calls this balance psychosocial integration (*see page 16, Literature Review: Belonging and Psychosocial Integration*).

The complexities of the local street culture are not captured in this report. However, there is a strong recognition at St. John's Kitchen that the best qualities of the local street culture cannot be replaced by other societal structures or services, and that they are essential for helping people to find meaning and purpose in life.

RELATIONSHIP TO MAINSTREAM SUPPORT SYSTEMS

People in the population served at St. John's Kitchen generally have not had their needs adequately met through mainstream support systems. In many ways, this is due to the cultural disconnect between mainstream support systems and people who identify with the local street culture.

Mainstream support systems are designed to leverage the norms of mainstream culture, in order to efficiently serve wide populations. In our society, mainstream cultural norms mean that most people carry ID, have a fixed home address, keep to a precise schedule, and have the support of their immediate family members. By structuring care around the norms of mainstream culture, systems of support are able to simplify the organization of people and processes, and to define clear limits to the scope of their services.

People who belong to cultures outside of the mainstream do not receive adequate care within mainstream support systems. For people in these groups, mainstream support systems present a complex set of expectations that are counterintuitive and disorienting. Furthermore, these systems require a set of personal supports that people not belonging to mainstream culture often do not have.

The significant supports that people do have, which fall outside of the norms of mainstream culture, are not embraced, and are in fact often deemed illegitimate.

This dynamic has strong implications for people belonging to street cultures. As was discussed in the Literature Review (specifically in the context of housing stability), when support systems fail to embrace and include the qualities of street cultures that help people make meaning out of life, people are unsupported in those systems and end up turning away from them (*see page 12, Literature Review: Culture*).

For people belonging to the local street culture, St. John's Kitchen plays a vital role within local systems of support in nurturing the foundational cultural supports without which other supports cannot succeed.

"Traditional models of support exist because they work for the majority of people. But a single model can't work for everyone. We're here for everyone, especially those people that the model doesn't work for."

– St. John's Kitchen Worker

STRUCTURE OF ST. JOHN'S KITCHEN: COLLABORATIVE SUPPORTS WITHIN A COMMON GATHERING PLACE

The unique structure of St. John's Kitchen is a gathering place where everyone is welcome, within which each person is cared for through a collaborative approach. This model has specifically evolved to enable local systems of support to serve people who identify with the local street culture. Local agencies intentionally weave through the structure of St. John's Kitchen to be grounded among the people they serve, to share information and conversation, and to offer better service through collaboration with other agencies.

As discussed above, the culture and community of the gathering place of St. John's Kitchen form the foundation of supports there. Above this foundational level, focused supports provided by different agencies serve people in their unique needs. When needs change, responses come directly from St. John's Kitchen workers, and from community partners weaving through St. John's Kitchen.

It is thanks in part to the unique model of St. John's Kitchen as a gathering place and service access/navigation point that local systems of support are able to serve high volumes of people collaboratively, over the long term. In particular, the gathering place of St. John's Kitchen plays a vital role in nurturing positive long-term relationships between service providers and the people they serve, and in fostering information sharing and service collaboration between agencies.

Long-Term Relationship Building

The structure of St. John's Kitchen as a gathering place plays a key role in fostering long-term relationships between people who use services and service providers. As a place where people connect casually and regularly, even when there is instability in other areas of their lives, St. John's Kitchen provides a place for relationships to be built and sustained over many months and years. Workers from many local agencies spend dedicated time at St. John's Kitchen for this reason.

“Outreach uses the Kitchen to be grounded when things seem extra chaotic. To sit and have coffee and a meal with someone – though you’re not out doing something with them, you’re building that relationship.”

– Street Outreach Worker

The informal mode of interaction that is culturally normative at St. John's Kitchen allows workers to connect with a high volume of people in a short visit, adding to the capacity of local systems of support to provide relationship-based supports with greater numbers of people.

Frequent unscheduled contacts at St. John's Kitchen offer a non-intrusive way for workers to remain connected with people, and give space for relationships of trust to grow organically over time. When long-term relationships of trust are built, service providers are better able to support people when needs arise – and indeed, people often approach service providers with needs only when those relationships are established.

“Building a relationship, especially a financial relationship, takes a lot of trust. It can’t be built quickly – you have to be very patient about it. I go to St. John's Kitchen and drink coffee – often I just shoot the breeze with someone. Over time, I’m always coming back, not being intrusive. I wait for people to come to me... And when they come to me, I’m there.”

– Sue Collison, Hub Worker (Money Matters and Housing Desk at The Working Centre, based at St. John's Kitchen one morning a week)

Information Sharing and Service Collaboration

The gathering place of St. John's Kitchen plays a significant role in fostering exchange and collaboration between agencies that make up local systems of support. As a place that workers from many agencies weave through in the course of their daily work, St. John's Kitchen has evolved to be a place for learning and sharing information, exchanging ideas, and collaborating to support people. Many local agencies intentionally connect with St. John's Kitchen to participate in these activities.

“It’s important for ACCKWA to be in touch with the community at St. John's Kitchen, because that’s often how we get really important information. If there’s a bad batch of drugs going around, or a new dealer, we’ll hear about that and pass that information on to others in the community and other organizations. People rely on Safepoint to carry those messages to folks ... When harm reduction and substance use issues come up, it’s good to be part of those conversations that are happening at St. John's Kitchen. It keeps us ahead of the curve, or on or over the curve. Someone will say, ‘Hey, this is what’s coming up. This is what we think. Is this what you think?’ The conversations are fluid and they continue over time. You can move in and out of them when you need to. They’re not one-time, formal conversations.”

– Jess Halliday, Outreach Coordinator, ACCKWA

“When I was doing outreach, I would regularly go to St. John’s Kitchen to connect with other agencies ... I would meet tons of other agencies there. It was a good way to meet with other outreach workers, and share connections about people we were working with.”

– Community Partner

Agencies connect with St. John's Kitchen in different ways, with some agencies basing formal services at St. John's Kitchen (*see page 47, Coming to the Table: Community Partners*), and others spending

informal time in the gathering place. Even workers that do not physically spend time at St. John's Kitchen often connect via phone or email, to tap into the volumes of information that move through the place, and to discuss ways to support people collaboratively.

ROLE IN SYSTEMS SUPPORTING HEALTH, CRIME PREVENTION/RESPONSE, AND HOUSING STABILITY

St. John's Kitchen plays a particularly significant role in local systems supporting people in areas of health, crime prevention/response, and housing stability.

Health

➔ *"If someone has decreased isolation because they have a place like St. John's Kitchen where they can go, they have one or two positive relationships, they can get a primary care met, and they see someone doing something productive – if they get an opportunity to contribute, that can help them to get out of a negative space where their identity is that of a sick person or a person who lives in poverty. When people get out of that negative space, they are healthier. They need fewer hospital visits, less counseling."*
– Community Partner

Crime Prevention and Response

➔ *"St. John's Kitchen has a huge impact on the issues that I have seen that lead to people becoming involved with the criminal justice system. The big issues are poverty, homelessness, lack of a stable medical regime, not having enough food, and not having a sense of community and support. That's what is great about St. John's Kitchen; it provides all of that and the sense of community. I've heard people talk about a sense of family there. People know they can go there and be supported. It does a really good job of addressing all of those things that lead to folks suffering mental health issues and homelessness, leading to criminal charges. It's fantastic."*
– Linda Elliott, Assistant Crown Attorney, Region of Waterloo

Housing Stability

➔ *"Anyone can be successful in Housing First if you meet the needs beyond a 'roof'. St. John's Kitchen offers a non-judgmental place to gather, to feel companionship and fellowship. It's a place where a street 'family' can be together, to have a meal, to be dry, and to really share companionship. There is no requirement, but people choose to eat with one another and have conversation."*
– Douglas Bartholomew-Saunders, Commissioner, Region of Waterloo, Community Services

Within systems supporting people in areas of health, crime prevention/response, and housing stability, St. John's Kitchen serves people on the following levels:

- 1. Serving People's Basic Needs**
- 2. Supporting People to Navigate Mainstream Systems**
- 3. Hosting and Providing Culturally Integrated Services for People**
- 4. Incubating System-Level Evolution that is Responsive to People's Culture and Fundamental Needs**
- 5. Fostering Mutual Support in Community**

All of these levels of support are complementary, and when all are present, they nurture people to thrive with dignity within the irreplaceable supports of their own culture and community.

1. Serving People's Basic Needs

St. John's Kitchen serves people's basic needs by providing a place where everyone is welcome to access food, shelter from the elements, clothing, and hygiene.

Having basic needs met has significant positive impacts on people's overall health, ability to live free from crime, and housing stability. *To read more about these impacts, see page 79, Appendix 5: Serving People's Basic Needs.*

2. Supporting People to Navigate Mainstream Systems

As discussed above, the most established and robust systems in our society are challenging to navigate for people whose cultural norms are not mainstream. Such systems include those governing hospitals, pharmacies, courts, prisons, rental housing, and utilities. Despite the challenges posed by the structure of these systems, people must navigate them in order to access important medical care, to address the role and impact of criminal activity in their lives, and to maintain housing stability. St. John's Kitchen plays a significant role in supporting people to navigate mainstream systems – in partnership with mobile outreach services and other agencies.

As noted earlier, St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre are involved in delivering local mobile outreach services in partnership with other agencies in the region (*see page 2525, A Shared Philosophy: Fixed and Mobile Outreach Services Through St. John's Kitchen*). These services include Street Outreach, Streets to Housing Stability, At-Home Outreach, and Specialized Outreach Services / the Psychiatric Outreach Project. For mobile outreach workers in these projects who are hired through The Working Centre, the model of St. John's Kitchen provides a grounding philosophy and culture.

Fixed and mobile outreach workers hired through St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre meet together as one team. They work in a fluid, integrated approach. Within the team, workers know their individual roles and responsibilities; however, the team works together in such an integrated approach that people supported through fixed and mobile outreach do not have to be aware of these distinctions. This makes relationships more natural and support more accessible – people can approach any worker for support, and be supported by the team. By working so closely, fixed and mobile outreach services support people's diverse needs in complementary ways – providing the stability and accessible resources that people need at St. John's Kitchen, as well as the support of accompaniment as people go about their lives outside St. John's Kitchen.

"I would say that The Working Centre follows a best practice by co-locating fixed and street outreach. We find that combination very important as each provide different services and they complement each other. Fixed outreach offers access to resources like laundry, showers, etc. in a known location at specific times. Mobile outreach is more flexible and can go to where people are and offer accompaniment. Combining them both and linking them across Waterloo Region with the partnership with Cambridge Self-Help Foodbank is a real strength."

– Marie Morrison, Manager, Housing Stability, Regional Municipality of Waterloo

"St. John's Kitchen is our best resource, as far as the people we're generally interacting with. They need an accessible place that can serve basic, immediate needs. If someone is new, I'll give them my number, but I'll also let them know about the supports and on-site Outreach at the Kitchen."

– Street Outreach Worker

As part of the strong collaborative spirit that exists between local agencies, mobile outreach workers hired through other agencies work closely with fixed and mobile outreach hired through St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre. Workers from different agencies maintain continuous communication in order to provide integrated support to people without overlapping, and to share information about trends impacting the population they mutually serve. Often this communication and collaboration takes place at St. John's Kitchen; St. John's Kitchen and other community partners often host integrated outreach meetings to deepen this collaboration.

"Working together, we're all equals. There's a sense of family. I do a lot of work as an individual, but I also meet a lot with staff at St. John's Kitchen to connect about community members we mutually serve ... The people that we're working with know that there's a community of support. If a participant that I'm working with starts connecting very closely with someone here [at St. John's Kitchen], they will redirect them back to me, and vice versa. But all the workers do one-offs, and we're never going to say no to someone."

– Clarence Cachagee, Shelter to Housing Stability Worker, House of Friendship

The area where this collaborative work is the most crucial, is in supporting people to navigate mainstream systems. Mobile outreach services play an indispensable role in accompanying people as they navigate these systems. Fixed outreach workers at St. John's Kitchen support system navigation for people in ways that facilitate and complement the work of mobile outreach. St. John's Kitchen workers offer information about how to navigate local systems, connect people to appropriate services, arrange accompaniment with mobile outreach, follow up with people about upcoming commitments, support people to prepare necessary information, and make phone calls with or on behalf of people.

To read more about how St. John's Kitchen supports people to navigate mainstream systems in the areas of health, crime prevention / response, and housing stability, see page 81, Appendix 6: Supporting People to Navigate Mainstream Systems.

3. Hosting and Providing Culturally Integrated Services for People

St. John's Kitchen is a place where services are offered in a model that is built upon the positive values and norms of the local street culture. This makes services offered at St. John's Kitchen (by St. John's Kitchen itself and by Community Partners) uniquely approachable and accessible for people belonging to the local street culture. These services support people in ways that mainstream support systems are not able to, because they nourish and complement the cultural understandings that help people find meaning in life. *(To read about the street culture roots of the model of St. John's Kitchen, see page 26, A Values-Based Culture with Roots in the Local Street Culture.)*

"The role of St. John's Kitchen is easy accessibility with minimal bureaucracy. That makes it easier to reach out to, and less cumbersome. It offers non-traditional ways to provide services that may be available in traditional systems, but that may have more obstacles to access in those traditional systems."

– Juan-Carlos Gomez, Clinical Social Worker, Grand River Hospital

Services at St. John's Kitchen follow norms created by people gathering there. Freedom and informality are important norms in the culture of St. John's Kitchen, and are reflected in the continuous availability and accessibility of services there. When people walk into St. John's Kitchen, the support of St. John's Kitchen workers is available to them immediately. The availability of support is the same, regardless of the nature of a person's previous history in the space, and whether a person is sober or intoxicated. Services for health care, addictions management, financial support, and more, are open to anyone on a drop-in basis and/or through informal interactions over coffee or food. Care is taken to limit the impact of external structures with eligibility requirements – the goal is to find options that can work for each person. There are no documentation requirements or waiting lists for any services offered at St. John's Kitchen.

