



KEEPING PACE WITH DEMAND Stories

From Ottawa's Community
Social Service Providers

WHY OUR STORIES MATTER

FALL 2016

Strong social infrastructure helps us have healthy communities and wellbeing for everyone. When surveying 103 community services and programs that receive funding from the City of Ottawa, Making Voices Count heard many examples as to how current funding is not keeping pace with demand.

The City of Ottawa draft budget takes some important steps to address this critical situation:

- \$500,000 would be placed in a fund to help agencies to deal with growth, waiting lists for services and other critical, one-time issues.
- \$110,000 will be provided to increase the annual cost-of-living increases to community agencies from 1.5% to 2%.

The stories told here paint a picture as to how important it is that City Council approve these funds in the final budget vote. Let the Mayor and your City Councillor know why you think this matters.

At the same time, Making Voices Count want to ensure that social infrastructure spending keeps pace with other city funding. We ask that City Council work with the community to develop a long-term social infrastructure strategy that will addresses the multiple, complex and emerging needs of an increasing Ottawa population.

We thank the community social service providers from across the city, and their clients, who have shared their story. We thank City Council for listening to them.

About Making Voices Count

Making Voices Count (MVC) works with city decision makers to create a City for all. MVC is driven by residents, the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres, City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), and community partners. MVC builds on the momentum of the previous Making Votes Count project. Please



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STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS STRAINED TO KEEP UP

Our daily activities help almost 700 members to break out of their isolation. Here, they find support as well as opportunities to interact with their peers.

A core of very involved volunteers assume many responsibilities, some of which should be carried out by additional employees. There exists a need for more volunteers, since it's always the same ones who are present, and they become exhausted.

As Paulette shared:

I have been volunteering at the Ottawa Rendez-vous des aînés francophones for many years. Our daily activities help almost 700 members to break out of their isolation. Here, they find support as well as opportunities to interact with their peers. Our organization counts on the dedication of 200 volunteers to successfully conduct its activities, since only three full-time employees and one part-time maintenance worker receive a salary.

We have the opportunity to see how our organization serves as a community of mutual support for our seniors: Because it is remotely located and is difficult to access by bus, some of the participants and volunteers must help those who cannot get there by car by offering them transportation.

When an employee is sick or must miss work, his or

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her responsibilities fall to the other two staff members or to the available volunteers; this has been observed many times by the board of directors. It is exhausting for those who take on these additional responsibilities.

We would like to obtain funding to hire a fourth employee. However, grants are subject to very precise conditions and do not always include a portion for salaries. These grants often require the creation of new activities, but we have good programs for which we have the necessary material and which meet the needs of our community. Not all grants take into account the fact that baby boomers are volunteering less than before, since many of them do not want to or cannot commit.

By: Julie Lizotte, Coordinator

RURAL FOOD BANK SCRAPES BY



We saw an increase of 16% of families seeking food from last year to this year.

The West Carleton Food Access Centre (WCFAC) has seen an increase in the number of clients each year while donations and funding have not kept pace. We saw an increase of 16% of families seeking food from last year to this year. That's an additional 59 requests from clients who live in isolated, rural communities.

If the centre was not in the community, I am not sure how some of the clients would manage to support and feed their families.

WCFAC is entirely volunteer-run. We deliver services to the best of our ability with the sources of funds available. In order to save money, we have volunteers picking up supplies on sale from several grocery stores. Our centre, with support of the City Councillor's office, the Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre, and the previous public health nurse, worked in partnership with Canadian Tire to offer slow cookers to clients who have only hot plates and no ovens.

The community is very supportive of the centre, but we are drawing from the same limited pockets all the

time. There are no big grocery stores in the township to set up a bin to collect non-perishable items. Most West Carleton residents shop at the stores in Kanata and Stittsville, which have donation bins for food access centres in those communities, but we are not allowed to put a collection bin in any of the large box stores. Recipients receive less food if we don't receive sufficient donations.

“The food I receive helps me get through to the next paycheque, provides my children with items for school lunches and keeps them from going hungry.”

One client said, “The food I receive helps me get through to the next paycheque, provides my children with items for school lunches and keeps them from going hungry.”

