



613 COM HOUSES

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE COALITION OF COMMUNITY HOUSES



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HOUSE FEATURE: STRATHCONA HEIGHTS

A LONG TIME COMING: OCCH TAKES A LOOK AT THE MAKINGS OF THE FIRST 'VIRTUAL' COMMUNITY HOUSE AND THE JOURNEY GETTING THERE

How can a community obtain a community house? This is a common question the OCCH receives from community members and advocates wishing to enhance community cohesion and build capacity in their neighbourhoods. Community houses have historically been rooted in tenant associations, where residents came together and advocated for a community space; this model is known as an incorporated community house, which is governed by a Board of Directors.

Over the past 20 years there has been a shift from the incorporated model, with Community Health Centres playing a larger role in advocacy and the mobilization of residents. Ottawa Community Housing (OCH) has also played a vital role in the development of community houses from the very beginning by providing spaces for community houses to operate in.

For the Strathcona Heights community, securing a community house has been a long road - one that has spanned a decade.

The background work for the creation of the community house started around 2010, when a community developer from the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre (SHCHC) began to attend monthly OCCH meetings to gain a better understanding of the place-based approach in community houses.

Later in 2010, SHCHC submitted a proposal outlining an innovative approach to a community house - a virtual model.

The proposal suggested that occupying a housing unit was not necessary, and that the community house could exist between various common spaces in OCH buildings in the neighbourhood.

The proposal was compelling and was backed by telling statistics and feedback from community members on why they needed community house services in their neighbourhood. The key issues in the community were identified as: selling drugs, garbage, crime and safety, access to food, activities for children and youth, and community cohesion and leadership. Although the SHCHC was already actively involved in this community; nurturing and supporting grassroots initiatives and otherwise being responsive to the immediate needs of community members was not within the scope of a community developer's work. This was the role of a community house coordinator, who could coordinate and implement community wide programming. A community house would allow for more effective bridging of resources into the community daily.



Snow melts around the playground in Dutchie's Hole Park in Strathcona Heights (2022)

The development of the Strathcona Heights Community House was ultimately successful and opened its 'virtual' doors in July of 2021. The amount of time that passed between the proposal and Community House coming to fruition hints at some significant barriers along the way. Gerald Dragon, a community developer at SHCHC provided some insight on the process, sharing that he was prepared for a lengthy process after looking at the pathway of the Rochester Heights Community House, which also took a significant amount of time to develop and become operational.

Alignment of priorities and a shared understanding of the vision of a virtual community house were some of the larger challenges along the way. Misaligned priorities included budgets and competing interests at city council.

The community members in Strathcona Heights also had some reservations about the concept of a virtual community house – being the first of its kind and an abstract concept, it was not clear what this model might look like in practice. There was also the question of why there could not be a physical community house, when all existing community houses had operated with this model. The readjusting of the application for a virtual community house did assist in distilling the most crucial role of a community house – the presence of a consistently available house coordinator who is enmeshed in the community.

Gerald noted that although he was often in the community, he was not the beacon that was needed - someone who was always available to guide and assist with the wide array of challenges in a low-income community. This includes anything from housing, food security and programming for children, youth, or seniors and more. This dressing down of the concept of a community house saw success after a large push in 2019, which engaged the city, the SHCHC, and the city councillor, Mathieu Fleury.

Once the plans were finally confirmed and funding was secured, SHCHC set to hiring a community house coordinator and was able to secure Anabelle Gisanza, who was working in the neighbouring community of Lowertown at the Lowertown Community Resource Centre. Anabelle brought with her a sharpened toolset for community work and set to task on capacity building. Gerald shared that he was quickly able to see the impact that Anabelle made in her role by connecting with residents that previously were not actively engaged in the community, identifying priorities, and making herself visible and available in the community.

