

*Somerset West
Community Health Centre*

CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS

February 2026



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

For more than 30 years, Black History Month has provided an important opportunity to recognize the achievements, resilience, and cultural contributions of Black communities. This year, our team launched the month with an outstanding Black History Month program that highlighted key initiatives, celebrated community leadership, and created meaningful opportunities for connection and learning.

At Somerset West Community Health Centre, this commitment extends beyond February. It's woven into our everyday efforts — across roles, sites, and disciplines.



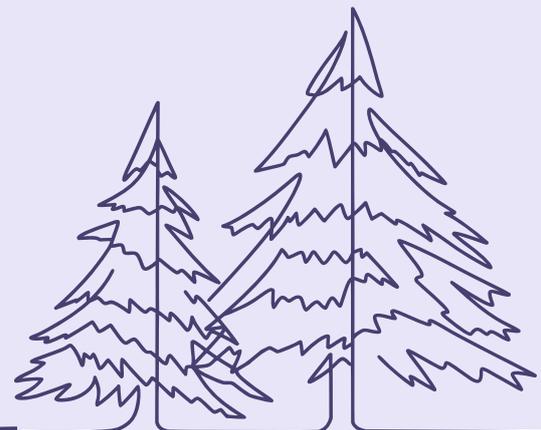
It shows up in the culturally affirming programs and services we design and deliver across the Centre: in how we partner with communities, how we listen to lived experience, how we integrate cultural humility into care, and how we create spaces where people feel seen, respected, and safe. This work is essential to achieving better health outcomes and to building trust with communities that experience marginalization.

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL FACILITATOR

Recently, our team participated in the All-Staff Wellness Event, a gathering that invited staff to slow down, learn, and connect. Together, we explored the teachings of the Four Medicines, took part in smudging, and created our own smudge kits to bring these learnings into our daily lives. The room was filled with curiosity, openness, and genuine engagement. Thank you to everyone who joined and contributed to such a meaningful experience.

We are also very pleased to welcome Victoria Marchand, our new Indigenous Cultural Facilitator, to Somerset West Community Health Centre. Many staff have already met Victoria at recent events, including our staff retreat and Black History Month celebration. Working alongside Austin, Victoria will help advance our shared commitments to creating safe, welcoming, and affirming environments for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis clients and staff. Her role includes supporting the integration of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being across our programs, and strengthening our collective cultural awareness and humility. In the coming weeks, Victoria will be connecting with programs and teams to listen, learn, and identify opportunities for collaboration and growth. These conversations are an important part of moving from intention to practice, and we encourage everyone to welcome them openly.

Kwey kakina, Hello everyone, Victoria nidijnikaz, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg ashidj Winneway Long Point First Nations nidonjiba, mongo nidodem. Mino Sheba, my name is Victoria Marchand, and I'm a proud Anishinabekwe of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg and Long Point First Nations, both Algonquin Anishinabeg communities north of Ottawa. I look forward to learning more from all of you and witnessing the real-world impacts of your heart work.



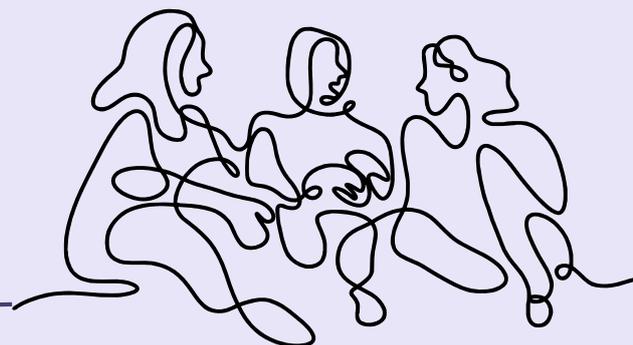
ALTERNATE NEIGHBOURHOOD CRISIS RESPONSE

ANCHOR continued to serve as a vital source of support across our catchment, responding to 105 calls and remaining actively engaged with individuals and partners throughout the community. Each call represents a moment of connection—an opportunity to provide timely, compassionate support and help stabilize situations before they escalate.