We serve low-income earners and seniors who receive only old age pension, as well as people off work due to illness who need the centre's help until they get back on their feet. With increases in utilities and living costs, the number of working poor requiring our assistance has increased. With very little funding from the City, it's very

hard to meet the growing demands of our rural community. The community can only do so much.

Written in collaboration with volunteers at the West Carleton Food Access Centre, along with Julie McKercher and Maria Friis, Community Developers at Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre

CHINESE PLAYGROUP MUST TURN FAMILIES AWAY



There is very high demand on our services but not enough resources to meet all the complex needs of their clients, without enough staff capacity or time.

There is a huge demand for our Chinese playgroups. We are sometimes seeing 40-60 people at one of our locations, with only one staff person to facilitate. Sometimes, we have to turn families away when the room has reached its capacity.

This creates anxiety for parents who depend on that service each week for support, from the early childhood development workers and from their peers. At the end of each playgroup session, parents are often lined up to talk with staff about the challenges they are facing and to get referrals and supports.

The early years (0-6 years old) is the most critical stage to ensure healthy growth and development and playgroups are an easy-to-access service to help parents identify development issues and get referrals – this saves money in future costs on the health and social services system.

As Lilou shared:

“I came to Canada with my family five years ago as a new immigrant from mainland China. My son

was two years old and I was pregnant with my daughter. Having a Chinese playgroup at Somerset West Community Health Centre was a great comfort because it allowed me to access services without any language barriers, and created a more comfortable environment for my son who was having speech delays.

Once he heard Mandarin being spoken, he was more relaxed and able to better learn and develop his language skills. For me, I was able to connect with other parents who were facing similar challenges and we were able to support each other as we learned a new language and made our home in Ottawa.”

There are not enough resources for Chinese-speaking families across the city, so families are travelling across the city to access services.”

“Having a Chinese playgroup allowed me to access services without any language barriers, and created a more comfortable environment for my son who was having speech delays.”

There is very high demand on our services but not enough resources to meet all the complex needs of their clients, without enough staff capacity or time.

By: Susan Xu, Early Childhood Development Worker



CHALLENGES MAINTAINING PROGRAMS UNIQUE TO THE COMMUNITY

The needs of residents are increasing and are getting more complex. Municipal funding for community development services has not kept up to the demand.

A core of very involved volunteers assume many reThe changes in services offered are due to difficulties in obtaining continuous funding that supports long-term programs.

Even though the needs of residents are increasing and are getting more complex, the budget provided by the City for community development services has remained unchanged for years. Consequently, we must spend a great amount of staff and volunteer time and energy innovating in order to continue serving residents with reduced financial means, as well as writing funding requests.

As Marise shared:

“I have witnessed many changes in the services offered at the Vanier Community Service Centre since I moved into the neighbourhood five years ago. I have been a volunteer for many years at the Partage Vanier Food Bank as well as in the Income Tax Clinics. Over the years, I have seen an increased demand for these two services and consequently, the waiting lines have lengthened. We filled out more than 500 tax returns this year for residents of the area, mainly with the help of the volunteers.

Like many other parents at the beginning of the school year, I appreciate having access to emergency food supplies from Partage Vanier. This service allows me to dedicate part of my monthly budget to back-



to-school necessities for my two children. However, we notice that donations to the food bank are scarce during the summer season. Rising costs in grocery stores result in less donations and a higher demand. Therefore, residents have access to a reduced variety of food products with which to enhance their family meals.”

“When the Centre receives a negative response from funders, we sometimes have to make the difficult decision to not renew certain programs.”

When the Centre receives a negative response from funders, we sometimes have to make the difficult decision to not renew certain programs. We try to avoid cutting programs that are not offered elsewhere in the community.

By: Helena Arruda, Director of counselling services and community development

COMMUNITY HOUSE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LIMITED



My position is only temporary and part-time. Community houses, across Ottawa, lack the resources to do this important community engagement work.

When I joined the Board of Britannia Woods Community House, I learned they did not have on-going funding for community engagement. Having lived in the community for a while, people placed their trust in me. Residents talked about lacking a sense of community, as people didn't know each other, they weren't engaged, and there was conflict among neighbours.

Community houses need more funding for community engagement, so as to increase community house hours and accessibility, create opportunities to bring adults together and provide support, especially for people with the complex challenges many individuals and families are facing.