"A lot of other services need referrals, people go to appointments – it's very regimented. At some places, if you no-show 3 times, that's it. The creativity here is that you can be gone for 6 months and come back and get the same services. You can have a really rough day, then come back the next day and be treated the same."

– Abby Horst, Sanguen Health Centre

The continual availability of services at St. John's Kitchen means that people are able to access services in their own time, according to their needs and wishes. For issues that involve intimate levels of trust, such as financial work, or care for mental health and addictions issues, there is space for relationships of trust to be established before people decide to pursue more directed services – and when they decide to do so, the services are available. This flexibility and easy accessibility mean that services at St. John's Kitchen often act as a first point of access to local support systems. Over the long term, these elements make St. John's Kitchen a stable place of support that people know they can return to at any time as a resource for timely support when life becomes unstable.

Beyond their structure of access, services at St. John's Kitchen are intimately integrated with the culture of the community gathering there, through the nature of interactions between workers and the people they support. Meetings are informal. Conversations take place over a cup of coffee. People go into the medical clinic just to chat with the workers at the reception desk. People leave conversations and return to them later that day or another time. There is a strong recognition that the cultural norms and values that people live by are vital supports to them – and services are a complement to those supports.

"What's great about St. John's Kitchen is that I often see Outreach workers sitting down for lunch with people there. Sitting around the table with someone is a non-threatening way to get to know them. It's laid back. It's not in an office, or a sterile environment. People don't have to make eye contact all the time. They can leave to get a coffee or a cigarette, and continue talking later. There are lots of other people around, it's a place they know well and feel comfortable."

– Community Partner

To read more about how St. John's Kitchen hosts and provides culturally integrated services for people in the areas of health, crime prevention / response and housing stability, see page 87, Appendix 7: Hosting and Providing Culturally Integrated Services for People.

4. Incubating System-Level Evolution that is Responsive to People's Culture and Fundamental Needs

St. John's Kitchen plays a core role in regional systems of support as a place that incubates innovative responses extending beyond the walls of St. John's Kitchen itself, which address the fundamental needs of people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, and/or street-involved. These responses have the cultural model of St. John's Kitchen as their framework – fundamentally, they are built on the values of the people they serve. By filling in gaps in service and changing the structure of service provision, these responses contribute to system-level evolution that leads to people being better supported in their physical needs and their spirits.

The creative responses incubated at St. John's Kitchen have been conceived and realized in collaboration with partners including the Region of Waterloo, other social service agencies, professional associations, and community members. Projects that have emerged from these collaborations include the following based in and around St. John's Kitchen:

- S.O.S. / P.O.P. (Physical and mental health services for people who are homeless, at-risk of homelessness, or street-involved, and have concurrent disorders. *See page 48.*)
- Hospitality House (Residence providing family-style care for people who are acutely ill and are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and who are not able to maintain other shelter.)
- The Community Dental Clinic (Dental care for adults who are homeless, at-risk of homelessness, or street-involved.)
- Worth a Second Look Furniture and Housewares (Resources to make a home, including moving services, and affordable second-hand furniture and housewares.)
- Job Café (Connections to casual and temporary labour for people who are unable to, or choose not to, participate in the mainstream labour market.)
- Bunkees (Emergency temporary shelter for people who are persistently homeless.)

Ideas for responses like these come out of people expressing their needs at St. John's Kitchen, and the creative conversations between staff, patrons, and community partners that follow. In their roles as listeners, narrators and advocates, St. John's Kitchen workers take these conversations into the wider community beyond St. John's Kitchen, and invite collaboration. With community support, The Working Centre is able to make timely responses happen, through its flexible infrastructure.

“There is the trust of people who are going [to St. John's Kitchen], to be able to say, ‘I have this problem,’ and the ability of The Working Centre to respond to it. It’s a place of creativity and innovation because it’s so in touch with people.”

– Van Vilaysinh, Manager, Housing Services, Region of Waterloo

To read more about the role of St. John's Kitchen in incubating system-level evolution in areas of health, crime prevention / response and housing stability, see page 93, Appendix 8: Incubating System-Level Evolution that is Responsive to People's Culture and Fundamental Needs.

5. Fostering Mutual Support in Community

"I see St. John's Kitchen as a gathering place that is accessible and that is a community – a respectful place where reciprocity and engagement in what's going on is encouraged. It's not a charity model, which I think makes it somewhat unique."

– Marie Morrison, Manager, Housing Stability, Regional Municipality of Waterloo

St. John's Kitchen supports people within the best qualities of the local street culture. An important element of this culture is the strong level of mutual support that exists between people who belong to it. Mutual support is key to the way that the local street culture acts as a source of strength and resilience for people, and it is the deepest and most enduring level of support at St. John's Kitchen.

People support each other at St. John's Kitchen by being friends and substitute family members, and by sharing the daily work of preparing, serving, and cleaning up after the daily meal. In these ways, patrons of St. John's Kitchen create a sense of belonging to a community.

"Some of the people that come up here, they say 'hi' to me, and I don't even know them. When I first came here, I didn't want to be a part of this. I was moody. But then I got used to it as I kept coming back. It was better than just sitting at home. The people started coming up and talking and sitting at my table and asking where I was from, because they knew I was new. Then I started talking with them and got to know a lot of people ... For somebody that's not from here, they opened their hearts to me ... I started volunteering because I thought they needed help, and I wanted to help when I could."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

By being cared for by others and by contributing care and work back to their community, people feel valued and valuable at St. John's Kitchen. In this way, St. John's Kitchen is a place where people build a positive sense of self.

"When I first came here, I was a pretty angry man. This place has helped me to see that there's more to life than watching television. This place helped me feel accepted in being myself. Of course, after being myself for awhile, people get annoyed at me. But I get along with most people here. I'm not mainstream... In general in society, people should respect each other more. But this place has made me feel empowered and feel like myself. Because before that, my life was unsustainable."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

By fostering a sense of community and positive sense of self among people gathering there, St. John's Kitchen builds psychosocial integration. This sense of having individual purpose within a wider supportive group creates personal and community resilience. It encourages people to seek more out of life, in terms of personal purpose, and connection to wider society.

"I try to contribute to the space. That's how I was raised – that's what it means to be a part of civilized society. I put something on the bulletin board today. I don't push the broom around much. But I need to contribute. As much as I like to plan things out, things never go according to plan. I plan on doing more artwork for this place. I thought of serving food at the counter, but I have a problem keeping a schedule... I want to start to volunteer this summer at the Hacienda"

garden. I feel like there are so many different options for me in this city. I just have to get myself sorted out."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

To read more about the impact of mutual support at St. John's Kitchen on people's health, ability to build a life free of crime, and housing stability, see page 97, Appendix 9: Fostering Mutual Support in Community.

Integration of Support Across Systems

St. John's Kitchen adds a unique dimension to the structure of local systems of support by integrating supports on the ground across systems for health, crime prevention/response, and housing stability. The tailored support that each person receives at St. John's Kitchen fluidly incorporates all systems and levels of support that are appropriate for their needs. This integrated approach is important, because in the realities of people's lives, issues of health, crime, and housing stability intersect in significant ways. People are able to attain and maintain stability in life when they are supported as whole people through the complexities of these intersections.

"Housing stability is heavily impacted by involvement in the justice system. Housing stability is often interrupted with unpredictable entrance and exit times from incarceration and getting picked up for petty crimes. Of the 261 people we surveyed back in November [2014 – for the 20,000 Homes Campaign], 30% self-reported that they had been in jail in the last 6 months. This number was much higher than I would have imagined. "

– Marie Morrison, Manager, Housing Stability, Regional Municipality of Waterloo

"In terms of health, addiction and mental health illness is one of the biggest contributing factors to homelessness. Untreated mental health illness and addiction can impact someone's housing stability. For example if someone has paranoia they may not be trusting enough of the system to follow the process to secure housing. Addiction can lead to unpaid rent and trouble with the law which can result in eviction."

– Community Partner

As a place that embraces people in their full complexity and supports them fluidly across systems, St. John's Kitchen invites people in, regardless of their spectrum of needs. Indeed, many people go to St. John's Kitchen simply knowing that they need support, without knowing the precise nature of that support. Once people arrive at St. John's Kitchen, conversation with workers helps them to think about next steps they need and want to make.

Interviewees for this report expressed that the broad and integrated support that is continuously accessible at St. John's Kitchen makes it a place for people to:

Get started
Find stability in daily life
Come back to in times of change
Contribute as a member of a community

One Place Among Many

St. John's Kitchen is one of many gathering places in the local community, each with their own character and culture. People who gather at St. John's Kitchen also spend time in downtown parks, in the plaza in front of City Hall, in the Queen Street Commons Café, and at other gathering places offering services, such as churches, House of Friendship, Ray of Hope, the YWCA, oneROOF, the Downtown Community Centre, coffee shops and more.

To read more about the role of St. John's Kitchen in the context of other local gathering places, see page 101, Appendix 10: One Place Among Many.

SECTION 5: THE FUTURE OF ST. JOHN'S KITCHEN

St. John's Kitchen is a unique community resource that plays a vital role in local systems of support. It is a place of conversation, friendship, and shared creative work. It embraces people in their full complexity, and nurtures them to build a life of meaning within the irreplaceable supports of their own culture and community.

“Charity is giving someone food from the Table. Justice is giving someone a seat at the Table. Justice is what happens at St. John's Kitchen.”

– John Neufeld, House of Friendship

Responding to Current Challenges Facing the Population Served at St. John's Kitchen

Since 2012, a significant increase in the use of various street drugs, in particular crystal meth, has led to higher and more complex needs among the population served at St. John's Kitchen. The inexpensiveness and availability of crystal meth has led many long-time patrons of St. John's Kitchen to shift away from alcohol use to crystal meth use. Additionally, there is a growing group of people who are new faces to St. John's Kitchen, for whom crystal meth is the drug of choice.

Crystal meth use has severe negative impacts on people's physical and mental health, relationships, and reasoning capabilities. Long-term use of crystal meth can result in brain damage, paranoia and psychosis (Healthy Canadians, 2015). Since 2012, the number of patrons of St. John's Kitchen experiencing the negative long-term effects of crystal meth use has risen substantially. Other substances that have been used by this population in the past have not caused negative impacts to the same degree.

The impacts of crystal meth use on mental health create a greater need for the relationship-based, culturally-integrated supports at St. John's Kitchen. These supports are vital for people who are experiencing mental health and addictions issues and who are homeless, at-risk of homelessness or street-involved, to be able to access the services they need and to build a positive sense of self within a supportive community. However, mental health issues such as paranoia and psychosis also mean that relationship-based supports take more time to establish and maintain.

“Crystal meth has been a tremendous game-changer in the last few years. A lot of my clients have become very difficult to work with, due to the drug-induced psychosis, and the enormous impact of the physical and mental addiction on people's ability to reason. People who are addicted to crystal meth are different than other kinds of addicts. They are different from the crack addicts we saw in the past, and from the new heroin addicts. The drug takes a huge toll on their reasoning process. Because of that, people can be whiny, they can be demanding, and unprepared to deal with the messes in their lives and in their community. This is an example of why St. John's Kitchen is so desperately needed now – because other agencies may not have the patience to deal with people in this situation.”

– Stephanie Krug, Criminal Defence Lawyer

"A big change has happened in the community with drug use and, in particular, the use of crystal meth. It's more difficult to connect with people when they're not really present because they are using such a powerful drug. I know people who I've worked with for many years, who are now using crystal meth, whose health has really deteriorated and it has become a challenge to stay connected."

– Doug Rankin, Community Health Worker, Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre

Amidst this shift in the issues impacting the population served at St. John's Kitchen, workers walk alongside each person as a whole person, and listen deeply to understand people's perspectives on their realities. Shared reflection guides responses to the needs of each person, as well as to the needs of the larger population.

"The reason that we listen is to try to understand the culture. With the shift in culture, we've had to understand rather than to react. I think we're having a sense now. If you stand with someone through anger, over time, you can translate that genuine love of the spirit. You separate behaviors from the person."

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

With the increase in the complexity of people's needs at St. John's Kitchen, and the increasing number of people who are new to the space, workers at St. John's Kitchen need to spend more time with each person in order to build and maintain relationships. When workers have strong relationships with people, they are able to provide ongoing supports that may prevent situations from reaching a point of crisis.

Currently, St. John's Kitchen is operating with reduced staffing, due to ongoing funding challenges. As this reduced capacity coincides with greater need, workers are increasingly devoting capacity to crisis management. This means that workers are stretched in their capacity to spend time building and maintaining the strong relationships that support people to maintain stability when they are not in crisis. This dynamic creates more crisis situations over time.

It is important for workers at St. John's Kitchen to have the capacity to be involved in conversations and situations before they reach a point of crisis. In the current context of higher and more complex needs, more staffing is needed at St. John's Kitchen to support people adequately and appropriately.

Current Funding Challenges and Needs

It is largely thanks to community support that St. John's Kitchen has been able to operate over the past 30 years. St. John's Kitchen does not receive sustainable funding through government sources. The Region of Waterloo provides St. John's Kitchen a yearly grant of \$15,000. Community donations provide the remainder of St. John's Kitchen's operating budget.

As the role of St. John's Kitchen has expanded from a gathering place with a daily meal service to a service access/navigation point serving people with many complex needs, its operating budget has increased to approximately \$250,000/year. Community donations have not increased in equal measure with the growth in supports and services at St. John's Kitchen, resulting in a funding shortfall. The Working Centre is supplementing St. John's Kitchen's budget through a substantial yearly equalization payment, and stretching its resources in order to do so. Over the long term, this strategy is not

sustainable, and creates strain on The Working Centre's capacity to provide a stable and flexible infrastructure for its projects.