Beyond direct response, January was a month of strong community presence and partnership-building. On January 14, we gathered for an ANCHOR staff appreciation event, recognizing the dedication, teamwork, and resilience of our staff. It was a meaningful opportunity to reflect on our accomplishments and celebrate the people who make this work possible.

Throughout the month, ANCHOR participated in seven major community events. Members of our leadership team attended the Ottawa Police Service community consultation to share perspectives on the upcoming community policing initiative. Staff also connected with service providers at the Mechanicsville community mental health event, strengthening relationships in our expanded catchment area. A tour of Operation Come Home allowed us to exchange knowledge and explore deeper collaboration to better support youth in our community.

In addition, ANCHOR tabled at Bell Let's Talk Day, conducted outreach with Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation (CCOC), presented our services and program limitations at the Catherine Street Community Hub, and attended a CCOC-hosted community event at 151 Parkdale—continuing to build the partnerships that strengthen coordinated, community-based care.



PRIMARY CARE & REGIONAL PROGRAMS

OTTAWA NEWCOMER HEALTH CENTRE (ONHC)

The Multicultural Health Navigator (MHN) team continues to provide individual and group support to newcomer clients across ONHC programs. This month, the team advanced a comprehensive training model focused on Anti-Racism and Decolonizing Pediatric and Family Health Care. Two sessions have already been delivered, with additional learning events planned to further strengthen culturally safe, equitable care across services.

ONHC is also supporting Men Together, a community-led initiative facilitated by our colleague Mugisho. This series creates a safe and welcoming space for men from African, Caribbean, Black, and Arab communities to connect, reduce isolation, and promote mental health and well-being. Additional gatherings are planned in the coming months to continue fostering connection and community wellness.

As part of Black History Month, ONHC will host an event celebrating milestones achieved through the Black Health Plan while exploring the links between economic empowerment and community well-being for Black newcomer families, youth, and young adults.

ONHC's leadership in knowledge sharing continues to grow. Dr. Parisa Rezaiefar and Mental Health Navigator Marcus Zacharia recently presented to CHEO's Board of Directors, sharing case studies that highlighted both barriers and successes experienced by newcomer families within hospital systems. Dr. Rezaiefar will also present at the Faculty of Medicine's Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, reflecting on her personal and professional journey supporting immigrant physicians and learners.

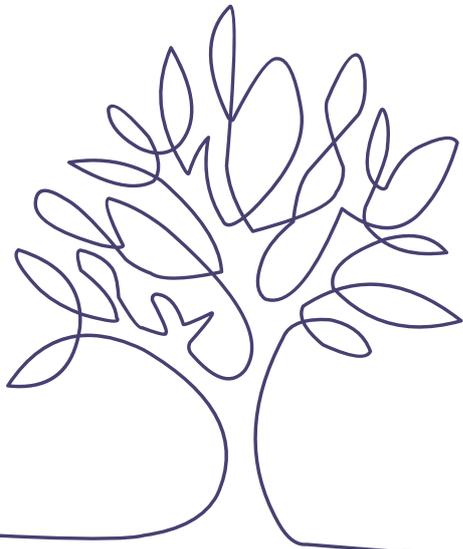


MENTAL HEALTH & COUNSELING

2026 is the Year of the Horse, a symbol of forward movement and growth. It is a time for reflection and new beginnings.

In keeping with our 20+ year tradition of celebrating together, Somerset West Community Health Centre's Chinese and Vietnamese Community Support Services recently hosted two celebrations to recognize the Lunar New Year and celebrate the Year of the Horse.

These celebrations continue to be a meaningful way to foster health and well-being by recognizing the important connection between belonging and overall health. The events were open to Somerset West clients who participate in our Seniors' programming, and both events featured games, riddles, song and dance, delicious food, and an opportunity for the community to come together. Over 200 clients attended, with many volunteers offering support, entertainment, and their talents to ensure the events ran smoothly. This year, we were once again joined by Debbie Sullivan, representative from the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility, as our special guest.



FAMILY, COMMUNITY HEALTH, & HARM REDUCTION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

This winter, our Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) work in Mechanicsville focused on deepening meaningful participation in neighbourhood life — particularly among residents who face higher risks of social isolation. Grounded in the belief that communities already hold strengths, skills, and leadership within them, this approach prioritizes relationship-building, low-barrier entry points, and visible opportunities for connection that can grow into sustained engagement.

