

Casa El Norte STRATEGIC PLAN

Relief of Poverty

Providing emergency housing, food security and basic needs to ensure the immediate safety and well being of unhoused and vulnerable populations in the community of Fort Erie

2024-2028



Executive Summary

This 4 year strategic plan positions Casa El Norte as a resilient, community-centered emergency shelter committed to safety, accessibility, support, and long-term change. Through focused priorities and goals related to a safe and accessible shelter, community collaboration and sustainable resource development, the shelter can be a catalyst for addressing homelessness and fostering community well-being.

This plan represents our organization's response to significant change as we work to understand how to evolve and strengthen Casa El Norte to meet current and emerging community needs. We created four planning pillars: Rebuild for Safety and Accessibility, Resource Development and Sustainability, Strategic Land Use and Building Social Capital. It will be important to the success of this strategic plan for us to develop a performance management framework with measurable indicators that can be used to adapt strategies.

On behalf of our Board of Directors, we are excited to share this roadmap to launch us into our 45th year of this organization and invite you to join us on this journey of hope, inspiration, and action. Together, we will respond and rebuild as we work toward an equitable community where all people have the opportunities and resources needed to thrive.





Casa El Norte

Our Mission, Vision and Values

Casa El Norte is a not-for-profit charitable organization whose charitable purpose is the relief of poverty through the provision of food, emergency shelter and other basic necessities for asylum seekers and other unhoused persons. Established in April 1984, Casa El Norte is the first and oldest refugee shelter in Canada. The organization began as a small grassroots movement to respond to the needs of asylum seekers arriving in our border community. Since then, the shelter has been home to over 10,000 asylum seekers from different countries around the globe and other indigent persons in our community. As an organization we are committed to community collaboration and remaining adaptable and responsive to the evolving needs of those persons unhoused in our community.


Vision

A welcoming community where everyone has access to secure shelter, food security, support and opportunities to rebuild their lives with dignity, hope and belonging.


Mission

To provide safe, accessible and compassionate emergency shelter to asylum seekers and persons unhoused in our community, ensuring dignity and respect while connecting residents to essential services and pathways towards stability and integration.







Dignity and Respect: Upholding the inherent worth of every person, treating all with compassion and kindness.




Inclusivity: Creating a welcoming space that respects diverse lived experiences and identities.




Accessibility: Committing to removing barriers and ensuring that facilities, services and opportunities are accessible to all.




Safety and Security: Ensuring a safe environment where residents feel protected and supported using a trauma-informed approach.




Human Rights: Supporting the fundamental rights of asylum seekers and unhoused persons.



Community and Collaboration: Building partnerships within the community to foster belonging, support, and shared responsibility.



Empowerment: Supporting residents in their journey toward stability, self-sufficiency, and dignity through tailored services and opportunities.



Responsiveness: Remaining adaptable and responsive to the evolving needs of residents and the community.



Environmental Scan: Situational Analysis using SWOT Analysis



Strengths

- **Community Trust and Reputation:** A 45 year history of established relationships with community organizations, municipality and residents fostering trust and engagement.
- **Dedicated Staff and Volunteers:** Skilled team committed to mission.
- **Governance and Organizational Structure:** A committed Board of 10 volunteer members with diverse skills and organizational development plan for strong infrastructure and sustainability.
- **Community Connections:** a strong existing network of support services providing comprehensive care to connect meaningfully with diverse refugee communities, creating a welcoming environment.



Weaknesses

- **Physical Infrastructure Issues:** Aging building requires major repairs for safety
- **Limited Accessibility:** Need to improve accessibility in built environment, communication and information, and service delivery.
- **Financial Instability:** Loss of core operating funding from Niagara Region weakens operational capacity
- **Changing Immigration Law:** Reduced number of asylum claims in our border community
- **Responsiveness to Evolving Community Needs:** Does organizational mission still fit with community needs for unhoused and food insecure persons?



