

*Somerset West
Community Health Centre*

CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS

SEPTEMBER 2025



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Somerset West recently held its 53rd Annual General Meeting, which was a resounding success! It was a wonderful opportunity to come together, to celebrate our community, our staff, and each of this year's community award recipients. The evening was filled with powerful stories – stories that reflect the diversity of cultures we serve, and shape who we are as one Centre. Our work goes far beyond the programs offered at our Centre. This past year has shown us the true power of resilience and hope, carried by the voices and actions of the people who make our community stronger each day.

2025 COMMUNITY AWARD RECIPIENTS:

MARION DEWAR SCHOLARSHIP
Batool Karimi

**JACK MCARTHY AWARD FOR
COMMUNITY SERVICE**
Helena Nguyen

COMMUNITY BUSINESS AWARD
Ashraf Yacoub, Flora Pharmacy

**COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
AWARD**
Centretown Community Health Centre
Community Navigation Eastern Ontario

MR. CARL REINBOTH AWARD
Amy Cameron

CHINESE RAILWAY WORKERS MEMORIAL

Our Centre, together with members of our Board, took part in the unveiling of a powerful new monument at the entrance of our 755 Somerset St. location. Created by artists Yi Chang and Shi Chang, the memorial pays tribute to the 17,000 Chinese-Canadian railway workers who built the Canadian Pacific Railway between 1880 and 1885. Its unveiling on - June 22nd - holds deep significance for our community, marking the anniversary of Canada's official apology in 2006 for both the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act.

Now standing proudly in the heart of Ottawa's Chinatown, the memorial not only honours past sacrifices but also serves as a reminder of resilience, dignity, and unity. As we celebrate this meaningful tribute, it also inspires us to continue challenging modern forms of systemic exclusion.

PRIDE PARADE

Our Centre proudly participated in this year's Capital Pride celebrations along with other members of the Coalition of Community Health Centres! Though the parade was cancelled, staff and community members came together to march, connect, and stand in solidarity with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Leading up to the parade, we shared daily resources that encouraged reflection, learning, and conversations about equity.

ALTERNATE NEIGHBOURHOOD CRISIS RESPONSE (ANCHOR)

Throughout the summer months, the ANCHOR Program stayed fully active, providing 24/7 support to the Centretown-Ottawa community. Our team responded to mental health and drug use-related crises with care and compassion, reinforcing trust and safety in the neighbourhood.

A big highlight was the launch of the ANCHOR Control Centre at the 55 Eccles site, a hub that strengthens coordination, communication with partners, and our capacity to manage complex situations. In July, we hosted a ride-along with partners including the City of Ottawa and Community Navigator of East of Ontario (CNEO); and participated in many community celebrations.

In August, ANCHOR took an active role in the Pride Parade and hosted a booth at the Pride Street Festival. These activities increased our visibility, deepened community connections, and showcased ANCHOR's commitment to inclusion and support.



INDIGENOUS CULTURAL FACILITATOR

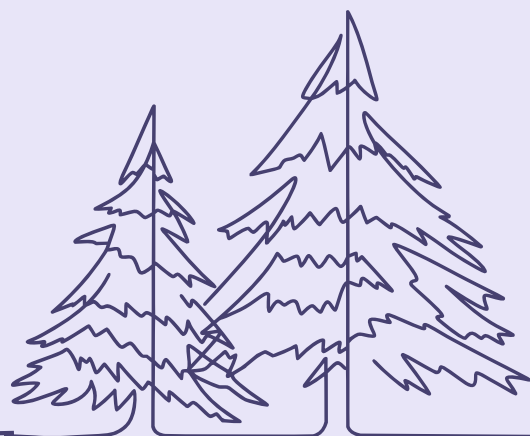
Over the past three months, we have had the honour of our Indigenous Cultural Facilitator bringing culture, teachings, and community connection into our work. Through their guidance, we hosted two major cultural events and connected with more than 400 clients. Along the way, we strengthened relationships with partners including Operation Come Home and StreetSmarts (youth outreach), Shauna's Outreach and the City of Ottawa outreach teams, Jewish Family Services, Tungasuvvingat Inuit and Wabano (Indigenous partners), and Shepherds of Good Hope.