In order for St. John's Kitchen to continue to fulfill its complex role in local systems of support, a stable source of funding is needed to complement community donations. Donations must remain an important element of the model of St. John's Kitchen, because they make creative and innovative work possible, and bring the spirit of mutual support in community through which St. John's Kitchen thrives.

Frugal Innovation

As stewards of community resources, The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen practice frugal innovation. This spirit is underpinned by The Working Centre's salary policy, according to which no full-time staff member receives a salary greater than the average full-time salaried worker in Canada. The substantial resources that are conserved through frugal practices such as the salary policy are reinvested in community projects that make it easier for the local population as a whole to live well with less.

"It's important to include that The Working Centre has the ability to stretch a dime to the nth degree. They are frugal in terms of the immense amount of work they can do within a very small budget. They are exceptionally efficient, hard-working, and creative in providing programs to address the needs of vulnerable people in the community. My big concern is their resources being stretched too thin with the increasing complexity of the individuals they help and the ever growing need. My recommendation would be for additional funding, because of their efficiency."

– Coba Moolenburgh, Director, St. Mary's Counselling Service, St. Mary's General Hospital

Flexibility of Services and Funding

Some important elements of the role of St. John's Kitchen within local systems of support are its flexibility and easy accessibility. These elements have been fostered by a funding model that is designed for both flexibility and accountability, and by the choice not to require registration or tracking of patrons. In order for St. John's Kitchen to continue to fulfill its role in local systems of supports, these elements must continue to be nurtured. This view was strongly expressed by community partners in interviews for this report.

"Other formalized services have long waiting lists. People might have to wait 6 months to get into some programs. With St. John's Kitchen, it's easy to just make one call, and know that the person will be supported there. This shows how beneficial it can be to not have funding strings attached that require specific things to be tabulated. There are organic parameters to St. John's Kitchen that mean it is likely to be responsive to how the population that have gravitated to that place want it to be ... That may be lost when funding is provided under certain conditions."

– Juan-Carlos Gomez, Clinical Social Worker, Grand River Hospital

Reporting, Evaluation and Funding

The long-term supports that St. John's Kitchen provides for people, in terms of stability and spiritual fulfillment, are essential for people's health, ability to live free of crime, and housing stability. However, it is challenging to report on these elements using traditional models of evaluation.

"St. John's Kitchen is a community space at heart, and it's hard to measure the value of it with the same methods that are used by health and social services."

– Doug Rankin, Community Health Worker, Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre

As part of the research for this report, we interviewed staff members from four local funding agencies. We heard that increasingly, local funders are interested in funding more holistic approaches that support people as whole and complex members of a community. As funders negotiate this shift, they are exploring new methods of reporting and evaluation that are more suited to these holistic approaches.

"What stands out the most to me is, how does St. John's Kitchen connect with funding to support the holistic model, not just food, or just staffing, etc.? I've been thinking about the flexibility of looking at an approach versus a program or a project."

– Nancy Bird, BA, VP, Resource Mobilization, United Way KW

Local funders recognized the need for any evaluation at St. John's Kitchen to be unobtrusive, and to be designed to capture the complexities of the support that people receive there. Suggestions from local funders for carrying out reporting and evaluation at St. John's Kitchen include:

- Gathering basic statistics, such as the number of meals served daily and diversion from emergency rooms
- Linking work at St. John's Kitchen to knowledge that exists in literature
- Seeking feedback from community partners
- Noticing and describing community trends

Collaborative Conversation Going Forward

All of the local funders we interviewed indicated an interest in continuing conversations to develop a stable funding model for St. John's Kitchen. Given the integrating role of St. John's Kitchen in local systems of support, funders recommended a collaborative process with multiple funders around the table.

"We need to think about how to look beyond programs, and focus on the need. The conversation will be about getting us to the place of the 'vision' – we're less concerned with how. It will get traction because of the need, and because none of us can do it alone. That conversation will help us get to the place of answering, how do we enable you to do the work."

– Alison De Muy, Senior Manager, Health System Integration, WWLHIN

The Future of St. John's Kitchen: A Co-operative Exchange for the Common Good

St. John's Kitchen has thrived for 30 years, thanks to the contributions of local community members and groups, who have offered everything from donations, to work, to support in friendship. These contributions continue to give life to St. John's Kitchen. With the continuing support of the local community, St. John's Kitchen will continue to be a place of gathering and support for people, for many years to come.

"St. John's Kitchen has walked a long road for thirty years, creating liminal spaces for co-operative action. It is impossible to quantify the daily work that thousands of people have

contributed to serve the daily meal. They have contributed to decentralized models of community development that grow from the bottom up and are dependent on the creativity of individuals. It takes discipline to develop the habit of joyfully preparing, serving, and cleaning up the daily meal. To address the globalization of addictions means to build the kind of community that helps each person become more human. It takes the efforts of many to weave community. It is a craft, expressed as walking with the other, allowing each person to change us as we engage together, one moment as the helper, another as the one who is helped. Together it becomes a co-operative exchange for the common good."

– Joe and Stephanie Mancini, Transition to Common Work

APPENDIX 1

Values of St. John's Kitchen

A non-comprehensive collection gathered by talking to patrons, volunteers, staff members and community partners who spend time at St. John's Kitchen.



"It's about the deep truth of our own wisdom and experience."

**- Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver
On values at St. John's Kitchen**

APPENDIX 2

THE ROLE OF STAFF AT ST. JOHN'S KITCHEN CORE PRACTICE B: FOLLOWING THE WHOLE PERSON

This sub-section appears in abbreviated form in Section 3: St. John's Kitchen: The Kitchen Table Model (page 43). The full text is included here.

"Our reason for being is to meet you as a person and determine how to help you as that person. You don't have to come and fit our program. Our program fits you. That's why St. John's Kitchen has grown so much – by just trying to meet people's needs as a whole, as those needs are noticed."

– Don Gingerich, Worth a Second Look Furniture and Housewares (also a project of The Working Centre)

A key element of how people are supported at St. John's Kitchen is that each person is followed as a whole person. In the same way that people participate in the community of St. John's Kitchen as complex and whole individuals, people are supported in their full complexity by workers. This means honouring and respecting each person's spirit and dignity, as well as committing to finding creative and flexible means to support each person in the way that works best for them.

"St. John's Kitchen is a place for community members to simply be. That's it. By being, a more genuine self is able to be nurtured. The services people are able to rely on are likely to be responsive to that sense of self."

– Juan-Carlos Gomez, Clinical Social Worker, Grand River Hospital

Fundamentally, embracing someone as a whole person means seeing their human spirit, and having **unconditional love** for the person. When someone acts in a volatile manner, workers separate the behaviour from the person, and focus on caring for the person. At the same time, there is recognition that volatile behaviour at St. John's Kitchen comes out of people's real struggles in life – and that often, behaviours are a way of expressing the basic human cry of, "Who cares about me?" A continual **generosity of spirit** is required to be present with people through their struggles and their anger, and having unconditional love for each person helps to nurture workers in how they respond.

"It's about unconditional love. You have to be able to see the spirit of the person before you. You are responding to the human being before you, not to particular acts ...It's about saying, 'I see the light in your eyes.'"

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

"When someone comes in and swears at you – you cut through that crap, let all that garbage go, and address the need that person is expressing."

– St. John's Kitchen Worker

In order to have real, unconditional love for people they serve, workers at St. John's Kitchen need to be fully present in their work. Workers meet people with **authentic integrity** – with their own true, whole selves.

“It can be very different from other environments. There’s a freedom in the relationships you build to be who you are, and to allow others to be who they are. You bring all of you, and all of your interests. You allow it to be a real relationship, and you bring your full humanity to the relationship.”

– Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver, interviewed at St. John’s Kitchen

By bringing their full humanity to be present, and by having unconditional love for the spirit of each person, workers at St. John’s Kitchen plant the seeds for relationships. The process of relationship-building at St. John’s Kitchen is intentional and gradual. Workers offer continual presence and invitation, and people engage when they feel ready.

“Intentional relationship is about not trying to advance an agenda when talking with someone. It’s about forming a genuine relationship by getting to know someone as a full person ...When someone is new to the Kitchen, I’ll start seeing them every morning. The morning they greet me back, I’ll know that’s the beginning of a relationship.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Worker

Once a relationship begins, ongoing and open conversation is needed to support and build it. However, being relational with someone is much more than conversation – indeed, relationships are nurtured by moments of silence and presence. Having space to share moments of rest with people is important to the work.

“As long as we’re talking, there’s a relationship and it works for the person to be here. Even if we’re arguing, that’s okay because there’s communication.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Worker

“Can I fix someone? No. But I can sit beside them as another human being. Sometimes silence and presence is the essence of being relational.”

– Coordinator, St. John’s Kitchen

As relationships grow and trust is built over months and years, people share a great breadth of emotion and experience. We heard that in this context, relationships become intense and close.

“There’s a vivacity, rawness and richness to the place. It’s rich in terms of engagement, conversations, and behaviours ... There’s a huge spectrum of experience that people will invite you into.”

– Coordinator, St. John’s Kitchen

The intense relationships that are built at St. John’s Kitchen are shaped by the culture of the place. In the culture of St. John’s Kitchen, relationships are characterized by **reciprocity**. This element is nurtured by the values of mutual respect, equality, and shared community ownership. People relate as equals, support each other, and learn from each other. In supporting people within the culture of St. John’s Kitchen, workers are intentional about leaving room for people to reciprocate, free of expectation. As relationships become stronger and people begin to reciprocate, they bring the fullness of their own agency and generosity to the relationship – and this nurtures both people in it.

“It’s about giving people room to reciprocate in a relationship, but not having expectations of them to act in a certain way. Instead of saying, ‘I need you to respect me right now,’ and

demanding someone to give the bare minimum of respect, we allow mutual relationship to develop over time.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Worker

“When you’re talking to somebody about their life, you can always learn from them.”

– Street Outreach Worker

The goal is to build strong reciprocal relationships with people and this means being fully present, while not overwhelming the relationship with too much emotional involvement. Being genuine nurtures supportive relationships, while the over-sharing of personal details or over-involvement in people’s lives can cause strain on relationships. The dynamics of relationships at St. John’s Kitchen are shaped by people’s roles within the space, just as dynamics within familial relationships are shaped by people’s roles within the family. Each relationship is unique, and its dynamics evolve as relationships endure and grow over time.

“I have to be giving of myself. I don’t mean personal information. I mean being open and authentic with people.”

– Street Outreach Worker

Strong relationships and deep respect for the dignity of each person lay the foundations for the **person-directed** approach at St. John’s Kitchen. As trust grows in a relationship, informal conversations deepen and people begin to share more about their lives. The goal is to be present with people in their humanity, discussing options for direct support, and providing support to help people access and navigate services as they choose. Conversation moves in the direction the person wants it to move.

“‘Person directed’ means to be able to have a conversation with a person, and be cued by the person to move to the place where they want to move in the conversation.”

– Coordinator, St. John’s Kitchen

In a person-directed approach, the role of the worker is to **walk with** a person and support them to live in the decisions they make. Workers hold a deep respect for each person’s agency, and offer ongoing support free of requirements and expectations. This means that as soon as people enter St. John’s Kitchen, regardless of their history in the place or their life choices and circumstances, they are in a place of support.

“There’s no expectation here. It’s a space where people can be and engage as they wish, and have their anonymity respected if they wish.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Worker

“When people aren’t changing their lives, we don’t see that as a failure or as ‘standing still.’ ‘Walking with’ means accompanying people through their lifespan as long as they want us around.”

– Street Outreach Worker

APPENDIX 3

THE ROLE OF STAFF AT ST. JOHN'S KITCHEN CORE PRACTICE C: REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

This sub-section appears in abbreviated form in Section 3: St. John's Kitchen: The Kitchen Table Model (page 43). The full text is included here.

Supporting people in their full complexity requires thoughtful responses – not reactions. This means that workers need to engage in deep listening and reflection before taking an action. Reflection occurs on a social dimension – “What fundamental issues are causing this situation for the person?” – as well as on an ethical dimension – “What is the right thing to do, within the values of the culture?” After workers have responded to a situation, they continue to listen to people and to reflect on the situations that result from their actions – and this ongoing reflection process informs how they continue to move forward.

“When our community changes, we have to change with them. We have to constantly ask ourselves, ‘This is what we’re doing. Why are we doing it?’”
– Specialized Outreach Services Worker

The reflection process that guides responses at St. John’s Kitchen helps to create **tailored responses for each person and situation**. The absence of rules or policies means that responses are flexible and accommodating to people’s needs. *(To read more about how flexibility is made possible at St. John’s Kitchen, see page 50, Supporting the Kitchen Table Model: The Working Centre’s Administrative Infrastructure.)*

“We always put the person first. Each individual case is handled without the obstacle of a rule”.
– Leslie Morgenson, Writer and Former St. John's Kitchen Worker

“There’s creativity in how people are worked with at St. John’s Kitchen... It’s a client-centred approach. They say, ‘You’ve got an issue and I’m not going to cookie-cutter an approach. I’m going to figure out what you need from me as a person.’”
– Violet Umanetz, Manager of Outreach, Education & Prevention, Sanguen Health Centre

Following and supporting the whole person means that responses to people’s needs at St. John’s Kitchen are broad and varied. **Support is offered in many different ways** – from helping someone to do their laundry, to calling the Region about a hydro bill, to spending time with a person while they are in crisis, to personally connecting someone to another agency, and more. In this capacity, workers act as personal supports and service navigators. Committing to this broad spectrum of support requires openness to creative thinking and conversation.

