

Casa El Norte **Shelter**

**Annual
Report
2025**

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Land Acknowledgement

Casa Shelter is located in Fort Erie, Ontario, on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Attawandaronk peoples. This land is protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum, a covenant that calls all who share this territory to care for the land, the waters, and one another – taking only what we need and leaving enough for those who come after us. We are also situated within the territory recognized by the Two Row Wampum and the Treaty of Niagara, agreements rooted in the principles of respect, peaceful coexistence, and mutual responsibility.

We acknowledge that the land on which we offer shelter, safety, and refuge was never ceded. We recognize the ongoing presence, resilience, and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples in this region, and we are mindful of the deep and painful connection between colonization, displacement, and the housing and food insecurity we work to address today. The crisis of homelessness did not arise in isolation; it is bound up in histories of dispossession that Indigenous communities have known for generations.

As a shelter rooted in the values of dignity, compassion, and justice, we commit to honouring these truths in our work. We will strive to ensure that Indigenous peoples who come through our doors are welcomed with cultural humility, safety, and respect. We commit to learning, to listening, and to building relationships with Indigenous communities in the spirit of reconciliation.

We are grateful to be here. We do not take that privilege lightly.

A Letter From the Board

We stand at a meaningful moment in the life of this organization. Over the past year, we have made significant strides – not only in the physical transformation of our shelter, but in the deepening of our mission and our commitment to those we serve. As we look ahead, our vision is clear: to build a community where every person, regardless of their circumstances, has access to safe shelter, dignified support, and a genuine sense of belonging. We are evolving. Guided by the housing needs assessment now underway, shaped by new and enduring partnerships, and strengthened by the generosity of our funders, volunteers, and supporters, we are positioning this organization to respond with greater capacity and greater compassion to the needs of Fort Erie's most vulnerable residents. The work ahead is both urgent and hopeful, and we move forward with confidence, rooted in our values and energized by the community that surrounds us.

A Year in Review

Accessibility Renovations – A Major Milestone

This past year has been marked by a truly transformative achievement: the completion of significant accessibility and safety renovations to our shelter. These improvements represent not only bricks and mortar, but a powerful statement about who we are and who we serve – ensuring that our doors are open, in every sense, to all who need us. Thank you to Rico and Solo Construction and Stephen and Papa Rea's Construction for their assistance in helping us fulfil the milestones of our accessibility plan.

We are deeply grateful to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for their generous funding support, which made possible the installation of an accessible bathroom, new accessible doors, a chairlift, and upgraded walkways and patio areas. These improvements are central to the advancement of our Accessibility Plan for the



shelter, and reflect our ongoing commitment to creating a welcoming, barrier-free environment for neighbours, volunteers, and visitors alike.

We also wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Ontario Government for their funding support through the Enhancing Access to Spaces for Everyone (EASE) Grant, which enabled us to create an accessible front entrance to the shelter. This investment in our entrance ensures that every person who comes to us for support is greeted with dignity and ease of access from the moment they arrive.

These achievements did not happen by chance. We owe special thanks to Board Member Dennis Hernandez Galeano for his outstanding leadership in driving these renovations forward. Dennis's hands-on dedication and commitment to seeing this work through from vision to completion made all the difference. We also extend our deepest appreciation to Judy Calvin, who not only secured the funding that made these renovations possible, but oversaw the construction process with care and diligence throughout. Together, their contributions have transformed our shelter into a more accessible and welcoming place for all.

Building Community

Community connection is at the heart of everything we do, and this past year has been filled with meaningful partnerships that speak to the power of working together toward a shared purpose.

We are proud to partner with the Fort Erie Multicultural Centre (FEMC) in the delivery of our community coffee hour – a warm and welcoming gathering that fosters relationships, reduces isolation, and builds a genuine sense of belonging among those we serve. We are grateful to the United Way for their generous funding support that makes this initiative possible.

