



Houselink 2017-18 Annual

impact

Report



HOUSELINK
home community opportunity

Housed, connected, healthy and in charge of our own lives

1200

Torontonians reached through Houselink's homes and services -- twice as many as five years ago

133

people secured paid work through our Supported Employment Program

79%

of our residents say they are satisfied with their housing at Houselink overall

286

*participants are on the Road to Employment. **30** found jobs outside Houselink*

240

*participants in Houselink's Social Recreation Program, up **27%** from last year*

8500

*healthy meals served through our Food Program, up **20%** from last year*

72

evictions prevented through our Steps to Support Initiative in 3 Toronto Community Housing buildings

94.2%

of residents in Houselink's dedicated housing remain stably housed -- one of the highest retention rates in the sector

100%

of our residents supported in our transitional housing remain stably housed

We are already seeing the impact

In 2017, Houselink celebrated its 40th anniversary with our new mission and vision statement and a three-year strategic plan to achieve that vision.

This year, we are already seeing the impact of our strategic plan. We now have the unanimous support of our participants and the Ministry of Health's backing to replace our under-used shared houses with self-contained accessible apartments. We have stepped up to transition chronically homeless men and women into their own homes, thanks to new funding from the City of Toronto. We are seeing more participants in our core programs, resulting in more jobs, more employment supports, more healthy meals and more social recreation programs.

To expand on the transformative power of peer support, we have introduced Wellness Recovery Workers to our support offerings. And we are at the table, helping to advance our collective -- and achievable! -- goal: to end chronic homelessness in Toronto.

It's the human impact that counts

In this report, we demonstrate the impact of these gains in people served, jobs acquired, friendships made and tenancies saved. But these are only part of the story. We know we have really had an impact when a participant says, "I love Houselink because I experience the joy of living with well-being and health."

Thank you to our dedicated Board, managers and staff, our funders and donors, and especially Houselink's 1,200 participants who each have their own story of hope and courage. See how much we have accomplished together!



Brian Davis
Brian Davis, Executive Director



Douglas Jordan
Douglas Jordan, Board Chairperson



ADVANCING

our plan

Poised to create new accessible apartments

As far back as 2011, we saw the need: 52% of our residents were over 55 years of age. They hoped to age in place, but did not live in an accessible building. We also know that most Houselink members want the autonomy and privacy of their own apartments, and only 6% of people on the supportive housing waiting list are willing to accept a shared unit.

This year, we continued to lay the groundwork to create new, accessible, self-contained apartments. We have the enthusiastic support of participants: 100 per cent of affected participants endorse the project and are eager to move into their own apartments. We have the money: the value of our older shared houses can provide the capital, with the Ministry of Health committed to funding our operating costs. Our next step: gaining municipal approvals.



“I will finally have a private space for my daughter to visit me.”

~ Houselink participant

A strengthened peer support program

From its earliest days, Houselink has fostered a community of peers. We know that the people who have “been there” can offer help that others cannot.

This year, Houselink has formalized its peer support program and hired four new Mental Health Recovery Workers – all people with lived experience -- to offer a wide range of supports to our members. These workers have received specific training to use their experience to provide support, with a particular focus on relationship-building, community development and peer-led activities. Bringing a new support offering into the mix requires thoughtful attention. We created a “Change Team” to oversee and support the integration of these new roles within the support teams, and all managers and coordinators participated in supervisory best practices training for peers at T-E-A-C-H.org (Teach -Empower – Advocate for Community Health).

“A peer support worker can act as a sounding board, helping us to get better in touch with the direction our recovery takes, and connecting us to the appropriate resources.”

~ Myrna, Mental Health Recovery Worker



“Amazing maintenance staff that is always willing to fix problems”

– Participant

When The Local, an initiative of the University Health Network's Open Lab, was looking for inspiring health stories, it found Houselink's Victor Henry. As the profile says “Victor from Maintenance” is an unsung hero. He “fixes ruptured pipes and broken heaters. But to those living in supportive housing he's part therapist, friend and support worker.”

This is one of the strengths of Houselink's integrated approach to housing management. Every connection – not just those with designated support workers -- is an opportunity to promote stability and recovery.

Mobilized to turn the tide on homelessness

Houselink is a solution to homelessness. Our combination of affordable housing plus support keeps **over 94% of our residents housed, year after year**. That's a stronger retention rate than even celebrated initiatives such as the Canada-wide At Home/Chez Soi program.

This year, when Toronto was presented with an unprecedented homeless crisis, Houselink stepped forward. Our Housing Transitions team supported 40 people in privately-owned buildings, with housing allowances provided by the City of Toronto. Since the program began, **not one participant has returned to homelessness**. The City is now providing additional funds for an expanded five-member Transition Team with the capacity to support 100 people leaving the shelter system.



< 2%

eviction rate within our dedicated supportive housing program



0

tenants supported through Houselink's Transitional Housing program returned to homelessness

72

evictions prevented through our Steps to Support Program in three Toronto Community Housing buildings





“Since 2017 I’ve worked part-time through the Supported Employment Program. I take out the garbage at my building, I do internal courier duties every alternating months, and I work at least two shifts a month as a Drop in Operator. It’s a way to earn extra income, and get out of the house.”