“We like to be a place where people feel free to come and ask for anything. Sometimes we don’t have it, but we don’t say no and we will try to figure something out.”
– St. John’s Kitchen Worker

In order to nurture an openness to creativity and to continually ground their work within the values of the culture, St. John's Kitchen promotes a shared set of **practices for daily work**. Some of these practices are:

- Never saying no
- Being in touch with the mood on the floor
- Continually communicating with other workers
- Practicing invitational communication
- Working with people to practice non-violent intervention

"Never saying no" means following each person's request. A situation that comes up often at St. John's Kitchen is someone asking for an item from the closet, such as socks or a backpack. Even if a worker is sure that the last item has been given out already, they show respect by going to the closet together and looking. Sometimes, unexpectedly, the item will be there. Other times, it will turn out that the person actually wanted another item from the closet, which they didn't want to ask for on the floor. Whatever the outcome, the worker has built trust with the person by being open and removing the barrier presented by the word "no" in a situation. This simple practice helps to foster creativity, build positive relationships, and break down hierarchies.

"Our practices, such as not saying no, make us think creatively. We have to think about how to have a creative conversation to find a way to meet someone's need ... It's easier to say, 'No, you can't have all the milk in the fridge' but that doesn't build relationship. With relationship, over time, someone will be more likely to respond flexibly and with respect when you ask them to do something ... There's lots of complexity in the work we do ... Someone might come in and ask for socks. Even if we think we're out of socks, we always walk with that person to the closet. When we get there, it might turn out that really they want tampons. It's embarrassing to ask a stranger for tampons".

– Specialized Outreach Services Worker

For reflection and creative responses to happen continuously at St. John's Kitchen, the goal is to be present and **in touch with the mood on the floor**. By listening and observing interactions on the floor, workers are a part of conversations and situations as they evolve – before either people's circumstances, or interactions between people, reach a point of crisis.

"The people on the floor are always aware of the temperature of a situation. The staff are a part of something before it is something."

– Specialized Outreach Services Worker

In order to be a part of conversations and situations on the floor, workers are intentional about practicing **invitational communication** – communication that invites people to participate in conversation and avoids creating barriers. In conversation with people, workers use language that is non-accusatory and that actively asks people to share their experiences, thoughts and ideas.

Within the oral culture of St. John's Kitchen, communication happens through conversation. **Signs are rarely posted**. In situations when they are posted, their function is to acknowledge the community's voice on issues that are affecting people. Signs only remain posted for a short time.

"What is a sign? A sign means, 'We don't have to talk.' By keeping it a conversation, it's harder work, it takes creativity, but it's worth it. It becomes a culture. Culture is not about rules."

– Don Gingerich, *Worth a Second Look Furniture and Housewares (also a project of The Working Centre)*

When working within the complex dynamics of St. John’s Kitchen, there needs to be **continual communication between those providing support**. Verbal communication is important for sharing information about situations that are unfolding. Non-verbal communication is also important, particularly when moments of crisis arise requiring everyone to work together smoothly to de-escalate a situation. Quick, non-verbal communication is made possible by shared knowledge of the mood and situations on the floor, as well as strong relationships of trust between workers.

"Strong bonds between staff members are formed because of the nature of the work. We need to be able to read a situation well, and to understand non-verbal communication. We need to be able to read each other’s cue words, facial expressions, and body language to see if we need to enter into a situation."

– Leslie Morgenson, *Writer and Former St. John’s Kitchen Worker*

In moments of crisis when physical or verbal violence arise, **non-violent intervention** is practiced. The focus is on de-escalating the situation and bringing people into conversation. In situations where patrons step forward to resolve a conflict, workers actively observe and step in where needed. In the aftermath of a conflict, no blame is assigned, and the focus is on providing support to both parties.

"The tradition of non-violent intervention is very strong here now, as is the tradition that there is no-one to blame. We don’t care who threw the first punch. To both parties we say, ‘Are you all right?’ And then we continue the conversation to see where the hurt is. We find ways to resolve the issue and find resources to deal with the pain... Treating both sides equally with respect is such an important aspect. There is no blame. If people don’t feel blamed they don’t feel that they are going to be punished and then they don’t have to defend themselves. You get rid of all that. And then you just have the person who’s talking about the pain that they have. And then you say, ‘What can we do? Is there something we can do? Let’s sit down and talk.’ And, sometimes some of the guys will say, ‘No, it’s okay, I just lost my temper. He owes me money.’ Sometimes it’s huge stuff. ‘I just lost everything. I lost my housing. I lost OW. The police have a warrant.’ Huge things can happen to people. Having a model that shows respect, that allows them to feel that this is their place, is much easier to work with than any model that has rules."

– Coordinator, *St. John’s Kitchen*

"As fast as something starts, a fight or something, the outreach workers just move in. Sometimes it can be loud and frightening. But then the outreach workers move in quickly. Often, the aggression here seems to be against things, like tables and chairs. One time, two guests started to get in a very loud argument. They were standing up and it seemed like it was going to escalate into a fight at any moment. Right away, two outreach workers stepped right in between them, back to back, and started talking to them. They kept talking, and as they were talking they were walking the guys separately to opposite ends of the room. Pretty soon, one person was sitting at one of the room and the other was walking outside. They were obviously well trained. They knew not to make physical contact, they knew how to bring the presence that was needed. It makes me feel better when I hear yelling now. I know someone will take care of that, and it’s not me. I don’t know how to, and I don’t have to."

– *St. John’s Kitchen Volunteer*

“There was a confrontation that I saw at St. John’s Kitchen. The other patrons said, ‘That’s not ok.’ I saw that staff members had eyes on the situation, but it was the patrons that resolved the issue. Staff were not involved at all until Jennifer left to talk to the woman involved.”

– Douglas Bartholomew-Saunders, Commissioner, Region of Waterloo, Community Services

It should be noted that police are rarely called to St. John’s Kitchen. However, we also heard from patrons and workers that when police are present at St. John’s Kitchen, they are respectful of the space and the community. Interviewees expressed their appreciation of the way that police conduct their work at St. John’s Kitchen. *(To read more about the role of St. John’s Kitchen in relation to crime, see page 55, Role in Systems Supporting Health, Crime Prevention/Response, and Housing Stability).*

“If there’s a situation where we had to call the police, we’d let people on the floor know what happened, that we had called the police, and why we had to call.”

– Specialized Outreach Services Worker

“We ask police not to fill warrants here, and generally police respect that this is a safe space. I remember once when police came to arrest someone here, they waited until after lunch was over and the guy had woken up from his nap. Then they walked out together and didn’t handcuff him until they were outside.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Worker

“It’s a good place to get arrested because the police are friendly.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Patron

In situations when a person’s repeated behaviour begins to affect other people in the community of St. John’s Kitchen, the person is brought into conversation around ideas for resolution. The conversation is guided by respect both for the community, and for the dignity of the person at the centre of the conversation. The person’s thoughts are invited around what works as a way of moving forward differently, and the person is supported through the process of resolution. In some cases, a person may be asked to take a break from the space for a time. Almost always, people who take a break return with a refreshed spirit and an offer of apology. However, in a situation where a person says that they are unable to be without the space, the conversation continues and other creative responses are found.

“We often ask someone, ‘What you’re doing is affecting the community here. What do you think we should do?’ Once we asked someone who had been involved in a lot of conflict here to consider taking a break from the space for a week, and she said she couldn’t. She said she needed to be here. So we asked her what she wanted to do in order to make things work for the community. She said she would like to be here and not interact with to the person who she was having the conflict with.”

– St. John’s Kitchen Worker

“There was one person that we had to ask to take a break, because he was stalking people in here. People had come to me and said, ‘We can’t take this. This is beyond our ability to manage. What do we do?’ So, I had to say to him, ‘If you want to stalk others you can’t be here.’ The person was suffering from psychosis which was probably drug-induced in this particular situation. So he just decided that he was going to stay away. But it was not because of what I said, but because he knew what the tone of the room was ... There are some times when you say

to people, 'You know what, because of what you are doing here, people are upset. Do you think it's a good time to be here? What we'll do is we'll make sure that you get meals after hours. Just don't put yourself in danger.'"

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

"When I ask myself, why do people keep coming back to St. John's Kitchen? It's because they're treated with respect. It's their place. If there's a problem, they're given ownership in trying to find a solution. There's that sense of community that you can come back to all the time – that sense of acceptance. People know that, 'I can mess up today, but I can come back tomorrow. Or maybe even this afternoon.'"

– Sue Collison, Hub Worker (Money Matters and Housing Desk at The Working Centre, based at St. John's Kitchen one morning a week)

The practices outlined above also inform interactions with and requests for support from the wider community.

Responses to situations that arise on the ground at St. John's Kitchen also inform bigger-picture responses that address fundamental issues impacting the population served. *(To read more about the role of St. John's Kitchen within these bigger-picture responses, see page 93, Appendix 8: Incubating System-Level Evolution that is Responsive to People's Culture and Fundamental Needs.)*

APPENDIX 4

DISCUSSION: WORKING WITHIN A VALUES-BASED CULTURE

Overall, interviewees talked positively about the culture-based approach that guides St. John's Kitchen. There was general agreement that this approach both nurtures people through positive relationships, and helps services to better support people in their needs.

"If you can forget about who's in charge and be flexible around expectations surrounding conduct, you can formulate relationships with staff, outreach workers and nurses that get rid of the rule-makers vs. rule-breakers dynamic. You can form relationships that help to serve the population more effectively."

– Stephanie Krug, Criminal Defense Lawyer

Interviewees talked about the practice of listening deeply to people, and the ability to respond flexibly to needs as they arise, as key elements sustaining the model of St. John's Kitchen. These elements foster creativity and innovation in serving people, and allow St. John's Kitchen to continue serving its community even as the community evolves. *(To read more about the evolution of creative responses to people's needs at St. John's Kitchen, see page 93, Appendix 8: Incubating System-Level Evolution that is Responsive to People's Culture and Fundamental Needs.)*

"St. John's Kitchen has to be creative and innovative in order to continue being relevant and comfortable for people. It's not a place that can stagnate, because of the evolution within the low-income and homeless community. They do a good job of listening to what's happening and evolving with needs."

– Jess Halliday, Outreach Coordinator, ACCKWA

St. John's Kitchen workers and community partners noted that working in an approach that is rooted within a values-based culture is complex, but ultimately challenges staff members to be intentional and reflective in their work. We heard that to maintain this kind of approach, workers as a group need to engage in honest and continual conversation around the values of the culture.

"Values are more amorphous than rules. A values-based approach challenges people to have dialogue around the meaning of values and come to agreement. It forces us to be respectful of other people and to listen to them, rather than to quote rules. It requires continual maintenance and understanding of the culture of the work, and it requires that we challenge people respectfully when gaps appear and it feels like we might not be doing a good job of supporting the shared values. The strength of a values-based approach is that it acknowledges conflict and integrates it into the lifeblood of a place. It challenges organizations to have conversations that are productive and creative rather than simply operational."

– Holt Sivak, Executive Director, Waterloo Regional Homes for Mental Health Inc

"We all hold the same philosophy as workers, and we all have different personalities and styles. You change and grow depending on your co-workers. There is a level of cultural maintenance going on. You are being intentional about asking your co-workers, 'You did that differently than I would have. Why did you do it that way?'"

– Specialized Outreach Services Worker

Two community partners interviewed felt there was a lack of clear rules and boundaries at St. John's Kitchen. In contrast, that St. John's Kitchen workers interviewed (both individually and in a group forum) did not share concern and expressed that practices of collaboration and common sense keep them and others safe.

"My 'soapbox' is that we really honour the difference between being uncomfortable and being unsafe ... We practise common sense and we collaborate. We are never working alone and never working in a silo. We are always following our gut."

– Specialized Outreach Services Worker

We heard that the culture of St. John's Kitchen and the approach of workers within it, fosters deep connections between people and workers. These relationships are valued in and of themselves and they have a significant impact on how people access and navigate services (see page 37, *Relationships*).

"I pretty much know everyone here. I know Tom well, Gretchen's my friend. It's a very good place to talk to someone if you need some comfort. People like Eli, and gentle people like Tom, are always willing to take a minute and listen."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

APPENDIX 5

SERVING PEOPLE'S BASIC NEEDS

This sub-section appears in abbreviated form in Section 4: St. John's Kitchen in a Systemic Perspective (page 56). The full text is included here.

St. John's Kitchen serves people's basic needs by providing a place where everyone is welcome to access food, shelter from the elements, clothing, and hygiene.

Serving People's Basic Needs: Health

Basic needs are important social determinants of health. When these needs are met, people are healthier mentally and physically, and require less support from health care services. Doctors treating people through St. John's Kitchen's Psychiatric Outreach Project intentionally assess whether people's basic needs are being met, and connect people to appropriate resources.

"Social determinants of health include basic needs: food, clothing, shelter. People come here for those things ... If I think there are social issues impacting someone's physical and mental health, those issues get addressed in tandem with other issues."

– Rebecca Lubitz, MD, MS, CCFP, physician at S.O.S./P.O.P.

The majority of comments from interviewees about the food served at St. John's Kitchen were positive. People noted the rigour around health and safety standards, and talked positively about the ability of St. John's Kitchen to provide food security for people. There was some discussion among health professionals around the nutritional quality of the meal, with the overall consensus being that the meal offers reasonable nutrition, and ideally could offer more.

Serving People's Basic Needs: Crime Prevention/Response

People who are homeless, at-risk of homelessness, or street-involved, are generally living on very limited resources. Having basic needs met at St. John's Kitchen invites people into community and ensures they are not hungry. Additionally, when people feel secure in their basic needs, this removes a source of anger and desperation.

