

*Somerset West Community  
Health Centre*

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

June 2023

## FAMILY, COMMUNITY HEALTH AND HARM REDUCTION

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The Advocacy Committee made a deputation to the Planning and Housing Committee to advocate for recommendations put forward by the Alliance to End Homelessness in its Our City Starts with Home: Scaling Up Non-Profit Housing in Ottawa report. The deputation expressed support for the proposed actions in the report, including clear and meaningful targets, prioritizing land for non-profit development, and making use of municipal zoning and planning tools. As outlined in the report, we urged the committee to make a commitment to engage with the Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition and Black housing allies to develop Black-led housing solutions in Ottawa. As a member of the Ottawa Community Benefits Network, we also supported the call that Community Benefits Agreements be applied to all developments on government owned land or in receipt of government funds or financing.



On May 12th, we celebrated the launch of the LeBreton Community Room. This was the culmination of a joint effort to respond to a community identified priority for a welcoming and accessible community space. Somerset West Community Health Centre worked in partnership with Ottawa Community Housing to secure funding through Hard Hat Heroes (United Way/PCL Construction). Now, there is a space located in the heart of the community, for activities, workshops and events. Because of this space, more people will connect, and will have access to resources.

With the support of Stacy Douglas, we were able to secure a paid student placement to support our efforts to develop affordable housing and livable housing targets for West Centretown. Gurleen Bhatti began the placement in May, and will undertake this work over the course of the summer. These targets will inform the development of our Advocacy Committee Work Plan for 2023-2024.

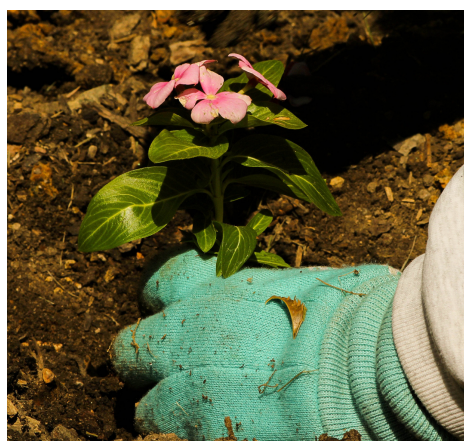
## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS**

Registration for the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) has been incredibly successful for 2023. This program has played a crucial role in reducing poverty among our clients and preventing them from losing their homes. Some clients require special assistance filing their income taxes for multiple years, with some packages spanning up to 10 years. We are grateful for our dedicated and professional volunteers who have been able to provide help to these clients. This year, we have received over 362 client registrations and completed more than 440 return files. We look forward to expressing our gratitude, celebrating our success, and discussing future improvements, with volunteers and staff at the end of June.

Student placement coordination is ongoing, and we have successfully recruited and onboarded new volunteers for various programs from February to May. These include an English as a Second Language Conversation Facilitator, administrative assistants for Ottawa Language Access, Yet Keen Seniors Day Centre, Rochester Heights Community House, and a French tutor for the after-school program. Our volunteers not only contribute their skills and expertise but also gain valuable work experience and prove themselves when delivering volunteer services to Somerset West Community Health Centre. We are thrilled to announce that one of our volunteers has been recognized for their outstanding performance and officially recruited for a part-time position with Somerset West Community Health Centre.

## **ROCHESTER HEIGHTS COMMUNITY HOUSE**

The Rochester Heights Community House has recently started a weekly Breakfast Club, as a mental health initiative to promote social connections amongst seniors. In addition, we continue to work with volunteers and the John Howard Society, to implement breakfast and community dinners at our 506 Bronson Avenue Rooming House.