We also wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to Craig Brown, Professor of Carpentry and Renovation at Niagara College, and to his students, who have collaborated with us in building food security sheds for Stronger Fort Erie

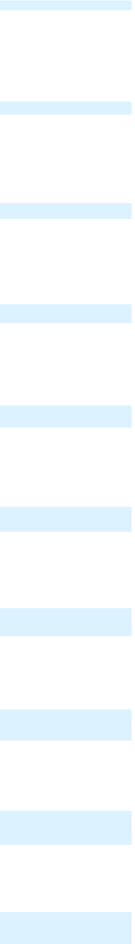


Neighbourhoods. Their hands-on skill, enthusiasm, and generosity of spirit have made a tangible difference in our community, and we are grateful for their continued support in the planning and development of shelter space. This is community partnership at its very best.

A special thank you to Laura Galea, Community Engagement Librarian at the Fort Erie Public Library, for organizing the Mitten Tree donation initiative at Christmas. This thoughtful gesture of warmth and generosity brought comfort to many of our neighbours during the holiday season, and we are deeply appreciative of Laura's ongoing commitment to community care.

Finally, we extend our sincere gratitude to Stronger Fort Erie Neighbourhoods for their ongoing partnership in food security and strategic planning for the well-being of our neighbours. Their collaborative spirit and dedication to building a stronger, more resilient community align deeply with our own mission, and we are proud to work alongside them.

Looking Ahead



As we reflect on a year of meaningful accomplishment – renovations completed, community built, needs assessed, and relationships deepened – we do so with gratitude and with hope. The road ahead will bring new challenges and new opportunities, and I am confident that with this community of dedicated partners, supporters, and staff, we are more than ready to meet them.

Thank you. Together, we are making a difference.

Theresa Anzovino

President of Casa El Norte

Officers and Directors 2025

Theresa Anzovino

President

Jonathon Jurmain

Vice President

James Butko

Treasurer

Vince Cottone

Secretary

Dennis Hernandez-Galeano

Dr. Helen Taylor

Theresa Webb

Sr. Maureen Quinn

1375 Hours Volunteered by Board Members

Our Shelter Manager Liliana LaHay – Service Above and Beyond

There are those whose dedication simply defies description, and our Shelter Manager, Liliana LaHay, is one of them. The countless hours of service – above and beyond any reasonable expectation – that Liliana has given to this organization reflect a depth of commitment that humbles and inspires us all. But this dedication did not begin with this role. Before joining us in a staff capacity, Liliana gave ten years of extraordinary volunteer service to Casa, demonstrating a longstanding and heartfelt commitment to this mission that long predates any job title. Liliana, we are profoundly grateful for everything you bring to this shelter, every single day.

Fund Development – Judy Calvin

We also wish to extend our deep and sincere thanks to Judy Calvin, whose contributions to our fund development efforts have been nothing short of exceptional. Judy has been batting a perfect one hundred percent in securing funding support, and her skill, persistence, and strategic navigation of the development landscape have opened doors that are making a real and lasting difference for this organization. Judy, your talent and dedication are a tremendous gift to us, and we are so grateful for all that you do.

Thank You to Our Volunteers

To our volunteers – your ongoing generosity and support of our evolving mission are the lifeblood of this shelter. Through the gift of your time and energy you make it possible for us to show up for those who need us most.

1,090 Hours Volunteered

We are especially grateful to recognize the following volunteers whose contributions this past year have been exceptional:

Larkin Soto

for a year-long commitment to building and managing our website and social media presence, bringing our mission and story to the broader community with skill, creativity, and dedication.

Soheila Vannatter

for her dedicated volunteer commitment to food security and food distribution, ensuring that neighbours in need are met with care and consistency.

Daniel Anzovino

for his invaluable volunteer support with IT and technology solutions, keeping our organization running smoothly behind the scenes.

Scott Taylor and
Scott Webb

for their ongoing support with donation collections and building advice, lending their time and expertise wherever it is needed most.

Aidan Anzovino

for completing 40 hours of community service through our organization. Your contribution is a wonderful example of young people investing in the well-being of their community, and we are grateful.

A Mission Evolved

For forty years, Casa Shelter has been a place of refuge offering safety, dignity, and welcome to those fleeing persecution and seeking asylum. That commitment has not changed. We remain steadfastly dedicated to supporting asylum seekers and newcomers navigating some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. And yet, communities evolve; and so must the organizations that serve them. Over time, it became clear that the same urgent need for safety and support was showing up in the faces of neighbours who had lived in Fort Erie for years such as women, youth, and families experiencing housing and food insecurity, with nowhere to turn.