"We are not funding people adequately. They can only afford to live in a rooming house which is not conducive to food security. I hear people come in all the time who say, 'I got groceries but they all got stolen.' People can't have their own food when they are in rooming houses. This is where St. John's Kitchen steps in. What would I do if my food was stolen and had no Kitchen to go to? I might resort to violence. You have to imagine what people will do in desperate circumstances. Having a place like the Kitchen can tangibly lower levels of anger, aggression and sense of catastrophe. I know people who say they didn't steal food because they went to St. John's Kitchen. Imagine what it would cost the community to have people stealing food. Not just in terms of the grocery store, but in terms of legal and police services."

– Alex Smart, Program Coordinator, John Howard Society

Serving People's Basic Needs: Housing Stability

In order to be able to maintain housing stability, people need to be able to afford appropriate food, clothing and personal hygiene products, in addition to accommodation. For this reason, the Region of Waterloo's Housing Stability Strategy identifies adequate income as an integral component of housing stability (All Roads Lead to Home, 2012).

The reality is that people living on OW and ODSP do not have adequate income to meet their basic needs and afford adequate rental accommodations. People in this group are unable to pay for needed items, and live in substandard accommodation that does not offer a safe environment to carry out needed tasks (such as cooking and personal hygiene). St. John's Kitchen offers resources that act as an income supplement, and it provides a safe place to carry out basic tasks. By filling in these gaps, St. John's Kitchen makes it possible for people living on a limited income to maintain housing stability while meeting their basic needs.

"It's just the little things. I can buy razors for myself from the store, but if I take them home someone else will use them and put the cap back on, so I won't know it's been used. Here, I can get a clean razor, and I can get someone to shave the back of my head for me."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

APPENDIX 6

SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO NAVIGATE MAINSTREAM SYSTEMS

This sub-section appears in abbreviated form in Section 4: St. John's Kitchen in a Systemic Perspective (page 56). The full text is included here.

The most established and robust systems in our society are challenging to navigate for people whose cultural norms are not mainstream. Such systems include those governing hospitals, pharmacies, courts, prisons, rental housing, and utilities. Despite the challenges posed by the structure of these systems, people must navigate them in order to access important medical care, to address to the role and impact of criminal activity in their lives, and to maintain housing stability. St. John's Kitchen plays a significant role in supporting people to navigate mainstream systems – in partnership with mobile outreach services and other agencies.

The blended nature of supports made available through St. John's Kitchen makes it difficult at times to differentiate which integrated project is providing the supports. The relationships established at St. John's Kitchen, in Street Outreach, in the medical clinic, all combine together to improve access to health care. This is alternately identified as St. John's Kitchen, as The Working Centre, as the Psychiatric Outreach Clinic. The uniqueness of the model is that St. John's Kitchen acts as the base from which these relationship-based supports weave and integrate practical responses to complex situations. As the following examples of increased access and navigation are discussed, the different roles are difficult to sort – the St. John's Kitchen team includes workers from related projects – the bridges and links formed in and through St. John's Kitchen enable these wider supports to be more effective.

As noted earlier, St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre are involved in delivering local mobile outreach services in partnership with other agencies in the region (*see page 2525, A Shared Philosophy: Fixed and Mobile Outreach Services Through St. John's Kitchen*). These services include Street Outreach, Streets to Housing Stability, At-Home Outreach, and Specialized Outreach Services / the Psychiatric Outreach Project. For mobile outreach workers in these projects who are hired through The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen, the model of St. John's Kitchen provides a grounding philosophy and culture.

Fixed and mobile outreach workers hired through St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre meet together as one team. They work in a fluid, integrated approach. Within the team, workers know their individual roles and responsibilities; however, the team works together in such an integrated approach that people supported through fixed and mobile outreach do not have to be aware of these distinctions. This makes relationships more natural and support more accessible – people can approach any worker for support, and be supported by the team. By working so closely, fixed and mobile outreach services support people's diverse needs in complementary ways – providing the stability and accessible resources that people need at St. John's Kitchen, as well as the support of accompaniment as people go about their lives outside St. John's Kitchen.

"I would say that The Working Centre follows a best practice by co-locating fixed and street outreach. We find that combination very important as each provide different services and they complement each other. Fixed outreach offers access to resources like laundry, showers, etc. in a known location at specific times. Mobile outreach is more flexible and can go to where people

are and offer accompaniment. Combining them both and linking them across Waterloo Region with the partnership with Cambridge Self-Help Foodbank is a real strength."

– Marie Morrison, Manager, Housing Stability, Regional Municipality of Waterloo

"St. John's Kitchen is our best resource, as far as the people we're generally interacting with. They need an accessible place that can serve basic, immediate needs. If someone is new, I'll give them my number, but I'll also let them know about the supports and on-site Outreach at the Kitchen."

– Street Outreach Worker

As part of the strong collaborative spirit that exists between local agencies, mobile outreach workers hired through other agencies work closely with fixed and mobile outreach hired through St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre. Workers from different agencies maintain continuous communication in order to provide integrated support to people without overlapping, and to share information about trends impacting the population they mutually serve. Often this communication and collaboration takes place at St. John's Kitchen; St. John's Kitchen and other community partners often host integrated outreach meetings to deepen this collaboration.

"Working together, we're all equals. There's a sense of family. I do a lot of work as an individual, but I also meet a lot with staff at St. John's Kitchen to connect about community members we mutually serve ... The people that we're working with know that there's a community of support. If a participant that I'm working with starts connecting very closely with someone here [at St. John's Kitchen], they will redirect them back to me, and vice versa. But all the workers do one-offs, and we're never going to say no to someone."

– Clarence Cachagee, Shelter to Housing Stability Worker, House of Friendship

The area where this collaborative work is the most crucial, is in supporting people to navigate mainstream systems. Mobile outreach services play an indispensable role in accompanying people as they navigate these systems. Fixed outreach workers at St. John's Kitchen support system navigation for people in ways that facilitate and complement the work of mobile outreach. St. John's Kitchen workers offer information about how to navigate local systems, connect people to appropriate services, arrange accompaniment with mobile outreach, follow up with people about upcoming commitments, support people to prepare necessary information, and make phone calls with or on behalf of people.

Supporting People to Navigate Mainstream Systems: Health

St. John's Kitchen supports people to use the mainstream health care system appropriately, and to successfully navigate the requirements of the system to receive ongoing care. Many people in the population served at St. John's Kitchen have relied on emergency services for most of their health care needs, for many years. St. John's Kitchen staff work together with Specialized Outreach Services and the Psychiatric Outreach Project (S.O.S. and P.O.P.) to encourage appropriate use of emergency services, and to establish more appropriate health care supports – connecting people with family doctors, supporting people to make and keep appointments, and connecting people to mobile outreach workers for accompaniment. These supports are complemented by medical care available at St. John's Kitchen without an appointment, offered through the Psychiatric Outreach Project clinic and KDCHC's weekly walk-in clinic.

"Lots of our guys don't show up to appointments, and specialists can get annoyed. We work hard to ask people to go, or if they don't go, to tell us or the specialist beforehand."

– Dr. George Berrigan, physician at S.O.S. / P.O.P

"St. John's Kitchen absolutely diverts people from using emergency services. If you have somewhere to go where you don't need an appointment, you won't get treated differently or poorly because you're on a methadone program, or you have substance abuse issues, where no-one will tell you you're bad – with the right staff and philosophy in that place, that certainly diverts people. I remember that Shirley, the psychiatric nurse, would help people with crisis situations that could keep them from going to Emerge. At the clinic [operated by KDCHC], people could come to us and we could educate them about whether they needed to go to Emerge. Sometimes people go just because they need their medication renewed."

– Lisa Connolly, Nurse Practitioner, formerly at KDCHC

An important aspect of ongoing medical care is accessing needed medication. St. John's Kitchen has strong relationships with local pharmacies, and works together with pharmacy staff to ensure that people receive the medication they need on time, and in the manner that is most appropriate for their needs (for example, arranging for medication to be organized into blister packs, or arranging scheduled injections as an alternative to oral medication). When billing issues arise, St. John's Kitchen acts as a mediator, so that people receive their medication on time.

"Because St. John's Kitchen and the Outreach Clinic operate under somewhat of a drop-in system in order to maximize opportunities for patients and others to access their services, there are often situations where patients unexpectedly present at Clinic with a variety of issues requiring prescription medications. Our pharmacy recognizes the importance of quickly co-ordinating with the Clinical team to ensure that the patient receives the medication as soon as possible."

– Mary Skele, CPhT, Operations Manager, Compounding Specialist, The Tannery Pharmasave

In facilitating care for people through the mainstream health care system, St. John's Kitchen workers communicate not only with people accessing care, but also with health care professionals in the mainstream system. Over years of collaboration, strong relationships of trust have been built, particularly between St. John's Kitchen workers and teams in local hospitals. Hospital staff often contact St. John's Kitchen for information about someone's next of kin or medical history, and St. John's Kitchen workers respectfully provide this information when appropriate, acting in the role that the mainstream health care system usually relies on family members to fill.

Deeper collaborations have grown through the working relationship between hospital staff and the St. John's Kitchen web of projects. Hospital staff now often approach The Working Centre / St. John's Kitchen directly to create service navigation plans for people they support, and to come up with creative ways to support people with complex needs. This collaboration helps people to leave hospitals more quickly, into the support framework that is most appropriate for their individual needs.

"St. John's Kitchen is a very integral part of the inpatient unit. We have a population we work with that have lots of complex needs. They could be on the streets and housing is a huge issue. The outreach team is a huge part of working with our staff. There's the offering of being able to monitor someone's condition, wound care, connection back with the physicians and teams we

build around clients. It's huge to have someone on the ground, who has the expertise to work with clients."

– Sherri Heimpel-Peers, RN CPMHN(c), Clinical Manager, Adult Inpatient Mental Health Unit, Grand River Hospital

"A primary way that St. John's Kitchen helps us provide services is assisting with people's transitions back into the community from a systemic setting in the hospital. When people are with us in hospital, their day is quite regulated. There are set times for meals, breaks, and dispensation of medication. For individuals who are transitioning out of this system, they need connections to other formalized programs in the community, such as food, housing supports, access to a physician, and psychiatric support when appropriate. Often, these individuals are already being supported by The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen. We consult and collaborate together regarding how best to support them...St. John's Kitchen also helps us to connect seniors to long-term wellness programs. In the intake process, programs want to know information that supports the case for the person's need to be in long-term care, as well as the history of the person and their personal triggers to know if it's safe for that person to be in their care. St. John's Kitchen and Outreach staff have the connection and know a person's history. We meet together and have dialogue about how to best support a person with a complex case. Through collaboration with St. John's Kitchen, we were able to transfer someone with a long history of transience and homelessness to long-term care. A significant factor in allowing this transition was that there would be continued care through Outreach. In this way, St. John's Kitchen contributes to alleviating pressure to have people stay in the hospital, despite it being known that the hospital is not the best place for the person to be."

– Juan-Carlos Gomez, Clinical Social Worker, Grand River Hospital

Supporting People to Navigate Mainstream Systems: Crime Prevention/Response

St. John's Kitchen workers support people to navigate the criminal justice system and the prison system. Workers remind people of their court dates and arrange accompaniment to court.

"If I'm having difficulty finding someone, I'll ask a worker connected with St. John's Kitchen if they've seen them recently. A lot of the time they'll have a number that they can text, or they can track the person down. That's a big deal, because that connection can help someone avoid warrants for arrest and charges for failing to attend court."

– Stephanie Krug, Criminal Defense Lawyer

St. John's Kitchen plays an important role in reconnecting people with their belongings when they are released from custody. A mobile role undertaken by a St. John's Kitchen "fixed" worker is a regular trip to Maplehurst Correctional Complex and Vanier Centre for Women to retrieve items belonging to people who have been released from those institutions following a court appearance in Kitchener (meaning they have been released in downtown Kitchener, while their belongings remain at the correctional institutions). This allows people to pick up their belongings from St. John's Kitchen, which is a significant support for people who do not have access to transportation out of town. This whole process can take a few weeks, and in response to high need, a new prisoner belonging program has recently been created through collaboration between St. John's Kitchen, mobile outreach, the Waterloo Region Courthouse and the Waterloo Regional Police Service. The new program allows people to leave their belongings at the local courthouse before entering custody; these belongings are retrieved by a mobile outreach worker and brought to St. John's Kitchen, meaning that when people are released from

custody they can pick up their belongings from St. John's Kitchen immediately. Reconnecting people with their belongings is a vital part of supporting people to rebuild their lives in community after a prison term – items commonly retrieved for people include ID and money.

Through S.O.S. and P.O.P., St. John's Kitchen supports people to communicate information about their health status and medical history to lawyers, probation and parole services, and courts. Letters and other communications provided by S.O.S. and P.O.P. staff are important resources that help the criminal justice system to tailor sentencing to people's individual circumstances and needs, and to arrange for people to receive appropriate care for their physical and mental health while in custody. These are significant factors in supporting people to find stability and reintegrate in community.

"If I'm working to decide whether to proceed with a charge, I always want to know what is contributing to someone's behavior and causing them to interact with the criminal justice system. I always want to know if there's something medical going on. For example, we had one person who was diabetic and that was causing him to not be doing well, both physically and mentally. I'm interested in knowing the whole picture. When recommending sentences, I want to know what kind of support someone has in the community, to know how stable they will be able to be. I look to Shirley [Psychiatric Outreach Nurse] and others associated with St. John's Kitchen to be able to know if the person will be safe and others in the community will be safe. Shirley and others associated with St. John's Kitchen are able to know whether there are medications that someone should be on when they are in custody, so that they will be in a good condition when they go back to the community."

– Linda Elliott, Assistant Crown Attorney, Region of Waterloo

Supporting People to Navigate Mainstream Systems: Housing Stability

In partnership with other local agencies, St. John's Kitchen supports people to navigate mainstream systems in order to attain and maintain housing stability in market rent. In this area, St. John's Kitchen workers sometimes support people directly – for example, making phone calls with or on behalf of people to problem-solve issues around utilities and first and last months' rent.