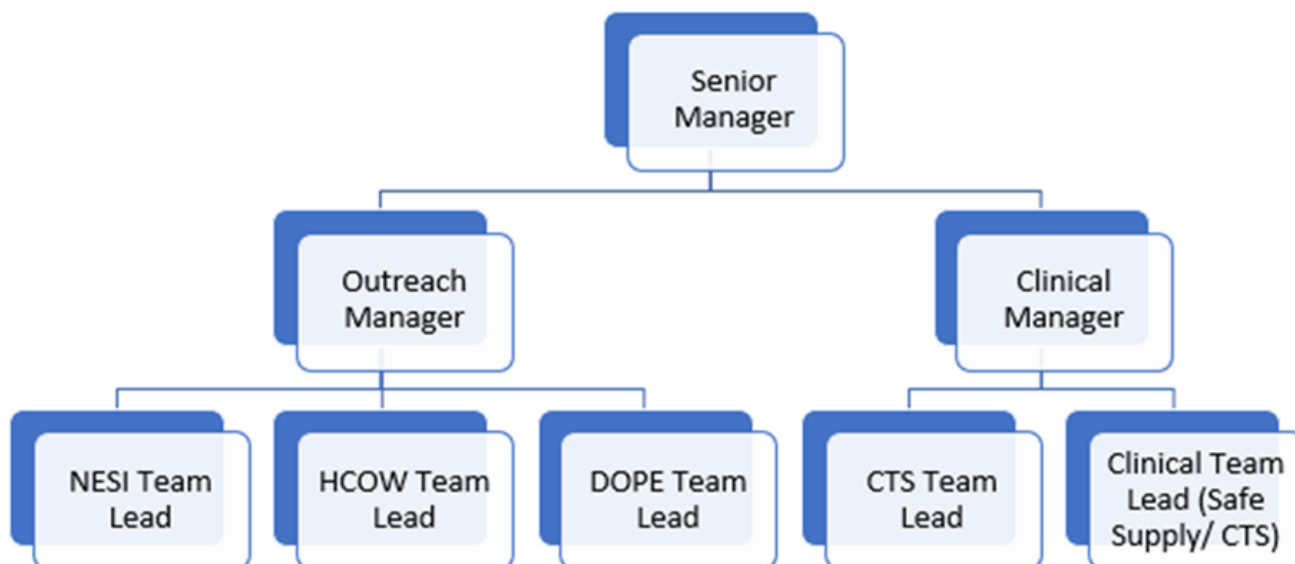


We have signed an agreement with The Children's Village to implement a Summer Camp over the months of July and August. This was promoted during our outreach to 204 units in the neighbourhood, in addition to distributing the Somerset West Community Health Centre's Who To Call flyer that was recently developed.

To welcome the warm weather, our team supported residents of 865 Gladstone Avenue and 280 Rochester Street to clean and plant flowers around the premises.

# HARM REDUCTION

It has been a busy month for our team as we are currently hiring for multiple leadership, Harm Reduction Worker, nursing and community worker positions across our programs. This new structure will provide more on-the-ground support to team members at a highly challenging time.



As the weather grows warmer, activities outside the centre also heat up, keeping our outreach and mobile greeting teams busy! The drug supply has grown even more toxic, with a high concentration of benzodiazepines and tranquilizers. In the past two months our teams responded to 83 overdoses in and around the CTS, compared to 34 in the two months prior. All other CTS sites are seeing a similar spike, particularly outside of their programs. The team is also seeing more complex wounds and prolonged sedation. We continue to network, research and brainstorm response strategies with our teams.

## ACB/HIV PREVENTION STRATEGY

The HIV Strategy worker, in partnership with other partners, are working to facilitate a HIV criminalization pamphlet. Once completed, the goal will be to target community members in Ontario about education and information surrounding HIV criminalization.

## ANONYMOUS HIV TESTING OUTREACH

The Anonymous HIV Testing Outreach team participated in a knowledge exchange session with the clinical staff at the University of Ottawa Student Health and Wellness Centre. The session was a presentation and discussion about the historical development of HIV/AIDS services in Ontario with a focus on Ottawa services, along with talking about HIV with patients. The session was a collaboration between the Anonymous HIV Testing Outreach team and the Health Promotion Specialist at the University of Ottawa Student Health and Wellness Centre.

## OTTAWA BLACK MENTAL HEALTH COALITION (OBMHC)

The Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition has been busy supporting coordination efforts in several areas of focus. Working groups have reconvened and will meet quarterly.

**Training sessions for First Responders** were held on May 29 and June 2nd. As part of the OBMHC's ongoing work to engage system stakeholders, and additional 4 paramedics and 24 police officers from the mental health teams received information about the Coalition, our members and services and resources for African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) community members which they can use in the field.

The **Housing Initiatives in Ottawa Discussion** held on May 15 and June 1st, were the first two meetings in an ongoing series of discussions. Affordable and supportive housing are important issues that impact mental wellbeing and our Black communities. These discussions bring together partners to discuss engagement with Alliance to End Homelessness and some of the other initiatives in Ottawa.