At our gatherings, Elders and Knowledge Keepers shared teachings, while we offered food, clothing, and more than 200 jackets to those in need. We also created and gifted smudge kits, welcomed the grandmother drum, supported the Aboriginal Community, and helped community members attend powwows.

Cultural teachings such as drumming, smudging, the four medicines, and dreamcatcher making were shared with clients and staff. Staff also had opportunities to deepen their cultural awareness, learning how to walk alongside Indigenous clients and communities in a good way.

This work is more than events, it is about carrying forward our medicines and teachings. Like sweetgrass, one strand alone is fragile, but when braided together, like our community, it is strong and unbreakable. We have offered tobacco from the left hand, closest to the heart, and in return, our Elders have gifted us wisdom. We have burned sage so our community can see, hear, feel, and think with good intentions.

These summer months have been deeply rewarding. It is a privilege to walk alongside our community and staff, guided by culture and teachings. Moving forward, our hope is to continue building cultural safety and knowledge, and to share Indigenous events, updates, and interactive features like Guess the Feather and Guess the Track through the newsletter.



FAMILY COMMUNITY HEALTH & HARM REDUCTION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

The Sunshine Hub continued to support families and strengthen community connections through weekly programs and special initiatives. Five Food Rescue sessions provided groceries and essential items to more than 110 families. Alongside food, residents also received clothing, household items, and personal supplies. These weekly supports reduced food insecurity, helped families redirect income toward other needs such as school supplies and rent, and built trust between the Hub and the community. Partnerships with Whole Foods, the Community House, and Lion Heart made this consistent support possible.

Weekly programs remained a cornerstone of engagement. Cooking Groups on Tuesdays engaged 18 residents in preparing and sharing cultural meals, offering participants the opportunity to learn from one another, celebrate their traditions, and foster inclusivity in a safe and welcoming environment. Breakfast Club, held every Wednesday provided not only food and conversation but also on-the-spot referrals to services such as Rec Link, Ottawa Public Health, and SWCHC programs. This consistent weekly gathering reduced isolation and created a dependable check-in point for tenants. Recreation also played a role in building connections, with Bingo sessions drawing residents together across generations for fun and community-building.

One of the highlights of the summer was the BloodVibes Health & Resource Fair, held on July 29 and followed by outreach in early August. This event was delivered in partnerships with: Canadian Blood Services, Ottawa Community Housing Foundation, Centretown CHC, SEOCHC, Heart and Stroke Foundation, Black Health Committee, CO-CREATH Lab. SWCHC programs included ACB HIV, Black Mental Health and Counselling, Primary Health Clinic, and Ottawa Newcomer Health Clinic. The event brought together approximately 40 residents, who attended workshops, accessed resources, and connected with community supports. Notably, 27 community members generously donated blood, while others joined in interactive sessions on blood pressure and diabetes awareness, HIV prevention resources, and received guidance from a multicultural health navigator. The fair provided vital health supports and created a strong sense of connection and community engagement.

In addition to these activities, twelve children received backpacks and school supplies through Rec Link and local donors, helping families prepare for the new school year and easing financial pressures during the back-to-school season.

Overall, more than 15 programs and events were delivered in August, engaging over 200 participants, alongside the 110 families supported through Food Rescue. These efforts promoted inclusion, reduced isolation, expanded access to health resources, and highlighted the importance of partnerships in advancing community well-being.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS

The Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) continued to provide virtual year-round tax support to Ottawa's most vulnerable residents, extending help beyond the traditional tax season. To celebrate the dedication of its volunteers, the program hosted a Volunteer Appreciation Lunch on June 20, highlighting achievements and sharing program data and client satisfaction survey results. Between March and April 2025, 12 professional volunteers supported the filing of 384 tax returns for 369 clients—266 on-site and 103 virtually—resulting in a total income of \$2,581,170, with the largest portion coming from GIS benefits (\$1,587,033). Six volunteers received long-service awards, including one for an impressive 15 years of service.

The program serves a community with significant needs: 91% of clients live in poverty, with more than half in deep poverty. Adults aged 18–64 represented the majority, with 92% living in poverty, while 89% of seniors 65+ were in poverty. Most clients are single (80%) and struggling financially, while families with children accounted for fewer than 5% of clients, all in deep poverty. Many clients also access other community services, including food banks (51%), housing supports (49%), health and mental health services (34%), legal and advocacy services (21%), and settlement or newcomer supports (11%).