More widely, St. John's Kitchen workers play a connecting role between people and other local services that have a focus on supporting people who are experiencing homelessness to navigate the housing market. The services that St. John's Kitchen workers connect people to most frequently include Streets to Housing Stability Outreach (delivered through The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen), Shelter to Housing Stability Outreach (delivered through House of Friendship), and Whatever It Takes (Lutherwood). The connecting role played by St. John's Kitchen workers is an important element in facilitating service access – not only do St. John's Kitchen workers pass along information about services to people, they also pass along relationships of trust by vouching for those services. As described earlier, the place of St. John's Kitchen uniquely fosters relationships of trust to grow over months and years. By passing trust along to other agencies once it has been established, St. John's Kitchen contributes significantly to the capacity of local housing stability services to support people.

"Once trust is built with one worker, that trust can be passed on to another worker. That's how trust is passed on between agencies."

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

Through S.O.S. and P.O.P., St. John's Kitchen supports people living with disabilities to secure adequate income to meet their needs and to make a stable home. In the P.O.P. clinic, Dr. George Berrigan supports approximately 80-90 people each year to apply for ODSP, of which over 50% are successful. This high success rate is due to the level of real need in the population using the clinic. Once people are connected with the income support that is appropriate for their needs, they are able to afford to move into safe rental housing, and to maintain it over the long term.

"Our staff are impressed with the quality of service provided by Dr. Berrigan in providing medical assessments for applications to residential addictions treatment programs or for ODSP. His understanding and genuineness with a concurrent disorder population ensures applications are appropriate and successful for individuals in getting the assistance they require."

– Coba Moolenburgh, Director, St. Mary's Counselling Service, St. Mary's General Hospital

"Going from OW to ODSP is really important when it comes to the housing part of all this. When I look at the difference between the housing people can get on OW and the housing they can get on ODSP – on OW, they're living in rooming houses that are dirty, they have bedbugs, rats, they're fire traps, the water is unreliable, and there's not good access to kitchen tools. On ODSP, they can get an apartment of their own, stop losing their property, and be safe in their housing."

– Dr. George Berrigan, physician at S.O.S. / P.O.P

In supporting people to navigate systems that contribute to housing stability, St. John's Kitchen occupies an important space as a connector, advocate, and mediator that does not hold money for people. People value the role of St. John's Kitchen workers in supporting them to communicate with their OW and ODSP workers, because their communication with St. John's Kitchen workers is free of the pressures of a monetary relationship. This non-threatening channel of communication helps people to feel more free to talk about their circumstances, concerns, and confusions. In their mediating role, St. John's Kitchen workers are able to reflect these issues to workers in agencies that do hold money for people, leading to people being better supported by those agencies.

"For the financial piece, it's a place of safety. People can ask questions, and not feel out of place that they don't know about those things. Or they can describe a situation, and someone else will pick it up and help them with it. St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre don't hold the money, unlike OW and ODSP – so people feel very comfortable talking to the workers. It's very non-threatening."

– Sue Collison, Hub Worker (Money Matters and Housing Desk at The Working Centre, based at St. John's Kitchen one morning a week)

APPENDIX 7

HOSTING AND PROVIDING CULTURALLY INTEGRATED SERVICES FOR PEOPLE

This sub-section appears in abbreviated form in Section 4: St. John's Kitchen in a Systemic Perspective (page 57). The full text is included here.

St. John's Kitchen is a place where services are offered in a model that is built upon the positive values and norms of the local street culture. This makes services offered at St. John's Kitchen (by St. John's Kitchen itself and by Community Partners) uniquely approachable and accessible for people belonging to the local street culture. These services support people in ways that mainstream support systems are not able to, because they nourish and complement the cultural understandings that help people find meaning in life. *(To read about the street culture roots of the model of St. John's Kitchen, see page 26, A Values-Based Culture with Roots in the Local Street Culture.)*

"The role of St. John's Kitchen is easy accessibility with minimal bureaucracy. That makes it easier to reach out to, and less cumbersome. It offers non-traditional ways to provide services that may be available in traditional systems, but that may have more obstacles to access in those traditional systems."

– Juan-Carlos Gomez, Clinical Social Worker, Grand River Hospital

Services at St. John's Kitchen follow norms created by people gathering there. Freedom and informality are important norms in the culture of St. John's Kitchen, and are reflected in the continuous availability and accessibility of services there. When people walk into St. John's Kitchen, the support of St. John's Kitchen workers is available to them immediately. The availability of support is the same, regardless of the nature of a person's previous history in the space, and whether a person is sober or intoxicated. Services for health care, addictions management, financial support, and more, are open to anyone on a drop-in basis and/or through informal interactions over coffee or food. Care is taken to limit the impact of external structures with eligibility requirements – the goal is to find options that can work for each person. There are no documentation requirements or waiting lists for any services offered at St. John's Kitchen.

"A lot of other services need referrals, people go to appointments – it's very regimented. At some places, if you no-show 3 times, that's it. The creativity here is that you can be gone for 6 months and come back and get the same services. You can have a really rough day, then come back the next day and be treated the same."

– Abby Horst, Sanguen Health Centre

The continual availability of services at St. John's Kitchen means that people are able to access services in their own time, according to their needs and wishes. For issues that involve intimate levels of trust, such as financial work, or care for mental health and addictions issues, there is space for relationships of trust to be established before people decide to pursue more directed services – and when they decide to do so, the services are available. This flexibility and easy accessibility mean that services at St. John's Kitchen often act as a first point of access to local support systems. Over the long term, these elements make St. John's Kitchen a stable place of support that people know they can return to at any time as a resource for timely support when life becomes unstable.

Beyond their structure of access, services at St. John's Kitchen are intimately integrated with the culture of the community gathering there, through the nature of interactions between workers and the people they support. Meetings are informal. Conversations take place over a cup of coffee. People go into the medical clinic just to chat with the workers at the reception desk. People leave conversations and return to them later that day or another time. There is a strong recognition that the cultural norms and values that people live by are vital supports to them – and services are a complement to those supports.

"What's great about St. John's Kitchen is that I often see Outreach workers sitting down for lunch with people there. Sitting around the table with someone is a non-threatening way to get to know them. It's laid back. It's not in an office, or a sterile environment. People don't have to make eye contact all the time. They can leave to get a coffee or a cigarette, and continue talking later. There are lots of other people around, it's a place they know well and feel comfortable."

– Community Partner

Hosting and Providing Culturally Integrated Services for People: Health

Services offered at St. John's Kitchen that support people in their physical and mental health include the Psychiatric Outreach Project and Specialized Outreach Services (delivered in partnership between The Working Centre, CMHA, and Stonehenge), the mobile drop-in clinic operated by KDCHC, and the Safepoint Needle Program delivered by ACCKWA and Sanguen.

The provision of health care services in a culturally integrated model at St. John's Kitchen fills a gap in the local health care system for people whose needs cannot be met through a traditional doctor-patient relationship, and who ultimately are unable to sustain such a relationship. People in this group use emergency services when acute issues arise. S.O.S. and P.O.P. are designed specifically to flexibly meet the long-term health needs of people in this population, through culturally integrated service delivery that invites people into relationships. As relationships grow, people become more comfortable working through their chronic physical and mental health issues with S.O.S. and P.O.P. workers, and this leads to better care for people over time. Similarly, the KDCHC offers a weekly drop-in clinic at St. John's Kitchen hosted by a nurse practitioner.

"The people the clinic [operated by KDCHC at St. John's Kitchen] serves are the marginalized of the marginalized. They are people that don't fit in the traditional medical system, who have struggles with things like ID, and with keeping appointment times. The clinic is about meeting people's needs where they're at. It's there when people have the need. If that need is front and centre in their mind, they can get it addressed, without the hassle of needing to make an appointment, then not be able to make that appointment, and getting in trouble for not being able to make it. Over time, when people keep coming back, we develop a rapport and relationship, and that develops into trust. Eventually, people open up about other health issues that they're experiencing, and they get much better comprehensive care over time."

– Lisa Connolly, Nurse Practitioner, formerly at KDCHC

Reconciling the structures of medical practice with the culture of St. John's Kitchen requires an openness to creativity and flexibility. Health care workers at St. John's Kitchen continuously listen and observe in order to understand the culture St. John's Kitchen, and the implications that cultural norms have for health care provision. Health care workers have learned, for example, that the nature of the culture as an oral one means that conversation is the medium through which people prefer to receive and pass

along information. This dynamic has its own implications: information travels quickly, the record of events lives orally in the community, and oral commitments are powerful.

"It's an oral culture here in the community. What they learn from the world is what they learn from others – not from books. Whatever I do or say will get around the community in no time. I had to build consistency, because everyone talks. Word of mouth is more powerful here than in other places. I had to intentionally back up what I told people. People expect you to hold to your word. And they don't expect you to treat them poorly if they mess up. I don't talk to people, I talk with them. There is no judgment of people."

– Dr. George Berrigan, physician at S.O.S. / P.O.P, interviewed at St. John's Kitchen

A significant area of difference between the traditional structure of medical practice and the culture of St. John's Kitchen is the role of hierarchy. Equality and inclusion are important values in the flat culture of St. John's Kitchen. Mainstream medical systems rely on hierarchy for efficiency and accountability. Health care services at St. John's Kitchen are structured to accommodate the realities of accountability for doctors, while embracing the positive values of the culture of St. John's Kitchen. In S.O.S. / P.O.P., decisions are only made through an inclusive circle of conversation among workers in various roles supporting a person, and the person themselves.

"I work with the nurses, psych nurses, the social worker, and outreach workers. Every patient has a team that works together with them. We develop a treatment plan. That could include medication for mental health, counseling, teaching coping strategies, completing an ODSP application, and housing supports. I approach medical decision-making from a patient-centred perspective. I seek input from everyone on the team and the patient themselves. That fits in with the philosophy of the non-hierarchical Kitchen Table model."

– Rebecca Lubitz, MD, MS, CCFP, physician at S.O.S./P.O.P.

Health care services at St. John's Kitchen go beyond simply meeting people within the culture of the place – they evolve to incorporate features of the culture as key elements in service delivery. For example, the informal and frequent way that people use the gathering place of St. John's Kitchen is an element in their support by S.O.S. / P.O.P. The door to the P.O.P. clinic is often kept open, and workers at the reception desk often greet people as they come up the stairs of St. John's Kitchen, before they enter the main gathering place on the floor. This greeting is a non-intrusive way for health care workers to check in with people they are supporting. By incorporating features of the culture of St. John's Kitchen in their model of service delivery, health care services at St. John's Kitchen are able to provide better ongoing care.

"For people who are tenuous, who have significant mental health issues that put themselves or others at risk, we follow up with them closely ... It's not hard for someone to come back to the clinic because there are other reasons to come here. Evelyn sits up front, so if there's someone I'm concerned about, I just ask her if she's seen them walk into the Kitchen."

– Rebecca Lubitz, MD, MS, CCFP, physician at S.O.S./P.O.P.

Hosting and Providing Culturally Integrated Services for People: Crime Prevention/Response

St. John's Kitchen workers have an important role in doing culturally integrated work that prevents the escalation of crises into situations of crime, and that supports people to respond to the impact of crime in their lives. Mainstream systems of crime prevention and response (including police services, the court

system, and probation and parole services) are not able to address these issues in the same way, because their role in upholding the peace and rules of wider society as a whole means that they must act according to specific procedures. Locally, these systems have evolved in recent years to better tailor responses to people's cultural context (for example, police services have focused more on building relationships with people in the downtown, and the local court system has created the Mental Health and Drug Treatment courts). In doing so, these systems have become aware of the limitations of their roles, and of the important role of community agencies, including St. John's Kitchen, in supporting people to divert situations that could lead to crime, and to reintegrate in community following an episode of crime.

"Over 80% of what police get called to is social disorder, not crime. Having strong community supports like St. John's Kitchen provides officers with options and alternatives – social supports for those most in need."

– Kevin Thaler, Deputy Chief - Operations, Waterloo Regional Police Service

"St. John's Kitchen is absolutely a complement to the Court System. I'm a believer in the partnering that has happened in the last couple of years with Mental Health Court and Drug Treatment Court, bringing in workers to assist judges and offenders ... The information about different agencies supporting people has been well disseminated in the community, and St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre have had a lot to do with it. The Justice System was really working in a silo before."

– Stephanie Krug, Criminal Defense Lawyer

In particular, the broad and long-term support that people receive at St. John's Kitchen helps to address the root issues in their lives that lead to criminal activity. There is strong recognition in local systems of crime prevention and response that fundamental issues of stability in housing and health have an important impact on people's ability to live free of crime. These systems value the high capacity of St. John's Kitchen to work through these issues individually with people over time.

"In K-W, the approach is different than it was 25 years ago. It's not a situation that we're going to arrest our way out of, and we're not the experts. Housing the homeless is not our expertise ... I get the model of The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen. It's important to have somewhere people can go and get back on their feet, or go and reconnect with health care providers, their family, or just counseling services ... I don't think people who are marginalized are comfortable coming out of their environment to ask for help. Help has to come to their environment."

– Kevin Thaler, Deputy Chief - Operations, Waterloo Regional Police Service

"In probation, when we're working with 100+ clients at the same time, we don't have the capacity to devote all our time to one client. It has been really beneficial having St. John's Kitchen involved. When there's another agency that is able to help provide some direction, that is very helpful ... With St. John's Kitchen's intervention, I can think of two clients who were able to remain crime-free for a long time. St. John's Kitchen helped to provide the housing, the stability, and the direction that they needed. [Question: What supports provided at St. John's Kitchen were significant for your clients?] Having someone there willing to talk to them in a crisis situation, who had the best interests of clients in mind, someone the client could trust, and who could help them secure the necessary housing or provide direction in terms of how to get it. Just being there

for people – to be of assistance, not necessarily to make decisions for them, but to provide them with options and give them direction."