Using a layered engagement strategy, we met residents where they are. Weekly Tea & Toast gatherings created consistent, welcoming spaces for informal connection and creative expression. Targeted outreach in partnership with OCH and CCOC helped expand participation across multiple buildings and blocks. Facilitated conversations centred on mental health and resilience, while inclusive neighbourhood-wide events served as accessible entry points into deeper involvement.

Between January and early February, more than 100 residents participated in activities ranging from small weekly groups to large community events. Repeat attendance across seniors, families, and residents from multiple housing sites reflects growing trust and relationship-building.

A Community Mental Health Dinner brought together 45–50 residents and partners for a powerful dialogue on wellbeing, lived experience, and neighbourhood resilience. The Winter Carnival at Laroche Park created an intergenerational gathering space that strengthened cross-building relationships. Across all activities, resident interests emerged clearly — including arts, food programming, games, wellness supports, and peer-led initiatives — highlighting strong potential for future resident leadership.

At Lebreton, planning efforts centred on stabilizing and activating the Sunshine Hub while aligning 2026 priorities with resident input. A well-attended community gathering generated practical, community-driven ideas including movie nights, bingo, knitting groups, food security initiatives, harm reduction training, and skill-building opportunities. Follow-up outreach ensured that residents unable to attend were still represented in the developing action plan. A partner planning session with OCH clarified shared priorities and strengthened coordination to move ideas into implementation.

Ongoing programming continues to build stability and connection. Weekly food rescue supports 18–25 families, Breakfast Club participation is growing, and volunteers have strengthened hub operations. Preparatory work is also underway for upcoming initiatives, including Black History Month programming.

Together, this work strengthens SWCHC's visibility and trust in the neighbourhood, reduces isolation, builds resident leadership, and advances equity-focused, community-led care in Mechanicsville and Lebreton.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS

Throughout 2025, 365 volunteers contributed over 9,219 hours to support programs across the Centre! We're incredibly fortunate to have such a dedicated and skilled team making a meaningful impact and helping us fulfill our mission of supporting people and communities to achieve their best health and well-being.

With the support of several staff members and three dedicated volunteers, we processed 583 applications for the Christmas Exchange Program through Caring and Sharing, the organizing agency. Despite 51 duplicate applications, 475 families received gifts. This included 37 families who received food hampers and 438 families who received gift certificates with a total value of \$11,961.

Due to limited sponsorship and community donations in 2025, the organizers were unable to provide gifts for every applicant. Over 1,000 families didn't receive gifts, which included 57 from SWCHC applicants.

In 2026, we will continue our effective hybrid service model, combining in-person tax clinics in March and April with established year-round virtual services. Our CVITP team consists of 13 skilled and dedicated volunteers. Registration starts on February 17th, 2026.

On-site Service Schedule:

SWCHC Branch – 30 Rosemount Ave.

- Time slots: 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. or 1:30–4:00 p.m.
- Tuesdays: March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31; April 7, 14, 21, 28

Rochester Heights Community House – 865 Gladstone Ave.

- Time: 10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.
- Wednesdays: March 4, 11, 18, 25; April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

CLIENT PROFILES:

- 81% lived alone; 19% as couples
- 8% parents; almost the same number of single and two-parent families
- 46% were 65 years of age or older
- 89% were living below official poverty line for Ottawa in 2024; 52% in deep poverty
- Single parents and working age individuals more likely to be living in deep poverty

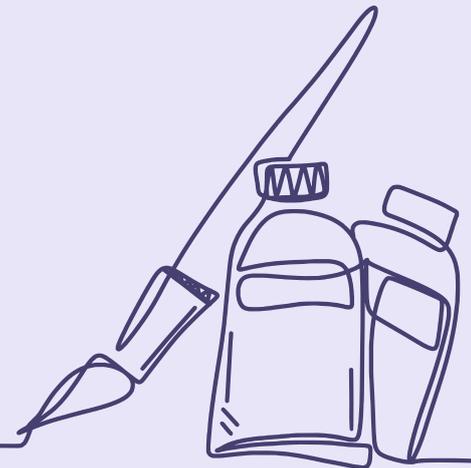


YET KEEN SENIOR'S DAY CENTRE

January was a month of connection, celebration, and new experiences at Yet Keen Senior's Day Centre. On January 21, 2026, we gathered to celebrate the birthdays of seniors born in January and February. Despite the extremely cold weather, more than 50 seniors attended, enjoying a homecooked meal, birthday cake, and lively performances brought to the crowd by the birthday members themselves. The event was a joyful reminder of the warmth, creativity, and community that thrives at Yet Keen.