Today, Casa Shelter serves not only asylum seekers, but all vulnerable members of our community. The door is open wider, because hardship does not ask where you were born. This evolution is not a departure from our mission. It is its fullest expression.

Visit our website to read more on the history of Casa El Norte.

<https://casaelnorte.ca/history>



Values Statement

Our work is grounded in a set of core values that guide every interaction, decision, and service we provide. These values reflect our commitment to dignity, compassion, equity, inclusion and trauma-informed care as we support our Fort Erie community.

We measure impact not just in numbers and programs, but in also real people, real lives and real change!



Vision

Our vision is a community where everyone’s basic needs are met and the most vulnerable members can experience dignity, safety, compassion and the opportunity to thrive.



Mission

Our mission is to provide a safe environment for Fort Erie neighbours experiencing housing and food insecurity and to facilitate navigation of services that support well-being.

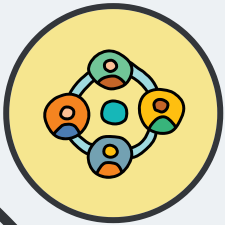
Core Values



-  **Dignity & Respect-** We honour the worth of every person, treating all with compassion and respect while listening openly and valuing each individual’s experiences, choices, and story.
-  **Compassionate Service-** We provide care that is trauma-informed, person-centered and grounded in empathy. Our work is guided by patience and cultural humility.
-  **Safety & Belonging-** We provide a space where all people can feel welcomed, included and secure. It is a place to rest and heal. Emotional, physical, and psychological safety at the foundation of everything we do.
-  **Inclusivity & Accessibility-** We embrace people of all backgrounds, identities, abilities and circumstances, ensuring services are barrier-free, non-judgmental, and easy to access for all.
-  **Equity-** We strive to remove systemic and personal barriers so every person has fair access to resources, opportunities, and support, working intentionally to reduce stigma and ensure just, equitable care.
-  **Collaboration & Community-** We believe ending homelessness requires we work in partnership with community members, service providers, and the people we serve. We foster connections that support long-term stability and wellbeing.
-  **Empowerment & Choice** -We support people in setting goals while honouring personal choice and autonomy,
-  **Cultural Humility-** We work with openness and self-reflection, learning from those we serve while challenging our assumptions and striving to continually improve.
-  **Accountability-** We act with transparency, integrity, and responsible stewardship of community resources, holding ourselves accountable to the people we serve and the values we uphold.

Our Strategic Planning Goals 2025

Approved by Board of Directors November 2025



Goal 1: Enhance Community Engagement

Strengthen our relationship with the community by increasing outreach programs, fostering partnerships with other organizations to participate in local events and to build a stronger, more connected community.



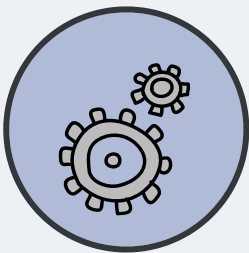
Goal 2: Foster Innovation and Growth

Cultivate a culture of creativity and continuous improvement through research, development and evidence-based planning throughout this interim year and beyond . Harnessing land as our transformative asset to advance our mission and vision to support the creation of a strategy to build and expand emergency housing in Fort Erie.



Goal 3: Resource Development

Ensure long-term financial health by diversifying revenue streams, optimizing budget allocation, and securing new funding opportunities