– Kevin McIntyre, Area Manager, Probation and Parole Services (Retired)

Hosting and Providing Culturally Integrated Services for People: Housing Stability

St. John's Kitchen provides a valuable space for local services to provide culturally integrated housing stability supports. Mobile outreach services including Streets to Housing Stability and Shelter to Housing Stability use St. John's Kitchen as a place to check in with people they are supporting, to make plans for transitioning to housing stability, to make phone calls to landlords, and more – in short, to do the daily work of the housing search.

Another service that bases time at St. John's Kitchen is The Working Centre's Hub project (or Money Matters and Housing Desk), which provides integrated financial stability and housing stability support. The project is usually based in The Working Centre's Resource Centre at 58 Queen St. South. Once a week, a worker from the project spends time at St. John's Kitchen to provide culturally integrated services for people in a population that does not generally use the Resource Centre. Most people in this population are persistently homeless, and will not consider seeking support for financial matters until strong relationships have been established on a personal level with a worker. Once a relationship has been built and a person begins to seek support for financial and housing matters, the practical work of supporting the person to attain stability in these areas can take months or years, and includes tracking down personal information, completing years of back taxes, applying for years of back benefits, connecting with former employers about pension entitlements, investigating housing options, and more. Over this time, people experience changes in life circumstances that create fluctuations in their engagement with the work. Supporting people through this complex and long-term journey is made possible by the unique characteristics of St. John's Kitchen as a place that fosters meeting, conversation, possibilities, ideas, and practical collaborative work.

"Building a relationship, especially a financial relationship, takes a lot of trust. It can't be built quickly – you have to be very patient about it. I go to St. John's Kitchen and drink coffee – often I just shoot the breeze with someone. Over time, I'm always coming back, not being intrusive. I wait for people to come to me. You have to be very patient. You can plant a seed, and it may take a couple of years to germinate. They have to be ready, and you have to be accepting of them where they are at. They might go away somewhere for 6 months with no notice, and you'll just have to resume in 6 months. Usually, after you plant the seed, it will germinate in time. And when they come to me, I'm there ... There was one gentleman that I saw for 3 years. We built up a relationship, and eventually we started looking at his taxes. We did 10 years' back taxes, and he ended up getting over \$10,000 back. Then we were able to apply for four back years of supplement for him, and he received that. While we were going through his records, we found out that his former employer was looking for him through CRA. We got in touch with the employer, and found out that he was entitled to a pension of \$600/month, starting several years previously. He ended up getting his full payment for the back years, and \$600/month going forward. That made a huge change to the way he's able to live. After that, we were able to talk about subsidized housing – a seniors' home. He'll probably qualify for that in a few years and have some more disposable income. When he gets into a seniors' home, he may get engaged in

that community because he's a social kind of person. But he won't stop going to St. John's Kitchen because that's the place he knows – that's his community."

– Sue Collison, Hub Worker (Money Matters and Housing Desk at The Working Centre, based at St. John's Kitchen one morning a week)

For people who have a degree of housing stability, St. John's Kitchen provides a place to access culturally-integrated supports outside of shelters. In the course of their regular lives, people in this group use St. John's Kitchen mainly as a place to share food and gather with friends. When situations of crisis arise, St. John's Kitchen is often one of the first places where people seek and receive support – because people already trust the space and the workers, and supportive responses are timely. Beyond immediate crisis support, services at St. John's Kitchen connect people to specialized supports in the community when needed, and are a source of stability while people wait for those supports to become available. By making it possible for people to access early and appropriate intervention, St. John's Kitchen supports people to maintain housing stability through situations of crisis.

"How I think St. John's Kitchen really supports housing stability is that they support people outside of shelter. If supports were only offered through emergency shelter then people would feel they have to access shelters to get supports. That shouldn't happen – people don't always require shelter and need to be able to access services in a variety of locations."

– Marie Morrison, Manager, Housing Stability, Regional Municipality of Waterloo

Over the long term, St. John's Kitchen supports people who live in market rent to maintain safe housing that meets their needs. St. John's Kitchen provides a comfortable place where people feel at home, where they socialize freely and frequently with friends. By making it easy for people to maintain their supportive social circle while also maintaining the privacy / safety of their home, St. John's Kitchen makes it possible for people maintain housing stability over time.

"I meet most of my friends here, because I don't want them to know where I live. If I let them know where I live, they will come over and never leave. They'll come over and drink and smoke and stay for two weeks."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

APPENDIX 8

INCUBATING SYSTEM-LEVEL EVOLUTION THAT IS RESPONSIVE TO PEOPLE’S CULTURE AND FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS

This sub-section appears in abbreviated form in Section 4: St. John's Kitchen in a Systemic Perspective (page 59). The full text is included here.

St. John's Kitchen plays a core role in regional systems of support as a place that incubates innovative responses extending beyond the walls of St. John's Kitchen itself, which address the fundamental needs of people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, and/or street-involved. These responses have the cultural model of St. John's Kitchen as their framework – fundamentally, they are built on the values of the people they serve. By filling in gaps in service and changing the structure of service provision, these responses contribute to system-level evolution that leads to people being better supported in their physical needs and their spirits.

The creative responses incubated at St. John's Kitchen have been conceived and realized in collaboration with partners including the Region of Waterloo, other social service agencies, professional associations, and community members. Projects that have emerged from these collaborations include the following based in and around St. John's Kitchen:

- S.O.S. / P.O.P. (Physical and mental health services for people who are homeless, at-risk of homelessness, or street-involved, and have concurrent disorders. *See page 48.*)
- Hospitality House (Residence providing family-style care for people who are acutely ill and are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and who are not able to maintain other shelter.)
- The Community Dental Clinic (Dental care for adults who are homeless, at-risk of homelessness, or street-involved.)
- Worth a Second Look Furniture and Housewares (Resources to make a home, including moving services, and affordable second-hand furniture and housewares.)
- Job Café (Connections to casual and temporary labour for people who are unable to, or choose not to, participate in the mainstream labour market.)
- Bunkees (Emergency temporary shelter for people who are persistently homeless.)

Ideas for responses like these come out of people expressing their needs at St. John's Kitchen, and the creative conversations between staff, patrons, and community partners that follow. In their roles as listeners, narrators and advocates, St. John's Kitchen workers take these conversations into the wider community beyond St. John's Kitchen, and invite collaboration. With community support, The Working Centre is able to make timely responses happen, through its flexible infrastructure.

“There is the trust of people who are going [to St. John's Kitchen], to be able to say, ‘I have this problem,’ and the ability of The Working Centre to respond to it. It’s a place of creativity and innovation because it’s so in touch with people.”

– Van Vilaysinh, Manager, Housing Services, Region of Waterloo

Incubating System-Level Evolution that is Responsive to People's Culture and Fundamental Needs: Health

Responses incubated at St. John's Kitchen fill gaps in the local health care system for people who are homeless, at-risk of homelessness, and/or street-involved. S.O.S. / P.O.P., the Hospitality House, and the Community Dental Clinic are all projects that are specifically targeted to serve the complex health needs of a population who have not been adequately supported in the mainstream health care system, leading to significant health issues impacting their quality and length of life. In these projects, care for people's health is combined with relationship-based personal supports, which have the positive cultural values of the population being supported as their basis. Each project has adapted these foundational elements for its specific context of care.

"The idea for Hospitality House completely came out of St. John's Kitchen, Outreach and P.O.P. recognizing that there were some significantly ill people that no-one was supporting ... St. John's Kitchen helped to inform our approaches and philosophy. We carried the philosophy of walking with people."

– Hospitality House Worker

The model of the projects and the way they work in integration with the many supports at St. John's Kitchen represent an evolution in the local health care system to serve people with complex needs in the fullness of their physical, spiritual, and cultural context. This integrated approach results in better overall health outcomes over time.

"It would be difficult to deliver my services anywhere else. It is easier for me to achieve stable mental health outcomes in this setting [at St. John's Kitchen] than in other places I work, because the team is here and easily mobilized on the same day the patient is seen."

– Rebecca Lubitz, MD, MS, CCFP, physician at S.O.S./P.O.P.

Incubating System-Level Evolution that is Responsive to People's Culture and Fundamental Needs: Crime

In the area of crime prevention and response, St. John's Kitchen plays a supportive role in an ongoing process of systems evolution driven by leadership within mainstream systems such as the justice system and police services. In recent years, these systems have focused on developing approaches that prevent criminal activity and meet rehabilitative needs more appropriately and effectively for people belonging to populations impacted by specific issues such as poverty, substance use, mental health issues, homelessness, and street-involvement. Examples of this ongoing process include the Mental Health and Drug Treatment courts, and efforts by local police services to build stronger relationships with people who are street-involved in downtown Kitchener. St. John's Kitchen contributes to this ongoing systemic evolution as a source of knowledge about the culture and fundamental needs of people in the populations targeted by these initiatives, and as a place that incubates constructive conversation between workers in mainstream systems and the people they serve. Recently, the Waterloo Regional Police Service did outreach for their strategic business plan at St. John's Kitchen, in conversation with patrons and workers.

"We did strategic business plan outreach at St. John's Kitchen. We met at the back of the dining area, with patrons of St. John's Kitchen and outreach workers. We asked, 'What should the police keep doing, and stop doing?' Outreach told us, 'The vast majority of police officers get it. You

have to have a relationship with people on the street to say, 'How's your guitar? I saw you in the Kitchen last week – did you get your string fixed? Listen, I need to ask you to stop panhandling, or I need to ask you not to go into the wine shop.'" Staff at St. John's Kitchen appreciate officers who take the time to talk. If someday someone gets hurt, that person will talk to you if you have that relationship ... I'm trying to get new recruits to talk to people at St. John's Kitchen. To sit down, and have some food together. To instill the importance of good relationships in new recruits and give them the tools to avoid decisions that hurt our relationships with the people most in need."

- Kevin Thaler, Deputy Chief - Operations, Waterloo Regional Police Service

Incubating System-Level Evolution that is Responsive to People's Culture and Fundamental Needs: Housing Stability

For many years, St. John's Kitchen has incubated projects that support the evolution of the local housing stability system in pace with changing community needs. The longest-running of these projects is The Working Centre's supportive housing, which has provided downtown housing with integrated supports since 1996. Recently, with support from the Region and community members, The Working Centre has expanded its housing to offer more units designed to support people with a wider spectrum of needs – from units for people who are able to live independently with support from a mobile Outreach worker, to units for people transitioning out of persistent homelessness. The collaboration of STEP Home workers has worked closely together to support the development of housing alternatives for those whose housing needs are not being met in other ways.

Other projects incubated at St. John's Kitchen that contribute to the local housing stability system include Worth a Second Look Furniture and Housewares, Job Café, and the new Bunkees project. These projects support people to build a life in which they feel at home – a life in which, whatever their preferred living space, people have access to resources and support to live with dignity and meaning. For people who wish to live in a house or apartment, Worth a Second Look Furniture and Housewares offers resources to make the space feel like their own. For people who require supplementary income to maintain stability in their chosen housing, Job Café offers connections to flexible casual work. For people whose home is outside of traditional housing, the Bunkees project offers temporary privacy, safety, and shelter from the elements. Working in integration with other local services, these projects contribute a vital dimension to the local housing stability system by supporting people to thrive within the framework that gives them meaning in life.

"Second Look downstairs is really good for low-income people. I go there for furniture, appliances. I've gone through 4 vacuums now. They give you your money back for electronics if they break down. I work on the moving truck [through Job Café] every two weeks. I've been doing this on and off for ten years. It's hard work."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

The local STEP Home umbrella of programs is a collaboration of 12 interrelated programs in Waterloo Region designed to end and prevent persistent homelessness and foster respect, hope, home and community. Within STEP Home, St. John's Kitchen plays an important role as a place that brings the voices of people who are persistently homeless or at risk of persistent homelessness to the table, to engage in deep conversations around needs and values. These conversations are a place for people to explore and express what a home means to them, and for the local housing stability system to develop creative ways to support people to make that home a reality.

"Housing as a right means that we as a community have a responsibility to make sure that people have the housing they need, so that they feel at home. We can't presume that everybody has the same idea of what that housing looks like."

– Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen

APPENDIX 9

FOSTERING MUTUAL SUPPORT IN COMMUNITY

This sub-section appears in abbreviated form in Section 4: St. John's Kitchen in a Systemic Perspective (page 60). The full text is included here.

"I see St. John's Kitchen as a gathering place that is accessible and that is a community – a respectful place where reciprocity and engagement in what's going on is encouraged. It's not a charity model, which I think makes it somewhat unique."

– Marie Morrison, Manager, Housing Stability, Regional Municipality of Waterloo

St. John's Kitchen supports people within the best qualities of the local street culture. An important element of this culture is the strong level of mutual support that exists between people who belong to it. Mutual support is key to the way that the local street culture acts as a source of strength and resilience for people, and it is the deepest and most enduring level of support at St. John's Kitchen.

People support each other at St. John's Kitchen by being friends and substitute family members, and by sharing the daily work of preparing, serving, and cleaning up after the daily meal. In these ways, patrons of St. John's Kitchen create a sense of belonging to a community.

"Some of the people that come up here, they say 'hi' to me, and I don't even know them. When I first came here, I didn't want to be a part of this. I was moody. But then I got used to it as I kept coming back. It was better than just sitting at home. The people started coming up and talking and sitting at my table and asking where I was from, because they knew I was new. Then I started talking with them and got to know a lot of people ... For somebody that's not from here, they opened their hearts to me ... I started volunteering because I thought they needed help, and I wanted to help when I could."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

By being cared for by others and by contributing care and work back to their community, people feel valued and valuable at St. John's Kitchen. In this way, St. John's Kitchen is a place where people build a positive sense of self.