In speaking with Anabelle, she outlined some of the physical challenges related to space availability in the larger community of Sandy Hill, like gym spaces (which was inevitably compounded by COVID-19). She also indicated that although there is a great amount of green space available in the community, she noticed that there was a lack of community ownership of these spaces. A walk around the neighbourhood also showed some accessibility concerns in the winter months, with pathways leading down to the park pathways not receiving winter maintenance.

Anabelle is hoping to assist in the development of community ownership of the green spaces this summer, noting that there is ample room for sports programming and other models of park programming. Anabelle pointed out the community garden which is a popular site for residents to garden in Strathcona Heights but would benefit from additional plots so that more individuals and families would have the opportunity to utilize it.

One thing is for certain, the implementation of a community house – virtual or physical – can have a profound impact on any community that is looking for community cohesion and place-based services and programming. Although the journey was long, it was successful.



Entrance of the Food Bank in the Strathcona Heights Community (2022)



BLAIR COURT COMMUNITY HOUSE TURNS 25!

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF SERVICE IN THE RIVERVIEW COMMUNITY

March 2022 marked 25 years of service at the Blair Court Community House! Located in the Riverview Community, the Community House sits at the end of the rowhouses that line Station Boulevard. Executive Director, Kristy Fudakowska has been a part of the Community House since its inception in 1997 as a youth worker, before assuming her current role in 2001.

Kristy attributes the success of Blair Court to the staff, volunteers, Board of Directors of past and present, reliable community partners and of course, the community members.

Although March weather this year was not conducive for an outdoor celebration, Kristy hopes to organize a BBQ for the residents, partners and staff once the warmer weather arrives. In the meantime, Blair Court has put together a wish-list of their top 25 items which will help support their community members (listed above).

Please join the OCCH in celebrating Blair Court’s fantastic 25 years, and many more to come!



Personal & Household

Sanitary napkins, face wash, diapers (size 5 & 6), liquid hand soap, Tylenol, laundry soap, gently used linens, all purpose cleaner.

Food Related

jam, school snacks, dry pasta, tomato paste, salt, sugar, flour, baking powder, biscuits, crackers, ketchup, mustard, mayo, powdered milk, canola oil.

Other

refundable bottles (LCBO/BEER Store)
monetary donation* of any amount
*tax receipt issued for monetary donations

Call us at 613-736-5058 to arrange drop off or pick up.



Executive Director, Kristy Fudakowska sits on the steps of the Blair Court Community House (2022)

PARADIGM SHIFT

BEHIND THE BUZZ WORDS

THE UPSTREAM APPROACH: INCREASING EQUITY FOR LONG-TERM IMPACT

Upstream and downstream approaches are terminology we are seeing more frequently in community-based initiative frameworks. Traditionally rooted in healthcare literature and linked to Dahlgren and Whitehead's model of health, the upstream and downstream model was developed by the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative.

This model maps upstream (prevention) and downstream (intervention) and suggests that equity should be addressed through upstream approaches, such as policy through strategic partnerships, advocacy around influencing system transformation, community capacity building, civic engagement and community organizing.

The model suggests that an adjustment to systems 'upstream' may result in the ability to better navigate 'downstream.' Shifting focus from a midstream or downstream intervention

model does have some challenges when it comes to reporting outcomes, as immediate results will not be evident. Using the upstream model will result in longer term impact but requires upfront investment. However, it can be argued that this approach is a secure investment for government and community alike, as we know that environmental and socioeconomic circumstances have a significant impact on health and wellbeing. Initiating long-term change and improvement on a systems level will yield long-term positive results.

One of the important aspects of this model is the emphasis on equity, both at the socioeconomic level and institutional level. In the community context, we can use the example of living spaces in low-income communities. An upstream approach would include ensuring that there is clean and accessible green space, a reduction of food deserts and properly lit and cleared pathways – of course there is a cost associated with bringing equity to these neighbourhoods.