***“As a single mother,
the community house
has become a family
that I and my children
really needed.”***

With temporary funding, I was fortunate to be hired at Britannia Woods Community House, as a part-time community engagement worker to facilitate an adult circle. Consistent positive engagement through the adult circle has helped people to open up, develop trust, seek support and get involved where they live. The circle brings together a range of cultural groups making it more possible to understand each other, reduce conflicts and improve relations among neighbours. People now know each other and tell their neighbours about the circle, what is going on in the community and share resources; the community feels like home.

People now know each other and tell their neighbours about the circle, what is going on in the community and share resources; the community feels like home.

We have many examples of how this group has helped parents. As one woman said: “As a single mother, the community house has become a family that I and my children really needed.”

My position is only temporary and part-time. Community houses, across Ottawa, lack the resources to do this important community engagement work. Community Houses usually have one full time staff person who runs programming and completes administrative work. It is difficult to also do community engagement work while providing much needed support to residents. It is difficult to have the community house open regularly with only one staff due to safety reasons.

Community Houses have the potential to have more positive impacts in the community but are limited by lack of funding.

By: Diana Belghali, Community Engagement Worker

COUNSELLORS STRETCHED TO ASSIST CRIMINALIZED WOMEN



We do as much as we can, but we desperately need more funding to hire more counsellors to meet the demand.

As with many other non-profit organizations, at Elizabeth Fry Society, we are under resourced. Our clients are women 18 years and up who are involved with the criminal justice system and those at risk of coming into conflict with the law.

The majority of the women who come to us identify as having experienced trauma in their lives. Due to a lack of funding, we have a difficult time addressing all their needs.

We currently have two counsellors working full-time and one part-time. Areas of programming include: trauma, emotional regulation (anger management), theft prevention, addiction and relapse prevention, and programming for women in the sex-trade. We also have a housing worker and a youth counsellor who act as case managers.

Our staff serves approximately 4000 clients, many of whom participate in ongoing counselling sessions. Due to the high demand, new clients are placed on a waiting list, yet we strive to accommodate individuals as quickly as possible. Group counselling, which runs for eight weeks, is usually fully booked, with 25-30 people, creating the need to run two groups at once.

Most people have to be placed in group counselling since we don't have the capacity to provide long-term individual counselling. We have clients who continually request to be seen on an individual basis, so that their specific needs can be addressed. But we only have the resources for a small number of women to be seen individually.

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We do as much as we can, but we desperately need more funding to hire more counsellors to meet the demand.

By: Maria Chiru, Manager of Adult and Youth Programming

DEMAND FOR INTAKE COUNSELLING SERVICES ON THE RISE

The volume has doubled, but we have the same number of staff to serve them.

At Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre, we've seen a 57% increase in the number of clients accessing our Intake Counselling Services since 2011, yet funding for this service remains the same. The volume has doubled, but we have the same number of staff to serve them.

Previously, appointments could be booked within two weeks. Now, clients wait 3 to 5 weeks, or longer. We used to respond to phone calls within 24 hours or less. Now, it can take up to 72 hours. In one day alone, there were eight crisis walk-ins and 30 phone calls. For people suffering over a long period, that leads to increased mental health issues.

Our highly qualified and compassionate counsellors can't keep up with this level of demand. At times, they feel they are rushing clients, knowing there are so many more clients to meet with.

We have made changes to try and meet the growing need. We've shortened walk-in hours to allow for more client counselling appointments. We're redirecting clients who live outside our catchment area. We've partnered with organizations, trained volunteers and pro-actively seek students to support clients. Our program manager and qualified staff from other services provide front-line crisis counselling as back-up.



“It’s a band-aid solution and we’re meeting the needs of folks coming forward, but there is an epidemic of folks not making ends meet.”

We've reached a crisis point; we're beyond capacity. Although increased funding to meet the growing demand for services would support the immediate and growing crisis, pressures across the system are contributors. Long-term counselling has longer wait lists, so we're seeing more demand for

short-term and crisis counselling. Given the increased cost of living, lack of affordable housing, and rising cost of food, minimum wage isn't enough to cover basic needs.