Client satisfaction remains exceptionally high: 98–99% of respondents to a May–June survey reported being "Satisfied" or "Extremely Satisfied" with the service, with no negative feedback, and 67% returning from the previous year. Survey insights will help strengthen future City of Ottawa funding applications, ensuring the CVITP continues to support the financial stability and well-being of Ottawa's most vulnerable residents.

On July 25, volunteers and staff from all SWCHC programs gathered at Tom Brown Arena for the Annual Summer Volunteer Party bringing together over 80 attendees to celebrate and recognize the incredible contributions of our 281 volunteers, who generously gave 10,355 hours of their time over the past year. The celebration featured a lively Mingo Bingo game, opening remarks, and a heartfelt appreciation speech from our CEO. It also included long-service volunteer awards and certificate presentations, a festive lunch, networking opportunities, exceptional volunteer performances, exciting lucky draws, and souvenir gifts for all volunteers. In 2025, 16 volunteers received long-service awards—six from CVITP and 10 from other programs (each with over five years of service)—including our longest-serving volunteer, who has supported the Yet Keen Seniors' Day Centre for over 30 years. We are grateful to all volunteers, new and returning, and look forward to celebrating their dedication again at next year's party.



YET KEEN SENIOR'S DAY CENTRE

Yet Keen has been piloting several new classes designed to help seniors stay active. These include a Chair Dance Class for seniors with limited mobility, a Ballroom Dancing program, and a Waist Drum Class led by a long-time volunteer teacher. We are also partnering once again with the Flow Gallery to offer bi-weekly art classes from August 2025 to February 2026. These sessions give participants the chance to explore art-making in greater depth and are tailored to the language and cultural backgrounds of Yet Keen's member demographic.

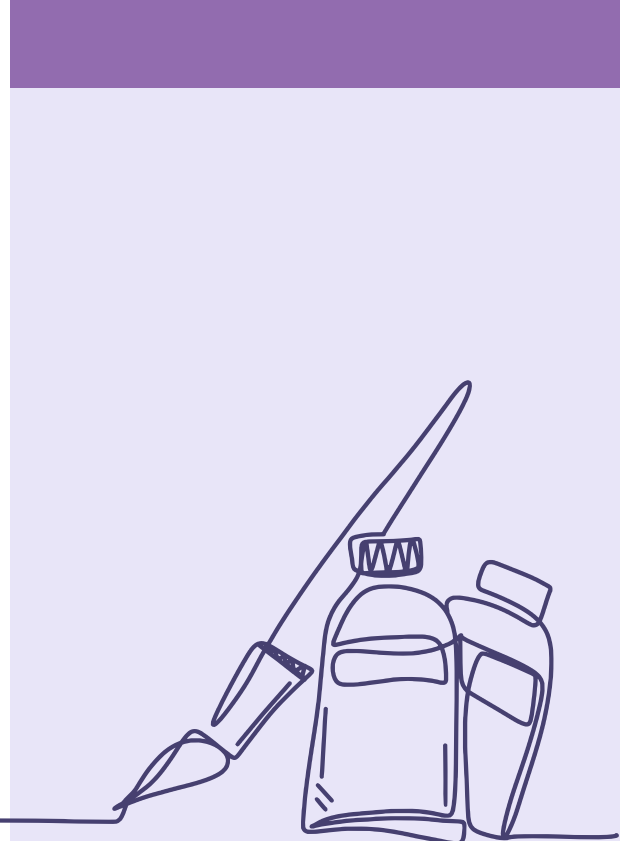
On August 29th, more than 80 seniors took part in a full-day outing to the Canada Aviation and Space Museum. Seniors enjoyed incredible views of the Hot Air Balloon Festival over the Ottawa River, and wrapped up the trip with a lively Laughter Yoga session on the bus ride home!

ROCHESTER HEIGHTS COMMUNITY HOUSE

This summer, Rochester Heights Community House was alive with energy as we wrapped up programming and prepared families for the back-to-school season. Weekly programs like Senior Zumba and our drop-in and community support provided stability, and joy to residents, while special initiatives created new opportunities for learning and connection.