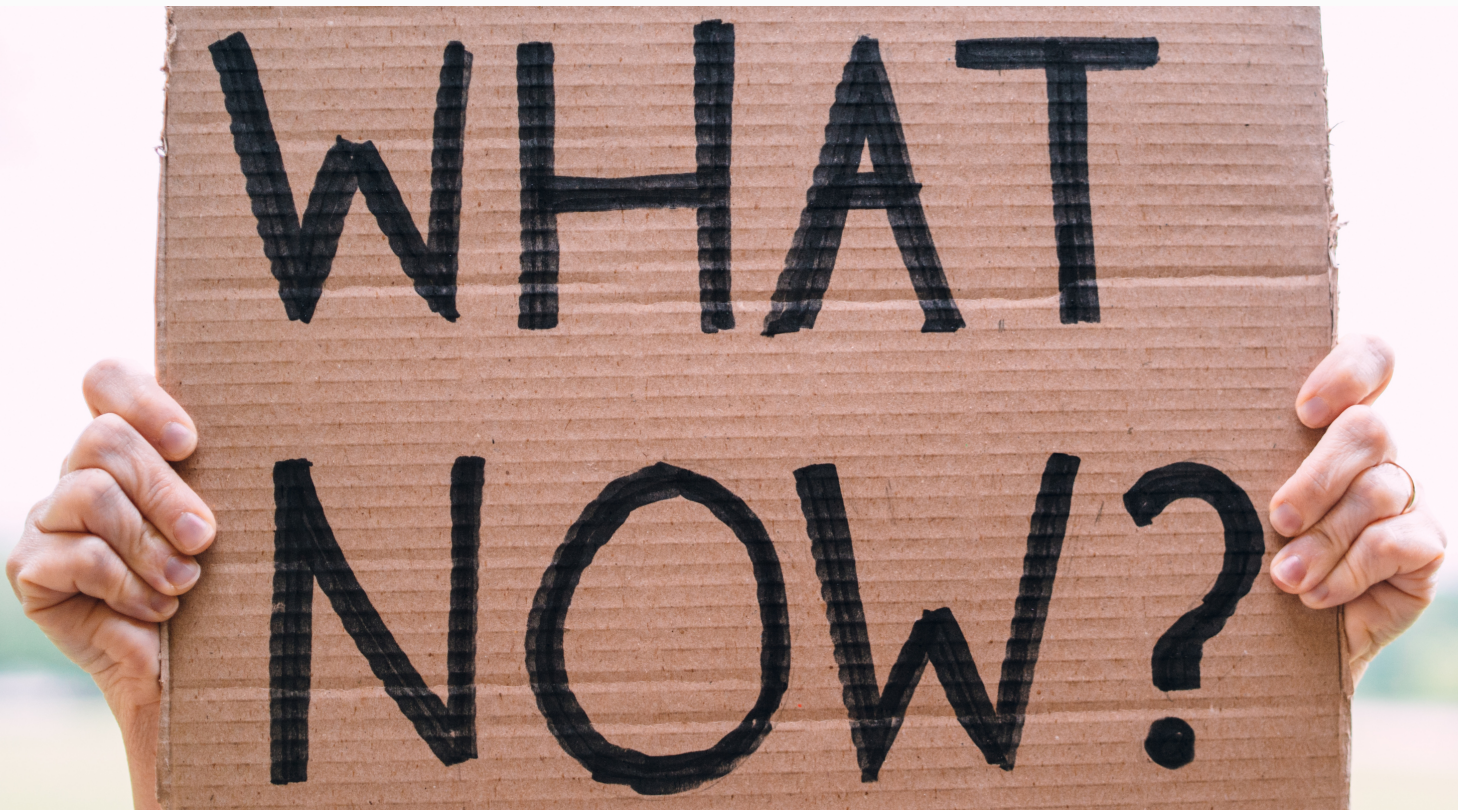
This approach will result in a bit of a 'shake-up' of agencies that are traditionally well-funded or reaped inequitable tax benefits. The re-routing of assets and funds from power-holding agencies will enable those with less equitable footing to steady themselves and enhance their work to improve socioeconomic and environmental factors for equity

seeking groups.