Just a week later, on January 29, 40 seniors joined Yet Keen for a special evening outing to the National Gallery of Canada. Guided by guest art teacher Chang Yi, the group explored the exhibition "Winter Count – Embracing the Cold" during free admission hours. Seniors received a worksheet to engage with the artwork and answer questions for a small prize, adding an interactive element to the visit. For more than 30 participants, it was their first time visiting the National Gallery. Many shared that they would not normally feel safe venturing out alone, especially on a day when temperatures dipped to minus 22 degrees Celsius. Yet Keen ensured the outing was accessible, providing school bus transportation and a light dinner sandwich prior to the visit.

The evening was a success, offering seniors an opportunity to engage with art, enjoy each other's company, and safely experience the gallery in a supportive, accessible setting. These events demonstrate Yet Keen's commitment to celebrating seniors and creating meaningful opportunities for connection, cultural enrichment, and community participation.



ROCHESTER HEIGHTS COMMUNITY HOUSE

This month, Rochester Heights Community House focused on restarting key programs and strengthening tenant engagement for the year ahead.

Senior art classes resumed, welcoming returning participants into a familiar and creative space. These sessions offer opportunities for self-expression, social connection, and continued engagement during the winter months. Weekly movie nights also continued, providing tenants with a warm, safe, and accessible space to enjoy films together, complete with free drinks and popcorn. These evenings foster social connection and help reduce isolation.

Tenant engagement was further strengthened through community meetings at both 280 Rochester and 865 Gladstone. These sessions offered residents a chance to share priorities, provide feedback, and participate in collaborative planning, helping build communication and shared ownership within each building. Laughter Yoga launched on a biweekly basis, offering a gentle, accessible activity that supports both mental and physical well-being, particularly for seniors. Cross-cultural breakfast programming remained popular, bringing residents together to enjoy culturally diverse meals, connect with neighbours, and foster understanding across communities.

The After-School Program resumed creative and hands-on learning activities to support children's independence and skill development. Art classes encouraged imagination, self-expression, and fine motor skill growth, while weekly food preparation activities gave children the chance to plan and make meals such as tacos, spaghetti and meatballs, poutine, and butter chicken. These experiences taught basic cooking skills, teamwork, and food awareness while building confidence.

Overall, January's programs at Rochester Heights successfully balanced creativity, practical learning, and social connection, providing tenants and children with supportive, engaging spaces to grow, connect, and thrive during the winter season.

CHILDREN & YOUTH

Parkdale United Church has generously provided space to our After School Program, allowing for gym access twice per week for the children to build their skill sets through sports.

The Children and Youth team have been busy in the community with weekly visits to classrooms in local schools and in our after school programs facilitating of Friends for Life: an interactive curriculum that helps children develop coping skills, emotional regulation, and problem-solving through engaging, age-appropriate activities; fostering empathy, resilience, and peer connections, leading to improved emotional control, social awareness, and positive self-talk.

We have recently solidified a relationship with Boomerang Kids in Kanata. A clothing consignment shop that is providing donations of clothes to stalk our free Clothing Cupboard for families on floor number 3 at 755 Somerset St. W.

Starting in late February we will partner with Ottawa Public Health offering a Pregnancy Circle, this opportunity is for Mandarin speaking pregnant individuals: a place to learn how to care for baby, talk about concerns and connect with other expectant mothers.

Our Babysitting Courses continue with free upcoming sessions in March and April.



HARM REDUCTION

NEEDLE EXCHANGE AND SAFER INHALATION

Our NESI Women's Breakfast continues to provide a welcoming space for connection, community support, and a nutritious breakfast. Thanks to our friends at Ottawa Food Rescue, participants enjoy essentials like toast, eggs, and sweet treats. The NESI pet food bank has also been a great resource for our neighbours, with top-quality pet food generously supplied by Community Veterinary Outreach (CVO).