Our eight-week Summer Camp, delivered in partnership with the Children's Village of Ottawa-Carleton, welcomed more than 30 children for creative workshops, outdoor recreation, cultural activities, field trips, and even a community bakery sale. The camp not only gave kids a safe, fun, and memorable summer, but also relieved financial and childcare pressures for parents.

As the season shifted, we came together to support over 50 local families through our Backpack Program, offered in partnership with the Caring and Sharing Exchange and Rec Link. Thanks to our volunteers, children started the school year with the tools and confidence they need to succeed.



HARM REDUCTION

NEEDLE EXCHANGE AND SAFER INHALATION

The Needle Exchange and Safer Inhalation (NESI) program had a full and meaningful summer, marked by community events, new resources, and ongoing engagement.

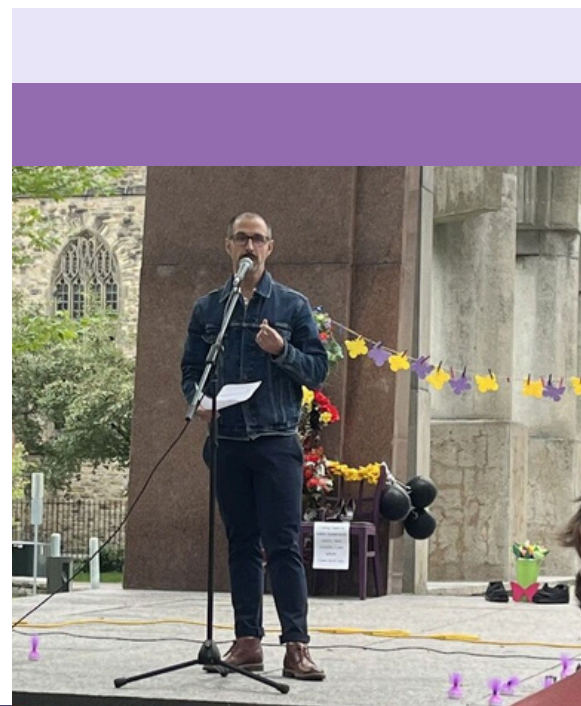
This summer, the NESI team was thrilled to welcome a new program van. The upgraded vehicle has already proven to be a valuable resource, allowing staff to continue harm reduction outreach across Ottawa with fewer service interruptions, as the previous van often required repairs. The evening outreach program has been introducing the new van to the community and using it to extend harm reduction supports more reliably across the region.

In July, the NESI program joined the Collective Grief Initiative at the International Drug User's Memorial, hosted at Sandy Hill Community Health Centre. This event brought the community together in a holistic recognition of lives lost due to drugs and drug policies. The program featured non denominational and Indigenous services, music, and the reading of names of recently deceased community members. It was a moving and collective act of remembrance.

The Women's Breakfast program also continued to grow over the summer, with new participants joining each biweekly session. Revived early in summer, the breakfast program has become a welcoming space for participants to share a meal, connect socially, and re-engage with supports. It has also created opportunities for collaboration between NESI outreach workers, the Peer Outreach Team (POT), and HART Hub services, ensuring that participants are connected with a range of resources to meet their needs.

In August, the program held a series of rotating naloxone training sessions for clients. Keeping groups small encouraged open discussion and peer learning. With the drug supply changing so rapidly, the training was not only an opportunity to share knowledge on naloxone use in community settings, but also a chance to hear directly from participants about how they are adapting to keep one another safe.

On August 29, NESI partnered with other SWCHC programs, local health and social service organizations, and community members to host a public event at the Human Rights Memorial on Elgin Street for International Overdose Awareness Day. Guided by this year's theme, Driven by Hope, the event provided space to collectively grieve those lost while also calling for action to address the ongoing drug toxicity crisis. A special thanks goes to Derrick St. John, Director of Supportive Housing and Substance Use Health at SWCHC, who delivered remarks recognizing over 15 years of the NESI program at Somerset West Community Health Centre and the critical role it continues to play in harm reduction.