It's a band-aid solution and we're meeting the needs of folks coming forward, but there is an epidemic of folks not making ends meet. It affects how families interact. It affects youth homelessness. It affects the increase in anxiety we've seen in the past five years.

By: Cathy Lawery, Counselling Services Manager and Maria Friis, Community Developer, a combined 30 years of working at the centre.

HIGH COST OF TRANSIT LIMITS QUALITY OF LIFE

We can see the impact of the high cost of transit on the people who come through our doors, but we don't have the resources to address it.

Because most people on social assistance cannot afford bus fare after they pay for rent, food and other basic needs, at St Luke's Table, we receive requests every day for bus tickets. Unfortunately, St. Luke's Table does not have the resources to provide bus tickets. Once a year, the City sends out an email, we request bus tickets and that's the amount we have for the year. We usually run out in May.



When people aren't able to afford transportation, they're not able to get to medical or mental health appointments, volunteer or employment opportunities, get to the grocery store or pharmacy, or get to appointments to view housing. Because of the lack of transportation options, our participants are not able to access important community resources or meet their basic needs such as groceries, food programs, or hygiene supplies.

“We currently have one participant who got a job, but couldn't afford the two bus tickets to get there.”

This also limits their ability to connect with professionals which, in turn, has a negative impact on their quality of life.

We currently have one participant who got a job, but couldn't afford the two bus tickets to get there. Lack of transportation has an even more

serious impact on those who are isolated or have mobility issues. Because you need nine medical appointments a month to access bus pass through social assistance, many people do not quality.

At St Luke's Table, we can see the impact of the high cost of transit on the people who come through our doors, but we don't have the resources to address it.

By: Shea Kiely, Executive Director

HARDER TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING PROGRAMS



Wonderful programs have been implemented by different levels of government, but in reality, those who need them face significant barriers in order to access them

I have been part of the Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre team as an Intake worker for almost ten years. Our small team and the budget allocated by the City does not allow us to offer all the programs and services we would like to provide to meet the needs of our residents.

We wish we could establish a community kitchen for our youth, but we don't have a house in the neighbourhood to accommodate it, nor the financial resources to hire personnel to run it. So the project cannot be carried out.

Wonderful programs were implemented by different levels of government, but in reality, those who need them face significant barriers in order to access them. Many of our residents cannot afford to travel by bus, yet they are not eligible for the Community Pass. We used to be at liberty to support them by offering them bus tickets. Now, our resources are so limited that we can't give them out to everyone who needs help and asks for it.

Our workload has grown over the years. We must devote more and more time to assist the community members who struggle with complex mental health issues in addition to lacking other necessities.

“Our resources are so limited that we can't give them out to everyone who needs help and asks for it.”

We cannot simply refer those who require follow-ups; we must also advocate for their rights. Our work is not appropriately recognized and the wages we receive barely increase; it's exhausting. Experienced Intake workers who love their job and have a good connection with the community are leaving the Centre to obtain better working conditions elsewhere.

By: Tracy Pressé

THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL HELP RISING



Longer wait times make it harder for us to find meaningful matches between volunteers and clients.

At Citizen Advocacy, our core program focuses on matching our clients with volunteers. It has been around since the 1970s while other programs have come and gone, sometimes because of funding. We're always working on improving the program.

The goal is to create long-term friendships between those with physical, mental, developmental, traumatic disabilities (friends), with a volunteer (advocate). The wait time was 2 years on average. However, it has now increased to 3 years. Our waitlist has also grown. We ask for a commitment of one-year minimum from volunteers. Recruiting, training and retaining volunteers is always an ongoing challenge.

This program allows our clients to create connections and friendships that do not necessarily come from paid professionals. We try to match people based on best match instead of on a first-come basis to allow for friendships to grow. When friends are waiting

a long time for us to find the right advocate it can sometimes have a negative impact on the friend.

As Marsha shared:

"I never had sight and have been blind my whole life. I have had development issues growing up and I have post-trauma. They good for people. I have been with them since the 70s and been matched three times. Some of my matches I've had for many years. They help me with daily activities such as going to appointments and going to the dentist or my psychiatrist. We also do a lot of activities like shopping, and going to restaurants, the science centre, and sports games. It's been a rewarding experience because I'm able to get to places I have never been before."

