

## Deputation City Budget 2023

Good afternoon everyone,

My name is Keir Thompson and Cristelle Eltham. We are from The Christie Ossington Neighbourhood Centre. We are a non-profit and multiservice organization located in the west end of Toronto. We have a 24- hour shelter at four separate locations. Our location on Bloor Street west which houses approximately 30 men experiencing homelessness, was cut to 15 during the pandemic, now back to 18 residents, and at the same location, we serve over 300 individuals who access our daily drop-in/food access program for individuals who experience food insecurity, homelessness, living in poverty, or are new immigrants to Canada. Our main objective at CONC is to improve the quality of life of our most vulnerable community members, especially as we continue to see an aging population in our community.

Last year, in order to meet this objective, our program served over 57,000 meals. We've continued to offer drop-in services like showers, computers and laundry services to our community members. Over 800 community members used these resources last year. Our Seniors on the Move Social Club currently has about 100 participants. The Seniors on the Move Social Club provides age-appropriate programs and local community initiatives. Our program activities are led by senior volunteers who are assisted by placement students in partnerships with other public agencies such as Toronto Public Health (THP). We also provide our participants with care packages, winter hampers, clothing, food and fresh groceries. We are situated in the midst of an aging community and we have seen the effects of the pandemic and inflation on everyone. With the increase in the number of newcomers to the city after the borders opened, post pandemic, our numbers have increased. With our daily average for community lunch service going from 132 to 242, with colder months having a drastic increase in daily average. However, with the increase in the cost of food, packages, toiletries, transport costs and materials for our programs our capacity is being decreased. These expenses with the cut in our funding has affected our portion sizes, the variety of food offered, and the quality of our food and programs.

Services need to be expanded, not cut. Non-profit service providers need funding increases to allow them to pay their staff fair wages, consistent with the City's Fair Wage Policy for contractors. Drop-in funding needs to be increased and the number of drop-ins funded needs to be expanded to allow for more in-person effective service provision and improved access to respite spaces. We have also seen a growing need for mental health support within the community. Ignoring the funding of basic health and wellness programs, and meal programs will isolate our seniors, the unhoused, those experiencing discrimination, and newcomers transitioning to a new city post pandemic. As a drop-in centre we don't only provide our community members with support towards their basic needs like, housing and food, we are a safe space for them to socialize, form friendships and learn from one another. We would like to close with a direct quote from our manager, who has been with the organization for over 20 years:

"We are here to serve, our community needs us more than we realize, especially post pandemic'.