ACB/HIV PREVENTION STRATEGY

The African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) HIV Prevention team spent the summer deepening our community impact through workshops, outreach, and peer support. We hosted a bilingual webinar on STBBIs and the intersection with Black maternal and reproductive health as part of the Lunch and Learn series, which drew strong participation and interactive discussion. Our team also joined community outreach at a local blood drive, as well as multiple ACB community summer events, where we shared resources and spoke with participants about PrEP and PEP.

In August, we took part in the Emancipation Day summit focused on taking action against stigma and attended the Ottawa Women's Network event supporting self-care for frontline workers. Our ongoing bi-monthly peer support group, It's a Vibe, continued, and we participated in the online show After Dark Chat, discussing HIV testing and awareness with the wider community.

ANONYMOUS HIV TESTING

July and August were busy months for our team as we stayed active in the community and supported Pride and health initiatives. In July, we joined the Dundonald Park drum circle and attended the Rainbow Service Provider Network meeting to plan upcoming Pride campaigns. We met with Let's Stop AIDS to discuss the global impact of recent USAID cuts on HIV care and supported their Zero Cuts, Zero Cases petition campaign. At the Blood Vibes special event, we provided on-site HIV and harm reduction education, Naloxone kits and training, and connected participants to local STBBI testing and harm reduction resources. Ongoing anonymous HIV testing continued at Operation Come Home, the Booth Centre, MAX Ottawa, and our Monday drop-in clinic at 55 Eccles Street.

August brought a full schedule of Pride events. On August 10, we participated in the Pride is Political festival, offering Naloxone kits, take-home drug testing kits, pregnancy tests, Party and Play gear, educational resources, and on-site HIV testing. On August 16, we were at the Pride Night Market, providing harm reduction supplies, Naloxone training, and HIV testing. We wrapped up Pride season at the Pride Street Festival on August 23–24, continuing to offer low-barrier testing and resources in Centretown. On August 29, we joined the Overdose Awareness Day event at the Human Rights Monument, honoring lives lost and supporting overdose prevention efforts.

Throughout July and August, our ongoing anonymous HIV testing sites remained active at the Booth Centre, MAX Ottawa, and 55 Eccles Street, ensuring continued access to low-barrier care and support for our community.



OTTAWA BLACK MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

This summer, Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition (OBMHC) community engagement volunteers were busy across the city, promoting Coalition member organizations, and sharing information about Black mental health programs and services. From the Summer Kick-Off & WOW Festival hosted by Ottawa Public Health to the He Leads series Reclaiming Our Narrative: Anger with the Brotherhood Coalition, our team was proud to support events that celebrate culture, wellness, and community. We also joined the African Canadian Association of Ottawa's Multicultural Festival, The Inner Table community conversation on mental wellbeing, Dapo Fun Day with the Dapo Agoro Foundation, and Afrofest hosted by Africa LIVE Canada. Each gathering was an opportunity to promote Coalition member organizations while strengthening connections across the region.

In addition to community engagement activities, OBMHC staff and members presented information sessions on Black mental health information and resources to 90+ staff who work with Black residents at CCI, PLEO, and SWCHC HART Hub. Each participant receives a resource package including the ACB MHSU Resource List, phone line support, counselling connect and more.

In August, Lukasa Library, a youth-led community library for Black residents opened its doors, and Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition was recognized for the largest donation of books by an organization. Dr. Clyde Ledbetter Jr. of Lukasa Library presented the award during the grand opening ceremony on August 7th.

Also in August, Devon Archer from the Ottawa Police joined the Advocacy and Systems Change (ASC) working group meeting on August 25th to give more information and updates on the CHANGE initiative which came out of the 28 recommendations directed to OPS during last years' Abdirahman Abdi Inquest.



CHILDREN & YOUTH

At Queensway Preschool, children added their handprints to the Welcoming Table, which will be placed at Parkdale United Church as a symbol of joy and community. For many, this was their last day before heading off to kindergarten, making it a meaningful way to celebrate them. Their handprints will remain there for years to come as a lasting reminder of their time with us.

The summer Youth Leadership Camp welcomed 39 future leaders across two sessions. Highlights included supporting the BloodVibe Health & Resource Fair, where youth helped set up, greeted the African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) seniors, and ensured they felt comfortable and cared for. Our big accomplishment was the youth-led toiletries drive, collecting donations for Parkdale Food Centre. Youth were passionate about cooking and thrived during the chef-led pasta making workshop with Farm Radio, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping farmers in Africa access information and community through radio.