~ Paul C.

Paid employment for 133 people

Houselink’s participants want jobs. After housing, employment is the second highest need among people on the supportive housing waiting list. The challenge? Between 75 – 85 per cent of people with serious mental illness are unemployed.

Houselink works to reverse that pattern. Through our Supportive Employment Program we use our own operating budget to hire and support participants in part-time or relief positions, while our Road to Employment program offers information, training and support to participants seeking jobs in the competitive job market.

This year, Houselink employed 133 people – 23 per cent of our participants. They worked as drop-in operators, receptionists, community kitchen cooks, landscapers, cleaners and in many other positions. Unlike the competitive job market, Houselink provides a flexible, supportive environment for those returning to work after a long absence.

Meanwhile, our 71 workshops and field trips attracted 200 new participants. **Thirty participants found full- or part-time employment**, 5 became volunteers and 5 completed education or training.

I ♥ Houselink

At our 40th Anniversary celebration we asked participants what they loved about Houselink. Here’s what they told us.

“I feel safe and wanted as a valuable member.”

“I have and continue to experience change. I have that peace of mind and serenity.”

“I am off the street and not in the shelter system.”

“It gave me steady employment for almost 20 years.”

“Our support staff, having a warm meal everyday, and the people I meet and talk to, the warm smiles and welcome.”

“I can contribute to the organization to the best of my abilities.”

“The freedom of being who I am.”

A healthier, more connected community

Isolation and poverty are the enemies of mental health. Houselink’s Social Recreation Program builds the bridge from isolation to health, good nutrition, affordable entertainment and a community of peers.

This year, over 75 per cent of Houselink participants took part in our community meal program. Over 8,500 meals were served using fewer factory-processed foods than ever before. And over 240 participants – up 27% from last year – were involved in a recreational or social activity.



Collaborating to advance Toronto's supportive housing system

Toronto's supportive housing providers are independent organizations. But we are all committed to improving the quality of life for low-income Torontonians living with serious mental health and addictions challenges, many of whom have experienced homelessness. And we all benefit from collaborating to create a supportive housing system that is equitable, seamless and efficient.

This year, Houselink took a lead role in developing a renewed Vision, Mission, Principles and structure for the 30-member Toronto Mental Health and Addictions Supportive Housing Network. These new Terms of Reference set the stage for a deeper and more effective collaboration to address the support and housing needs of low-income people with mental health and addiction issues across the city.

A recognized innovation

Houselink's Steps to Support initiative, in partnership with Toronto Community Housing, has been recognized as one of 12 Promising Practices by Addictions & Mental Health Ontario in collaboration with the Wellesley Institute and Canadian Mental Health Association.

An effective advocate



Forty years ago, Houselink's founders were among the very first to respond when people in mental institutions were being discharged into poverty and homelessness. Since then we have continued to be a steadfast advocate for social change.

***This year**, Houselink has worked closely with allied organizations to end homelessness, advance housing rights and ensure the voices of consumer/survivors are heard.*

The **Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness**, ensured Toronto's response to last winter's homeless crisis included permanent housing solutions. Houselink is a strong and active Community Partner and a part of the leadership team.

The **HomeComing Coalition**, a Yes-In-My-Backyard organization, and our allies successfully advocated for a new non-discriminatory approach to siting homeless shelters. Houselink is a founding member.

The consumer-survivor led **Dream Team**, of which Houselink is the trustee:

- completed their ground breaking "Safe at Home" project. Funded by the City of Toronto and using participatory research, they investigated the situation of vulnerable tenants who are forced to accommodate unwanted guests in their homes, often putting their own selves at risk. It is hoped that these victims of unit takeovers will now feel more empowered to seek a safe intervention.
- developed a new website, www.thedreamteam.ca.
- delivered 50 presentations to high schools and universities, including faculties of Law and Urban Planning -- and community group.

The **ODSP Action Coalition** resulted in a reversal of the Ontario Government's decision to cut work-related benefits for Ontario Disability Support Program participants. Houselink played an active role in the campaign.





A platform for participants to help themselves

Houselink embraces such principles of mental health recovery as hope, self-determination and community. This is the work that participants do for themselves. We let go when we are no longer needed and we are committed to being there when there is a need that we can assist with. Houselink's role is to provide a platform that enables good things to happen.

This year, participants advocated for themselves and their peers through the ODSP and Fair Share Coalitions, joined the March for Mental Health and Anti-Islamophobia demonstrations, signed postcards through the Stitching Our Own Safety Net campaign, and analyzed social issues through the LINK newsletter and Social Issues Committee.

Private space for private matters

In response to the spikes in overdose deaths, Houselink organized participant training in harm reduction, overdose prevention and using Naloxone kits through visiting Community Health Clinic staff. But Houselink staff also make a point of not being in the room. We want to make sure our participants have private space to talk freely.