Opportunities

- **Funding Diversification:** Potential to pursue new grants and fund development strategies to stabilize funding
- **Expand Outreach, Engagement, and Partnerships:** Growing support at community, municipal and provincial levels contributing to shared resources and sustainability
- **Building Redevelopment and Accessibility Upgrades:** Use of capital reserves and OTF Trillium Capital Projects Grant to improve accessibility and safety.
- **Leveraging Land Use:** Harnessing potential to use land as a transformative asset
- **Shifting Community Needs for Unhoused:** broaden organizational mandate and service scope



Threats

- **Changes in Law and Immigration Policy:** New asylum laws in Canada and changing policy in the United States is reducing number of asylum claims at Fort Erie Port of Entry land border.
- **Funding Reductions or Terminations:** Federal government does not provide a funding stream to support asylum seekers. Loss regional funding for emergency shelter due to prioritization of large shelters with 50+ capacity
- **Structural and Safety Risks:** Without urgent repairs, the building became unsafe necessitating major repairs.
- **Accessibility Non-Compliance:** Steps taken and accessibility plan developed but need additional funding to meet or exceed accessibility standards

PILLARS



Priority 1: Rebuild for Safety and Accessibility

To renovate and adapt our existing shelter to meet and exceed safety and accessibility standards for all residents prioritizing the dignity, safety, and inclusion of all residents, employees and visitors.

Priority 2: Resource Development for Sustainability

To commit to a proactive resource development strategy to ensure long-term sustainability and deepen community impact. This plan aims to diversify revenue streams, explore innovative funding models, foster strategic partnerships, enhance grant writing capacity, and expand our mission to address evolving community needs.

Priority 3: Harnessing Land as Transformative Asset

To conduct a feasibility study on strategic land use to leverage this asset to generate income, strengthen community ties, and shape the organization’s future direction based on evidenced community needs and opportunities.

Priority 4: Building Social Capital

To foster meaningful relationships, expand strategic collaborations, strengthen governance, and utilize digital technology to inform, educate, and engage the community, cultivating a culture of trust, shared ownership and collective impact.

Priority 1: Retrofit and Rebuild

This priority outlines targeted initiatives to renovate and retrofit our existing shelter to become fully accessible for residents of all abilities and implement needed safety upgrades. Focusing on safety and accessibility ensures a shelter environment that prioritizes the dignity, inclusion, independence and safety of all residents



1. Build diversified and sustainable revenue models

- a) Perform an accessibility audit, using an accessibility consultant, focusing on physical accessibility, communication and information systems and service standards
- b) Create a detailed accessibility upgrade and retrofit plan for shelter that includes entrances, ramps, widened doorways, doors, accessible bathrooms, accessible bedroom, visual and auditory signage, wayfinding, lighting improvements, chair lift, inclusive outdoor spaces and playground
- c) Implement accessibility modifications as soon as possible within funding parameters
- d) Deliver training sessions for staff and volunteers on accessibility features and disability awareness within 3 months of completed renovations
- e) Establish mechanisms to continuously improve accessibility



2. Safety Upgrades

- a) Conducting a detailed safety assessment of the current shelter infrastructure to identify structural, fire, health and security risks.
- b) Developing a renovation plan that prioritizes urgent safety upgrades including structural reinforcement, fire alarms, fire rated drywall, sprinkler system, emergency exits and security systems with completion targeted within 12 months.
- c) Scheduling and completing all safety upgrades ensuring compliance with safety codes.
- d) Establishing regular maintenance and safety inspection schedule post-renovation to sustain safety standards.

Priority 2: Resource Development

This resource development strategy positions Casa El Norte to thrive through diversified and sustainable income, innovative projects, strategic partnerships and organizational growth aligned with community needs. By implementing these goals and objectives, we will create financial stability and expanded opportunities for impact.



1. Build diversified and sustainable revenue models

- a) Develop a comprehensive revenue diversification plan, including contributions, grants, fee-for-service models, digital campaigns for online donations and fundraising.
- b) Hire or appoint a dedicated grant writer who can achieve a success rate of 70% +.
- c) Foster internal culture that emphasizes innovation, collaboration, and resourcefulness beyond traditional grants and donations.



2. Innovation in Fund Development

- a) Explore feasibility and implementation of social enterprise initiatives to generate revenue aligned with mission (e.g. meeting space, community cafe or product sales).
- b) Leveraging land use to generate rental income and community hub.
- c) Partner with innovative investors and corporate sponsors.
- d) Explore revenue-generating educational and experiential learning initiatives.