PRIMARY CARE & REGIONAL PROGRAMS PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

This summer, Primary Health Care's Rooming House Outreach Team purchased and assembled hygiene kits containing a 3-in-1 body wash, toothpaste, toothbrush, deodorant, and three pairs of socks for distribution to residents. These kits promote healthy hygiene practices and help prevent skin conditions and infections. Residents expressed sincere appreciation for the initiative, which will continue to run on Tuesdays throughout the fall.

Our Seniors' Outreach Nurse and Nurse Practitioner proudly represented SWCHC at the Good Companions' Seniors Active Living Fair & Open House, which drew more than 400 older adults. The team promoted our quarterly Wellness Clinics and other seniors' programs offered by the Centre, while offering on-the-spot blood pressure checks which were warmly received by participants. The team was delighted to be invited back next year!



OTTAWA NEWCOMER HEALTH CENTRE

The Ottawa Newcomer Health Centre (ONHC) had a productive summer, with several initiatives that strengthened community connections and expanded our programming.

Dr. Parisa represented ONHC at the International Refugee and Migration Health Conference in Halifax, where she delivered a workshop on Trauma-Informed Reproductive and Sexual Health History and Pelvic Exam. She also presented preliminary research findings on "Refugees' Access to Healthcare in Canada and the US: Perspectives of Refugees, Sponsors and Providers," which was conducted in collaboration with Fulbright Canada researcher, Dr. Megan Bertold.

Our Ottawa Language Access (OLA) program recently hosted a Community Interpreter Training, successfully preparing 14 new interpreters with a combined portfolio covering 10 languages. This initiative strengthens our commitment to providing linguistically appropriate services for Ottawa's diverse newcomer population. Of the 11 candidates who completed the training, four are beginning a new career in interpretation after retirement, three are newly arrived immigrants to Canada who will be joining OLA, and four bring the lived experience of being refugees themselves.

Our Multicultural Health Navigator team was active throughout the community, delivering presentations to CHEO's Development & Rehabilitation Program; SEO (Société Économique de l'Ontario) — a Francophone organization that supports newcomer employment pathways; the Somali Centre, Immigrant Women Services Ottawa, and Seaway CHC to strengthen referral pathways, improve coordinated care, and expand access to mental health, employment, and settlement supports. Together with Nurse Practitioner Paula, the team also supported the ACB Blood Vibes event, which provided education and resources on diabetes and high blood pressure for African, Caribbean, and Black communities.

As we look back on these exciting developments, we're especially thrilled to share that construction is officially underway at our new ONHC site. The new location will expand our capacity to serve clients and offer integrated services in a purpose-built space that reflects the needs of our community.



MENTAL HEALTH & COUNSELING

The Vietnamese Community Supports Team hosted our annual seniors' summer gathering, welcoming nearly 70 participants for a day filled with fun and connection. Seniors enjoyed line dancing, interactive games, and plenty of prizes, followed by a delicious lunch of Hainanese chicken rice, sweet dessert soup, fortune cookies, and fresh fruit. The afternoon wrapped up with lively bingo, a group photo, and warm goodbyes, leaving everyone with wonderful memories of time spent together. Events like this highlight the importance of creating joyful spaces where seniors can stay active, connected, and supported in community.



CLIENT COMMENT:

"The team here doesn't just offer help they truly care. If you're nervous, start small. I promise, you won't regret taking that first step."

2025-26 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We're excited to welcome our 2025–26 Board of Directors! This dedicated group of community leaders brings a wealth of experience, passion, and vision to Somerset West CHC. Serving on the Board this year are:

- Sammy Onyeama-Asonye
- Jennifer Arntfield
- Derek Vilis
- Colleen Hendrick
- Alison Molina-Girón
- Drew Meerveld
- Elham Gharji
- Ife Olarewaju
- Joey Yip
- Marie-Louise Chartrand
- Mohammed Kibria
- Sydnée Burgess
- Xiaojian Wang

Together, they will help guide our Centre in advancing health equity, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring our programs continue to reflect the diverse needs of our community. We're grateful for their commitment and look forward to the year ahead under their leadership.