In the context of community houses, an upstream approach would mean investment in already existing services in our communities. Community houses have always provided informal front-line services to community members residing in and around our neighbourhoods. Equitable funding across community-based services would allow for a focus on prevention-based services using a comprehensive approach.

As we continue to respond to the immediate health needs in and around priority neighbourhoods through midstream approaches, an increase in place-based resources on the ground will increase the capacity of community houses to prioritize an upstream approach.

Shifting towards an upstream approach model will demand a review of reporting expectations and short-term outcome achievements, as this approach will not align with short-term measures. Veering away from traditional reporting may be unappealing for some funding organizations; leaning into the discomfort of longer-term results is required for the upstream approach to be successful. It is crucial to remember that investment in the upstream approach is one that has completed due diligence through research and through practice of prevention work. Although it may be a shift, it is a shift that is required for effective, long-term outcomes.



COVID-19 UPDATE

AN OVERVIEW OF HOW AND WHY COMMUNITY HOUSES ARE CONTINUING HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS

We want to provide you with an update regarding our health and safety policies across the OCCH member organizations. As of March 21st, provincial mask mandates were lifted in Ontario. However, existing COVID health and safety policies will remain in place for the time being, an option that the provincial government allows organizations like community houses to exercise at their discretion.

A number of community-based organizations running recreational programs in Ottawa have chosen to follow this approach as well. Community houses will continue to monitor changes and review their respective policies throughout the spring and will provide updates on any changes.

As in the past, and to provide you with additional protection, all our staff who are eligible are fully vaccinated, wear medical masks at all times in the community house; and regularly self-test for COVID using a rapid antigen test.

Why are we keeping our COVID measures? The OCCH and its member organizations are committed to providing an environment that is as safe and inclusive as possible.

We are continuing with our existing health and safety measures because:

- Community houses serve many seniors, individuals with chronic health conditions and those under five years old who cannot be vaccinated, all of whom are vulnerable populations.
- Most current community house programming is indoors where the risk of transmission is still high.
- We understand members of our community are also making a conscious effort to be safe and expect community houses to be following prudent and cautious approaches to managing the risks of COVID 19.

For the time being, the capacity of community house programs will remain lower than room sizes normally allow, and we will continue to follow remaining public health measures and policies maintained by the province: e.g. asking you to stay home when sick and exercising proper hand hygiene. We are also ensuring that increased cleaning protocols will continue to be in place in community houses.

Just like everyone else, community houses are eager to return to life before COVID, but in the meantime, we continue to appreciate your support and cooperation as we navigate the best way forward to managing the risk of COVID-19 transmission.



COMMUNITY HOUSE CONTACTS

WANT TO GET IN TOUCH?

Banff Avenue Community House
 Phone : 613-739-5702
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 Address : 2084A&B Banff Avenue, K1V 7X9
 Website : banffcommunityhouse.ca

Blair Court Community House
 Phone : 613-736-5058
 Email : blaircourt@rogers.com
 Address : 1566 Station Boulevard, K1G 0M1
 Website : blaircourt.ca

Lowertown Good Neighbours Community House
 Phone : 613-562-2925
 Email : mthibeault-canas@crccbv.ca
 Address : 145 Beausoleil Drive, K1N 8W3

Michele Heights Community House
 Phone : 613-829-4353
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 Address : 102-2950 Penny Drive, K2B 6H6

Britannia Woods Community House
 Phone : 613-820-0853
 Email : f.yusuf@britanniawoods.com
 Address : 9-115 Richie Street, K2B 6C7
 Website : britanniawoods.com

Caldwell Family Centre
 Phone : 613-728-1800
 Email : director@caldwellcentre.ca
 Address : 20/22-1100 Medford Street, K1Z 8L5
 Website : caldwellfamilycentre.ca

Morrison Gardens Community House
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Pinecrest Terrace Community House
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Carson's Community House
 Phone : 613-745-0073 x 105
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Confederation Court Community House
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Debra Dynes Family House
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