"When I first came here, I was a pretty angry man. This place has helped me to see that there's more to life than watching television. This place helped me feel accepted in being myself. Of course, after being myself for awhile, people get annoyed at me. But I get along with most people here. I'm not mainstream... In general in society, people should respect each other more. But this place has made me feel empowered and feel like myself. Because before that, my life was unsustainable."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

By fostering a sense of community and positive sense of self among people gathering there, St. John's Kitchen builds psychosocial integration. This sense of having individual purpose within a wider supportive group creates personal and community resilience. It encourages people to seek more out of life, in terms of personal purpose, and connection to wider society.

"I try to contribute to the space. That's how I was raised – that's what it means to be a part of civilized society. I put something on the bulletin board today. I don't push the broom around much. But I need to contribute. As much as I like to plan things out, things never go according to plan. I plan on doing more artwork for this place. I thought of serving food at the counter, but I have a problem keeping a schedule... I want to start to volunteer this summer at the Hacienda garden. I feel like there are so many different options for me in this city. I just have to get myself sorted out."

– St. John's Kitchen Patron

Fostering Mutual Support in Community: Health

The psychosocial integration that people build at St. John's Kitchen has an important positive impact on their physical and mental health.

People experience improvements in health at St. John's Kitchen simply by being in a space where they feel a sense of belonging and connection to others. Furthermore, without this sense of belonging, people do not maintain good health over time, even when other social determinants of health are satisfied.

"There are factors at St. John's Kitchen that make people feel good. It's a place of safety and warmth, a place where people can feel respected. Having what I call a therapeutic milieu is when people come into the hospital and we don't do anything, and they get better. They have a place where they can share their experiences, talk with others who are going through similar things, where they can get online and connect with family members. It's empowering individuals and making them feel respected."

– Dr. Sujay Patel, Medical Director of Specialized Mental Health, Grand River Hospital

"When it comes to determinants of health, people often start with housing, income, education and employment. Maslow's hierarchy is important, but it's only useful if you're also able to turn it upside down and say, 'People with low income, education, housing needs, etc., also have deep emotional and spiritual needs and these things can't wait.' St. John's Kitchen addresses this need for belonging ... I know many people who over the years have gotten their income and housing stabilized, and who have learned that unless the belonging piece is addressed and maintained at the same time, it often doesn't work."

– Doug Rankin, Community Health Worker, Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre

The positive sense of self that people build at St. John's Kitchen is another important element that contributes to people's health over time.

"If [people] get an opportunity to contribute, that can help them to get out of a negative space where their identity is that of a sick person or a person who lives in poverty. When people get out of that negative space, they are healthier."

– Community Partner

As a continuous source of psychosocial integration that contributes to people's stable health over the long term, St. John's Kitchen reduces reliance on medical services, and provides complementary support that makes medical interventions more effective when they are undertaken.

Fostering Mutual Support in Community: Crime Prevention/Response

At St. John's Kitchen, people build an understanding of themselves as contributing members of a wider community. This creates a greater sense of a personal responsibility of care toward other community members, resulting in reduced participation in criminal activity.

"The fellowship piece keeps the lid on. We would have a lot more street crime without that sense of fellowship."

– Douglas Bartholomew-Saunders, Commissioner, Region of Waterloo, Community Services

People who gather at St. John's Kitchen and who have had past involvements in criminal activity, actively support each other to build a life free of crime. The support of a positive peer group is a crucial element in the often long process of rebuilding life in community after criminal involvement and time spent in custody.

"A lot of the clients that I've had interactions with have gone through the system, and they feel a connection and safety in numbers with others who have gone through the system. That can be positive. It can also lead to more criminal activity. At St. John's Kitchen, there is a safety in numbers that is positive, with people identifying their own plans as they are starting out of custody."

– Kevin McIntyre, Area Manager, Probation and Parole Services (Retired)

Fostering Mutual Support in Community: Housing Stability

The mutual support that people offer each other within their culture and community is a crucial element of long-term housing stability. Indeed, people who are newly housed after experiencing homelessness often end up leaving their housing due to the loss of the intense levels of mutual support that they are accustomed to within street culture (see page 12, *Literature Review: Culture*). Services offered by agencies are unable to replicate these levels and forms of support. As a result, when housing stability services do not support people to maintain connections with their community while in housing, this causes people to cycle in and out of housing over long periods of time. A core role played by St. John's Kitchen in the local housing stability system is to support people who are housed to remain connected to their street culture community and its irreplaceable supports.

For people who are transitioning into housing, or who are housed and street-involved, being involved in supporting their community at St. John's Kitchen is just as important as receiving support from others. By participating in useful productive work at St. John's Kitchen, people fulfill a sense of personal purpose within a supportive community. Volunteering regularly at St. John's Kitchen is an active way for people to maintain a sense of stability and prevent isolation, depression, and a return to previous destabilizing lifestyles.

"I used to work in a housing job. Even after we housed people stably, people still came to St. John's Kitchen for community. To take people from a shelter or a room downtown and to get them housing in a new community – not even necessarily too far away – there is the possibility for isolation in the new place. Especially for people who have not been stably housed before, to have the consistency at St. John's Kitchen is a big draw. Volunteering here is also a huge thing."

People who stop using substances, or who get into housing, have a void in their day, suddenly. What can they fill it with? People value being able to come to St. John's Kitchen and help serve the meal, etc. – to be part of the community they already have, rather than having to find a new community."

– Abby Horst, Sanguen Health Centre

Mutual support within a cultural community helps to build community inclusion, which is identified by the Region of Waterloo as an essential element for retaining housing over the long term (All Roads Lead to Home, 2012).

Another dimension of community inclusion extends beyond people's immediate cultural groups, into wider local society. Mutual support at St. John's Kitchen also fosters this wider sense of community inclusion, by bringing people from different walks of life together to volunteer. Through sharing work at St. John's Kitchen, people from different cultural backgrounds form unique relationships that widen their sense of inclusion in the local community. For people transitioning into housing, having this sense of connection beyond their cultural group is important for reducing isolation and nurturing new supportive relationships.

"I meet a lot of people here, who are helping out the community ... It's easy to meet people here. There are all kinds of people. There are some quiet people, more active people. There are lots of friendly people. It's a good place to meet people, get to know them, and become friends. We learn more about each other and introduce new friends to others. Walking downtown, we know so many people, because we met them here."

– Two St. John's Kitchen Patrons

"Most people don't think of community inclusion in the long-term, but if people don't have community inclusion while they are in housing, they end up leaving that housing. It's important for people to be connected to their community, not to feel isolated when they do have housing. The mandate of St. John's Kitchen is clear from that perspective."

– Van Vilaysinh, Manager, Housing Services, Region of Waterloo

APPENDIX 10

ONE PLACE AMONG MANY

This sub-section appears in abbreviated form in Section 4: St. John's Kitchen in a Systemic Perspective (page 62). The full text is included here.

One Place Among Many

St. John's Kitchen is one of many gathering places in the local community, each with their own character and culture. People who gather at St. John's Kitchen also spend time in downtown parks, in the plaza in front of City Hall, in the Queen Street Commons Café, and at other gathering places offering services, such as churches, House of Friendship, Ray of Hope, the YWCA, oneROOF, the Downtown Community Centre, coffee shops and more. The populations who use these other gathering places overlap to different extents with the population who use St. John's Kitchen.

Local systems of support are strengthened by the presence of a variety of gathering places and service access points. People who use local services are a diverse group, and it is important for people to have access to services that are targeted to their unique needs. St. John's Kitchen, though always a place where everyone is welcome, is not always suitable for everyone. The culture of St. John's Kitchen is strongly informed by an adult male street culture, which makes it uniquely well suited to serve the needs of people who are comfortable within that culture. Some women and youth enjoy St. John's Kitchen (approximately 20% of the people who gather at St. John's Kitchen are women). However, the main gathering places and service access points for women and youth are the YWCA and oneROOF respectively. Indeed, most women and youth who spend time at St. John's Kitchen also seek services at YWCA and oneROOF, because these agencies are adapted to serve their unique needs.

"There are some clients I have that I would not send to St. John's Kitchen to do service hours. For example, a 19-year-old boy, I would be hesitant to send to St. John's Kitchen for fear that they might make new or worse friends. On the other hand, if I have a client who is already severely marginalized by addictions and mental health, I might strongly advise them to go to St. John's Kitchen, particularly if they are isolated and in need of supportive community."

– Stephanie Krug, Criminal Defense Lawyer

Just as people are better supported when they have relationships with multiple workers, they are better supported when they have access to different gathering places. People value having a variety and choice of places to gather, where they can enjoy different elements of place – being outdoors, being indoors, participating in the economy, and being outside of the economy, for example. When people feel welcome and supported in a variety of different places, this builds a greater sense of belonging to a wider community.

In this context of overlapping populations, the local network of agencies coordinates work to serve the full spectrum of people's needs without overlapping services.

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INTERVIEWEES

Over 60 patrons, volunteers, staff members, community partners and local funding agencies participated in interviews for this report. We extend our gratitude to all interviewees.

Community Partners

- Chelsea Arnott, Leadership Programs Coordinator, The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation (The KWCF)
- Douglas Bartholomew-Saunders, Commissioner, Region of Waterloo, Community Services
- Dr. George Berrigan, physician at S.O.S. / P.O.P
- Nancy Bird, BA, VP, Resource Mobilization, United Way KW
- Stacey Bricknell, Nurse Practitioner
- Clarence Cachagee, Shelter to Housing Stability Worker, interviewed at St. John's Kitchen
- Lisa Connolly, Nurse Practitioner
- Alison De Muy, Senior Manager, Health System Integration, WWLHIN
- Linda Elliott, Assistant Crown Attorney, Region of Waterloo
- Ron Flaming, Residential Services Director, House of Friendship
- Juan-Carlos Gomez, Clinical Social Worker, Grand River Hospital
- Jess Halliday, Outreach Coordinator, ACCKWA
- Sherri Heimpel-Peers, RN CPMHN(c), Clinical Manager, Adult Inpatient Mental Health Unit, Grand River Hospital
- Jon Hill, Program Director, Ray of Hope Community Centre
- Abby Horst, Sanguen Health Centre
- Heather Kerr, MSW, RSW, Executive Director, Stonehenge Therapeutic Community
- Stephanie Krug, Criminal Defense Lawyer
- Linda Jutzi, Executive Director, Kitchener Downtown BIA
- Dr. G. Lafrenière, Associate Professor, Wilfred Laurier University
- Rick Lauzon, BSW, MSW, RSW, Clinical Manager, Withdrawal Management & Child and Adolescent Mental Health CDT/Triage services Grand River Hospital
- John Loughheed, Director, Spiritual Care, Grand River Hospital and Regional Cancer Program
- Rebecca Lubitz, MD, MS, CCFP, physician at S.O.S./P.O.P.
- Kerry Manthenga, Clinical Director – Community Services, Stonehenge Therapeutic Community
- Kevin McIntyre, Area Manager, Probation and Parole Services (Retired)
- Christine Michaud, Manager Community Relations, Downtown Kitchener BIA
- Cathy Middleton, Director of Women's Services, YWCA K-W
- Marie Morrison, Manager, Housing Stability, Regional Municipality of Waterloo
- Coba Moolenburgh, Director, St. Mary's Counselling Service, St. Mary's General Hospital
- Leslie Morgenson, Writer and Former St. John's Kitchen Worker
- Margaret Nally, Spiritual Caregiver
- John Neufeld, Executive Director, House of Friendship
- Dr. Sujay Patel, Medical Director of Specialized Mental Health, Grand River Hospital
- Doug Rankin, Community Health Worker, Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre
- Greg Raszmann, Licensed Funeral Director, Erb & Good Family Funeral Home
- Rebekah Rempel, Coordinator of Community Service-Learning at Wilfrid Laurier University
- Melissa Riewald, Manager, Community Development, United Way KW

- Don Roth, Director of Services, Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington Dufferin
- Steven Shadd, Professor Social Service Program, Conestoga College
- Brendan M. Sheehan, Director, Philanthropic Services, The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation (The KWCF)
- Holt Sivak, Executive Director, Waterloo Regional Homes for Mental Health Inc
- Mary Skele, CPhT, Operations Manager, Compounding Specialist, The Tannery Pharmasave
- Alex Smart, Program Coordinator, John Howard Society
- Rob Smith, BA, MSW, Service Resolution Coordinator-Whatever It Takes Program, Lutherwood Housing Services
- Kevin Thaler, Deputy Chief - Operations, Waterloo Regional Police Service
- Violet Umanetz, Manager of Outreach, Education & Prevention, Sanguen Health Centre
- Van Vilaysinh, Manager, Housing Services, Region of Waterloo
- Harry Whyte, CEO, Ray of Hope Inc

The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen Staff

- Joe Bauman, Street Outreach Worker
- Sue Collison, Hub Worker (Money Matters and Housing Desk)
- Barb Crockard, Coordinator, Hospitality House
- Sara Escobar, Street Outreach Worker
- Tom Friesen, St. John's Kitchen Worker
- Don Gingerich, Worth a Second Look Furniture and Housewares
- Sharon Hartigan, St. John's Kitchen Worker
- Gretchen Jones, St. John's Kitchen Worker
- Alice Maguire, Specialized Outreach Services
- Jennifer Mains, Coordinator, St. John's Kitchen
- Rebecca Mancini, The Working Centre
- Jude Meyer, St. John's Kitchen Worker
- Tanya Roper, In-house Support Worker, Hospitality House
- Eli Winterfeld, St. John's Kitchen Worker

Three Volunteers at St. John's Kitchen

Nine Patrons of St. John's Kitchen