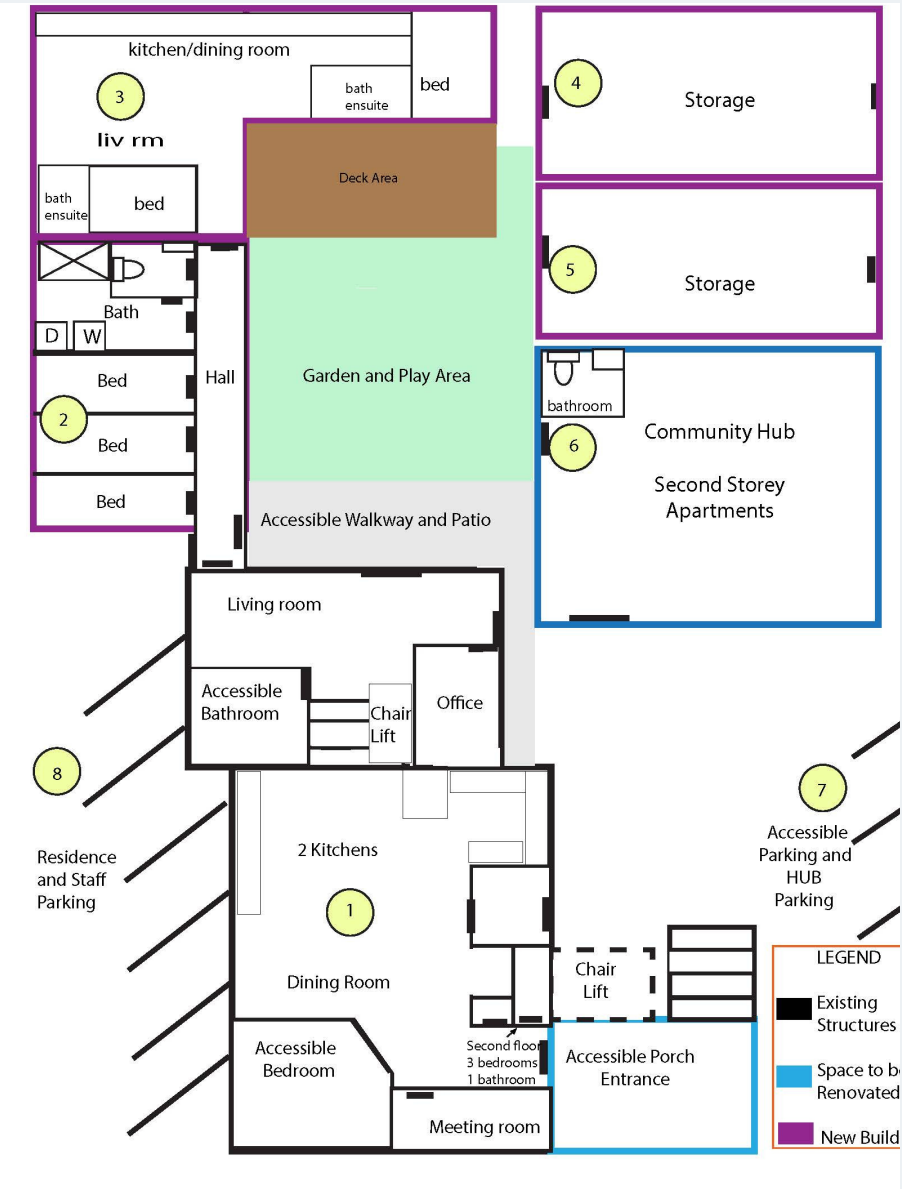
Goal 4: Community Service Hub

To develop a continuum of care through centralized and coordinated access facilitated by support partners in a community hub focused on providing services to food security and housing first strategies including prevention and diversion.



Goal 5: Develop a Teaching Charity Model (Priority 2 &4)

To create a “Teaching Charity” model that transforms charitable organizations into dynamic learning labs, much like teaching hospitals do for medical education. It promotes experiential learning, community-driven research, and organizational strengthening- building a vibrant ecosystem of education, service and community impact.



2024 CASA SHELTER ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

Improving Access to Built Environment in 2025

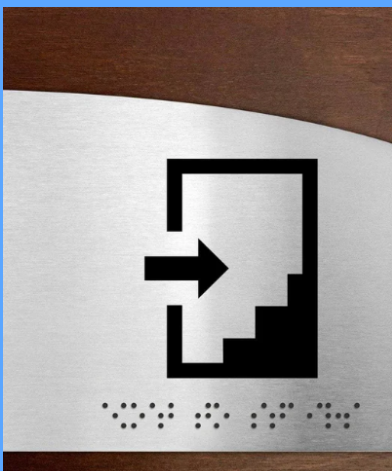


COMMITMENT

Casa El Norte is committed to an effective accessibility plan that includes aligning with and exceeding Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) standards and embracing Universal Design principles to ensure equitable access and spaces that are usable for all residents.

PLAN OBJECTIVES

1. Creating an inclusive and accessible environment for all residents, staff, volunteers, and visitors.
2. Identifying and remove barriers to access within our shelter
3. Designing facilities and services rooted in Universal Design principles, ensuring usability by all
4. Compliance with all legal requirements under AODA and related standards.
5. Fostering an inclusive environment where dignity and independence are prioritized.