3. Strategic Partnerships

- a) Shared revenue-generating activities including joint funding applications, collaborative fundraising, broader donor base.
- b) Collaborations for in-kind resource sharing, pooled resources for larger scale projects.



4. Growth Aligned with Community Need

- a) Conduct a community needs assessment to identify gaps and opportunities and align expanded mission for unhoused and food insecure persons in the community.
- b) Develop new or expand existing services and programs responding to emerging community issues.



Priority 3: Land Use

Strategic land use options will identify ways the organization can use this asset, with untapped potential, to create the most impactful and sustainable pathway for the organization to address the most urgent community needs related to individuals who are unhoused and/or experiencing food insecurity. This land-focused strategy positions Casa El Norte as a catalyst for social innovation and economic resilience. Strategic land utilization can generate income, strengthen community ties and shape the future direction of Casa El Norte based on evidenced community needs and opportunities.



1. Conduct Land Use Feasibility Study

- a) Conduct a comprehensive land use feasibility analysis to map and align with community needs and assets.
- b) Engage with local experts (registered professional planner, architect, municipal staff) to inform land use options, develop analytics, identify regulatory considerations, determine environmental impacts and community acceptance of proposed land uses.
- c) Explore land-based opportunities for income-generating activities like: MOUs with local not for profit for community/hub/co-working spaces; modular or multipurpose buildings for additional shelter space, education-training centres/ food storage and distribution centre, warming/cooling centre, or event space; revenue generating social enterprises; agricultural use for food security



2. Strategic Framework to Guide Land Use

- a) Establish a strategic framework to guide organizational direction and future growth based on data-driven insights.
- b) Evaluate strategies to leverage land and act as a catalyst for building strategic partnerships and strong community connections that facilitate collaboration, resource sharing and collective action towards the agency's mission.
- c) Evaluate strategies to leverage land to generate sustainable income streams to support a mission and future growth aligned with community need
- d) Develop an implementation plan that will generate income, strengthen community ties and shape the organization's future direction based on evidenced community needs and opportunities

Priority 4: Build Social Capital

Building social capital is central to strengthening our community impact, operational resilience, and long-term sustainability. This priority emphasizes fostering trust, forming strategic partnerships, enhancing governance and leveraging digital tools for outreach, education and engagement.



1. Enhance Volunteer Engagement and Management

- a) Comprehensive Volunteer Recruitment and Outreach.
- b) Precise Role definition and Policy Formulation.
- c) Continuous Training and Professional Development.
- d) Volunteer Recognition and Retention Initiatives.
- e) Track and monitor volunteer retention and engagement levels.



2. Form and Strengthen Collaborative Partnerships

- a) Identify new opportunities for cross-sector collaboration.
- b) Explore community hub for emergency shelter and food security
- c) Establish formal partnerships through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), joint initiatives, or shared resource agreements
- d) Develop communication strategies out outcome measurement



3. Ongoing Development for Governance

- a) Reviewing and updating governance policies
- b) Revising skill matrix to promote diversity in Board recruitment
- c) Ongoing training
- d) Establish a Lived Experience Advisory Committee
- e) Engage in an annual self-evaluation process to inform improvements in governance



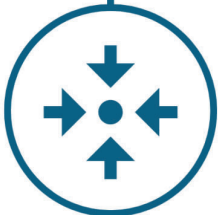
4. Deepen Community Relationships & Digital Outreach

- a) Develop a n accessible website with ongoing updates
- b) Run targeted social media campaigns to raise awareness
- c) Offer digital training via OWL platform for board members, volunteers and residents
- d) Host online forums, webinars and events
- e) Conduct listening session for feedback and share success stories
- g) Monitor digital outreach, engagement and impact metrics



Renovations and Capital Projects

1. Increase Accessibility of Facilities
2. Safety Upgrades



Resource Development

1. Build diversified and sustainable revenue models
2. Innovation in Fund Development
3. Strategic Partnerships
4. Organizational Growth Aligned with Community Need



Land Use: Leveraging Assets

1. Conduct Land Use Feasibility Study
2. Strategic Framework to Guide Land Use



Building Social Capital

1. Enhance Volunteer Engagement and Management
2. Form and Strengthen Collaborative Partnerships
3. Strengthen Organizational Governance
4. Deepen Community Relationships and Digital Outreach