**Peer Support Outreach workshops** are being delivered in partnership with OBMHC and SWCHC. These 90-minute sessions are intended to educate community, cultural and faith groups on the benefits of bringing facilitated peer support to places people already gather. Workshops have been in development and 10 sessions will be delivered over the summer months.

A **Community Capacity Building Session** was held on June 19th, and was developed in partnership with Ottawa Public Health, Canadian Somali Mothers Association, East African Parents Association and the Mehari Centre. This 1/2 day in-person meeting facilitated a visioning exercise for OBMHC and community leaders, and built on recent discussions about a designated centre for Black health. This event featured special guest, Libmen Gebremikael, Executive Director of TAIBU Community Health Centre in Toronto.

**Executive Board Recruitment 2023** included 2 Information Sessions held on May 1st and 15th for prospective candidates interested in joining the OBMHC Executive Board. Expressions of interest have been received and interviews will be held in the last week of June.

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES

The grand opening and renaming of the site for our Laroche Park After School program and EarlyON playgroups is official!

We have moved in and are enjoying the space at the Keith Brown Community Building.

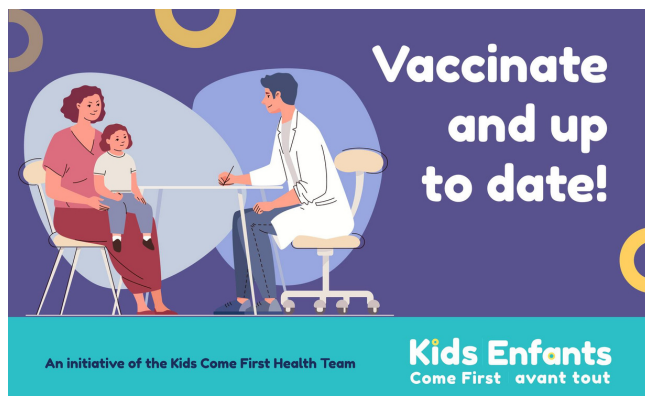


# PRIMARY CARE AND REGIONAL PROGRAMS

## PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

### KIDS COME FIRST PARTNERSHIP

In partnership with Kids Come First and other community partners, Primary Health Care is providing access to multiple catch-up vaccine clinics for children and youth from across the city. Recognizing that the last few years have been difficult for families to keep up with routine vaccinations, the goal is to make it easier for parents or guardians to book an appointment online or by calling Ottawa Public Health. The first Somerset West clinic is scheduled for Saturday, June 24th, 2023.



### SUMMER WALKING GROUP

Primary Health Care's Community Health Worker has organized a regular walking group for people living in rooming houses in the catchment area. These regular walking groups routes will start at 55 Eccles Street, and end at the Parkdale Food Centre at 30 Rosemount Avenue. This is an opportunity to connect, enjoy fresh air and enjoy a nutritious lunch at the end of the walk! These walking groups will continue monthly over the course of the summer.

### TABLET LENDING PROGRAM FOR SENIORS

In partnership with the adult day program at Abbotsford House, the Chinese Seniors Outreach Nurse in conjunction with the Chinese Seniors Working Group has secured 10 tablets to lend to seniors who would otherwise not be able to afford them. The main goal is to help seniors stay connected with the community and provide access to client friendly resources during health and social workshops. The tablets provide materials in larger text for seniors with vision impairment and permit easier navigation. By extending these digital devices to vulnerable seniors, the hope is they will feel supported and benefit from improved access. This tablet sharing program is set to continue until December 2023 with the possibility of extension pending project evaluation.



## MENTAL HEALTH AND COUNSELLING

Somerset West Community Health Centre co-presented at the Alliance for Healthier Communities conference: Connected Communities – Building Equitable Integrated Healthcare, reporting on the 1st year of the Black-Focused Social Prescribing pilot project. Social Prescribing is a holistic approach to healthcare that bridges the gap between clinical and social care – referring community members to local, non-clinical supports and programs that are chosen according to the client's interests, goals and gifts.

Our Black-focused Social Prescribing Project aims to improve health in Black Communities with an approach grounded in Africentric principles of wellbeing. Culture and connection, as social prescriptions, is core to this work - helping to connect people to the vibrancy and strengths of their self, culture and community, and enhancing their health and wellness.



**Photo above:** Somerset West Community Health Centre's very own Mary Nduati presenting at the Alliance for Healthier Communities conference on the Black-Focused Social Prescribing pilot project.