Wayfinding Signage

CORE PRINCIPLES



Universal Design: Designing facilities and services rooted in principles that ensure usability by everyone.



Barrier Removal: Identifying and removing physical and systemic barriers to access within our shelter.

Shelter

Improvements

Kitchen



Common Room



Stairchair



Accessible Bathroom



Shelter

Improvements

Bedroom One



Bedroom Two



Food Rescue Pantry



Upstairs Bathroom



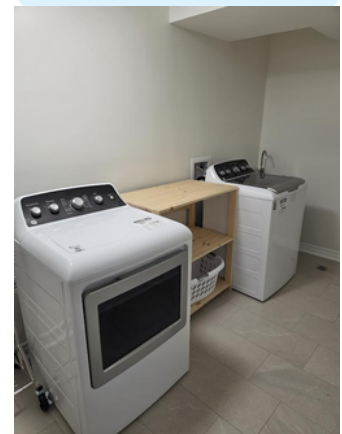
Shelter Office



Shelter Exterior



Laundry Room



Thank You to our Funders

Understanding Housing Needs – Niagara Community Foundation

Looking to the future requires understanding the present. We extend our sincere appreciation to the Niagara Community Foundation for their funding support for a comprehensive assessment of housing needs in the Fort Erie community. The findings of this important work will guide our future planning process and help ensure that our programs and services are responsive to the real and evolving needs of those in our community who are most vulnerable.



Special Recognition – Community Gaming Development Corporation

We wish to extend special recognition to the Community Gaming Development Corporation for the extraordinary support they provided during our period of transition. At a time when it mattered most, their commitment to our mission went above and beyond, and we are deeply thankful for the role they played in helping us navigate that chapter with stability and confidence. Their generosity made a lasting difference.

Fundraising Support – Delta Bingo

We also extend our sincere thanks to Delta Bingo for their support in facilitating fundraising efforts for our charitable purposes. Their partnership has provided a meaningful avenue for community members to contribute to our mission, and we are grateful for their ongoing role in helping us sustain the vital work we do.



Thank You to Our Funders

EASE Grant

The Government of Ontario through the Enhancing Accessible Spaces for Everyone (EASE) funding provided funds for a new accessible front porch, exterior lift, signage, and evacuation chair. Casa is grateful for the opportunity to ensure the shelter is accessible.



Trillium

The OTF provided a generous funding through the Capital Grant Program. An accessible washroom, two accessible doors, a Stairchair, as well as an outdoor patio and pathway will increase the accessibility of the shelter.



RBC

Thank you RBC for a fun day of setting up the newly renovated shelter for residents to move in! Six members of RBC, Fort Erie and Ridgeway Branches came to Casa to clean, organize, and assemble furniture to help get ready for opening!



In Kind Professional Services

Rebecca Bodner: Accounting and Bookkeeping
Chistina Cottone: Legal Services
John Teal: Legal Services
Beatties (Cathy Annette): Furniture and Office Equipment
Kristin Buscaglia: Interior Design and Decorating
Fox Shop/Korinne Antaya: Artwork
Open Arms Mission: Food
The Bridge: Food
St. Paul's Anglican Church: Meeting Space

Individual Donors

Theresa Anzovino
Tracey Czichrak
Simon Grant, Lakeview Homes
Kristen Buscaglia
Knights of Columbus, Port Colborne
Maria Poirier
Dr. Placide Rubabaza, Rubabaza Medicine
Dr. Helen Taylor
Bev Winger
Charlene Heckman
David Burtnik
Maria Poirier
Niagara Catholic District School Board
Canadian Online Giving
Niagara Regional Labour Council
Lillianne Wood
Simon Winger
Anonymous

Casa El Norte

Contact Us



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Site Operations

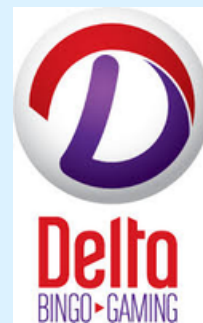
shelter@casaelnorte281.com

Charitable Number 89092 4392 RR0001

Thank You to Our Generous Funders



An agency of the Government of Ontario
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<https://casaelnorte.ca/>



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