This month, we hosted a bittersweet farewell for our colleague Caleb, who has stepped down as NESI Team Lead to take on a new role with CATIE. Caleb's dedication and leadership have set both the NESI daytime and evening teams up for success. Kayti Ferguson will serve as interim NESI and PHAC Team Lead, supporting the team through its ongoing transition.

Collaborative partnerships remain at the heart of NESI's work. We are thrilled to announce that NESI is now an official safer sex supply distribution partner with Ottawa Public Health, further expanding access to essential resources for our community.

Looking ahead, NESI, in collaboration with PHAC, will be offering four community overdose intervention training sessions in February. These sessions aim to equip participants with practical knowledge and skills to support neighbours in crisis and enhance overall community safety.

It's always a pleasure to see the team's work come to life through these programs, partnerships, and training initiatives, and we look forward to continuing to provide meaningful support to our community.



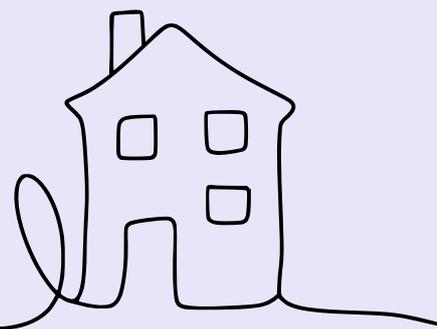
ANONYMOUS HIV TESTING

With support from the HIV/AIDS Legal Clinic of Ontario (HALCO), we helped local HIV treatment providers integrate anonymous viral load testing for people diagnosed with HIV via anonymous HIV testing. This helps to reduce barriers when linking someone to HIV care that can delay or stand in the way of someone looking to access treatment. Anonymous viral load testing was approved back in 2015, so we're very excited that this pathway is finally available for people on a local level!

We attended the monthly Rainbow Service Provider Network meeting and participated in the weekly Indigenous-led drum circle at Dundonald Park. We gathered with harm reduction outreach workers for a quarterly Ontario-wide outreach network meeting that included important information about the health impacts for drug users from medetomidine in the drug supply.

Our Canada includes immigrants and refugees. This month, we joined organizers of the "We're Better Together" campaign to learn about important ways we can support immigrants and refugees in this moment.

Ongoing anonymous HIV testing sites continued this month at the weekly evening 2SLGBTQ+ testing site at MAX Ottawa, weekly at the University of Ottawa, and monthly at both Centre 507 and Operation Come Home. We also continue to offer regular drop-in anonymous HIV testing on Mondays at 55 Eccles Street.



OTTAWA BLACK MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

This month Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition (OBMHC) received additional one-time funding from the City of Ottawa to expand capacity building initiatives. This investment will support the expansion of capacity building in grant writing, communications, website maintenance, and print promotion support for OBMHC staff and our eligible members.

Currently, OBMHC staff are preparing for Black History Month and Black Mental Health Week events. Our first community engagement activity was Black Out Night on January 16th at the National Arts Centre – volunteers distributed tote bags with resources and invitations to BMHW 2026. This year's event will feature:

- one-on-one peer and navigation support in our Quieter Connections space
- dedicated prayer space for participants observing Ramadan
- over 30 community partner booths at the Connecting Caregivers Expo
- 4 workshops for clinicians, including anti-stigma training co-presented by OBMHC and CAPSA
- special guests include Sarah Onyango, Mayor Suttcliff, Councilor King, and Featured Artist N'nerjie.

Staff are busy coordinating to promote SWCHC Black Health screening programs at the Black History Month Launch, preparing remarks for SWCHC's launch event on February 3rd, and gearing up for The Ottawa Hospital's Black History Month event February 20 where we will have booths and distribute resources. Additionally, staff are working to finalize the community of practice training and workshops, and SMART Recovery and Mental Health First Aid Training which will be delivered in May 2026 during Canadian Mental Health Week. Both these trainings will be delivered in French. Find out more about this and all the activities of the Coalition at our newly launched website www.obmhc.ca