I have been waiting for another match for a while and it is very frustrating to wait. Sometimes I go out with my husband and his advocate but its hard to try to do things all together. In the meanwhile, I try other programs as well such as participating in a blind bowlers' team and a choir at the Good Companions Seniors' Centre. I use Para Transpo to go to places. It's frustrating to get to my activities when the bus is late or it gets mixed up. Overall, these services are important and I hope I get matched soon.

"It's been a rewarding experience...I have been waiting for another match for a while and it is frustrating to wait."

When we do make a successful match it not only has a positive impact on the friend but can also have a positive impact and those around them and the wider community.

By: Doug McKenzie, Social Worker

WOMEN FLEEING ABUSE UNABLE TO ACCESS SERVICES



It is never easy to turn someone away, but unfortunately this is the reality.

At Nelson House, we have to turn women away every day. We have programs and supports in place, but there are not enough. Last year, we received 793 crisis calls throughout the year, of those, 327 were requesting shelter space that we could not accommodate. They had to be referred elsewhere for service.

We do our best to connect them with other agencies and services, but when we call other Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, they are usually full. We then call City of Ottawa shelters, but they are often also full. So these women end up staying in motels, which is a dangerous time for them.

Being in a motel isolates these women who are already at risk. Ideally they should be safe and protected, staying somewhere that has a 24-hour staff, security, food, counselling – a place where all of their needs can be met. It is never easy to turn someone away, but unfortunately this is the reality.

Our Transition Support Worker is being called on more and more, as abuse is not the only issue. We are dealing with multiple issues, like poverty, mental health needs, and substance abuse. Staff are required to learn new skills to try and meet these needs because there is not enough support in the community and sometimes waitlists to access services can be two years long.

In a way, it feels like we are setting women up to fail because they come through the shelter system, get housed but do not have the supports in place (i.e. mental health supports) to be successful in their independent living situation. Some women are staying in abusive relationships

because it is easier than living in poverty and waiting for services.

My hope is that all levels of government will recognize the need for increased supports for women and children fleeing abuse. It is frustrating and sad when any woman fleeing abuse is not able to access the services she needs.

By: Keri Lewis, Executive Director

“In a way, it feels like we are setting women up to fail. They do not have the supports in place to be successful in their independent living situation.”

LACK OF FUNDING FOR SPECIALIZED SERVICES

The Centre does not have the funds to hire a worker specialized in mental health and addiction issues

I am an intake worker at the Lowertown Community Resource Centre. We try to offer services adapted to all the residents who come to the center, but the Centre does not have the funds to hire a worker specialized in services specific to concurrent disorders: mental health and addiction issues.

We can refer clients to partner organizations but they often have waiting lists and involve residents going out of the neighbourhood to have service. This can be difficult for those who have mobility challenges or who can't afford a bus ticket let alone a taxi. Access to a psychologist or a psychiatrist requires a reference from a physician, but many of our residents don't have a family doctor. When they do obtain a reference, they are again faced with a months' long waiting list before meeting with a specialist.



These residents often experience isolation and despair as they wait for these services. We offer continuous support through this period as well as a number of other services that assist in breaking this isolation and the difficulties related to poverty.

We believe that adding a case worker specializing in this area will support residents as they wait for specialized services. This lack of funding for specialized services also affects the rest of the community. Some individuals with addiction and mental health issues

“This lack of funding for specialized services also affects the rest of the community.”

can end up on the street, because we cannot offer them help when they ask for it.

We offer multiple services to support and evaluate

resident needs and in my role I also refer residents to specialized services in the community. For persons experiencing concurrent disorders, mental health and addictions, the waiting lists are exceptionally long to access specialized services. There are other barriers, such as, not having a doctor to refer to a psychiatrist or not having the funds to purchase transportation to regular visits. These residents often experience isolation and despair as they wait for these services. We offer continuous support through this period as well as a number of other services that assist in breaking this isolation and the difficulties related to poverty.

Obtaining the funding to add a caseworker specialized in concurrent disorders will strengthen the support we can offer residents as they wait for specialized services. This worker will also increase residents' knowledge of their needs and the resources available in the community.

By: Christina Boggia, Intake Worker