"Houselink. Non-judgmental, very understanding, very patient. The definition of what those of us with mental health and addictions need. If I could explain how mental health should be treated like, it's Houselink. You can't lose with Houselink."

~ Participant

"For me, recovery began at Houselink Community Homes. Having access to permanent affordable housing helped me get clean and maintain my sobriety. Since I moved into Houselink, I have been a member of both Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. I've abstained from alcohol for ten years and will soon pick up my five year Narcotics Anonymous medallion to mark my clean time away from street drugs."

~ Houselink Tenant

"I'm a regular on the annual Houselink Camping Trip. That was where my neighbour Robert and I got the idea for a weekend canoe trip of our own. We rented a car and drove to Sudbury. While we were there, Robert was able to connect with his family and went with his sister to visit his mother's grave. He hadn't been able to attend the memorial service last year. After this family reunion, we spent the rest of the weekend canoeing in beautiful Killarney."

~ Richard



I have been a resident of Houselink for a little over four years, and I will describe how Houselink staff and services have been crucial in my life.

“My life has turned around 180 degrees”

First of all, upon moving into Houselink, I was a full-blown alcoholic and drug addict. I began to have difficulty paying my rent. My worker and his supervisor helped me to get my rent in order and guided me to AA meetings in my area (the supervisor knew where all the meetings were). I had already arranged for rehab on my own. I am now three years and eight months clean and sober, and my life has turned around 180 degrees.

I needed to engage more in the world at large. To this end, I was offered a part-time job at the Drop-in at 805 Bloor West. It boosted my self-confidence immeasurably, and gave me an opportunity to earn money for an honest day's work, something I hadn't done for a long time.

Houselink has an education fund for members wishing to attend school. I have already taken two screenwriting courses at Ryerson University to build upon a full-time program I had taken years ago, something I had

always wanted to do. I excelled at both, but more importantly, I had the opportunity to get outside my comfort zone and engage successfully with diverse groups of university students and faculty in a larger world.

I have found the staff at Houselink to be incredibly caring and savvy. They have encouraged me every step of the way. I feel that it is important to note that they are not the least bit condescending or patronizing, which is necessary for people to feel equal. Many of us come from places where we have always felt “less than.”

It has been suggested that I suffer from clinical depression. Frankly, the phrase has little meaning for me anymore, because Houselink has been so important in my recovery, helping me – to borrow a phrase from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous – “to pick up (my) bed and walk again.”

- RPV

Lives changed because of you, our generous donors

This year the Peggy Birnberg Fund distributed \$9,512 to 26 individuals and 1 group. Successful requests included beds, pet care, dental assistance, immigration assistance, and medical equipment.

The **Families Moving Forward Fund** helped 3 children go to summer camp; 3 youths attended soccer camp; 3 children enroll in music lessons, and 2 youths received education bursaries to assist with first time college fees.

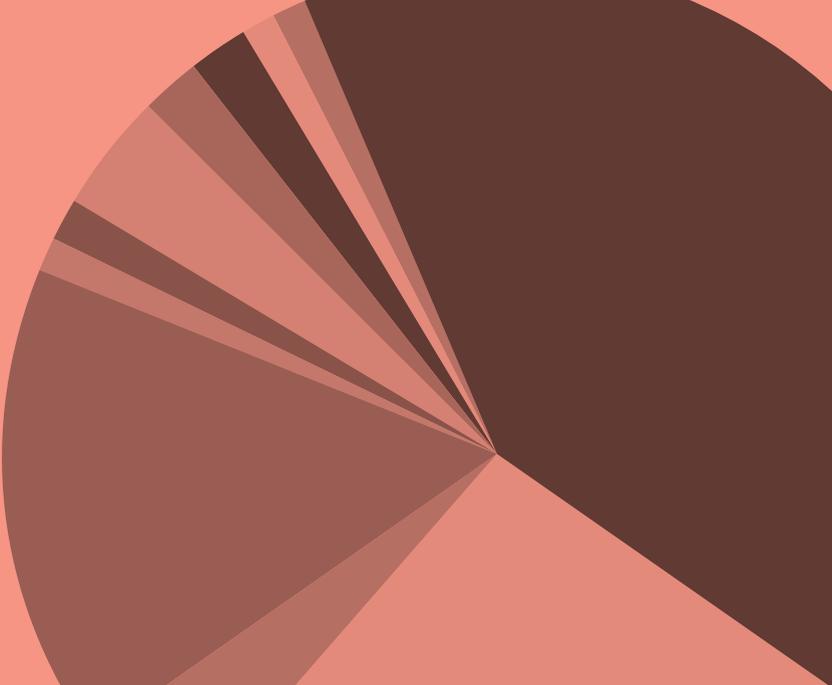
The **Participant Education Fund** helped 27 participants pursue a diverse number of educational opportunities including general interest classes, health and wellness, arts, crafts, and music. The type of institution was just as diverse as the courses themselves - George Brown, the Toronto District School Board, The Learning Annex, the Toronto Hostel Training Centre, the YMCA, Ryerson and University of Toronto!



FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

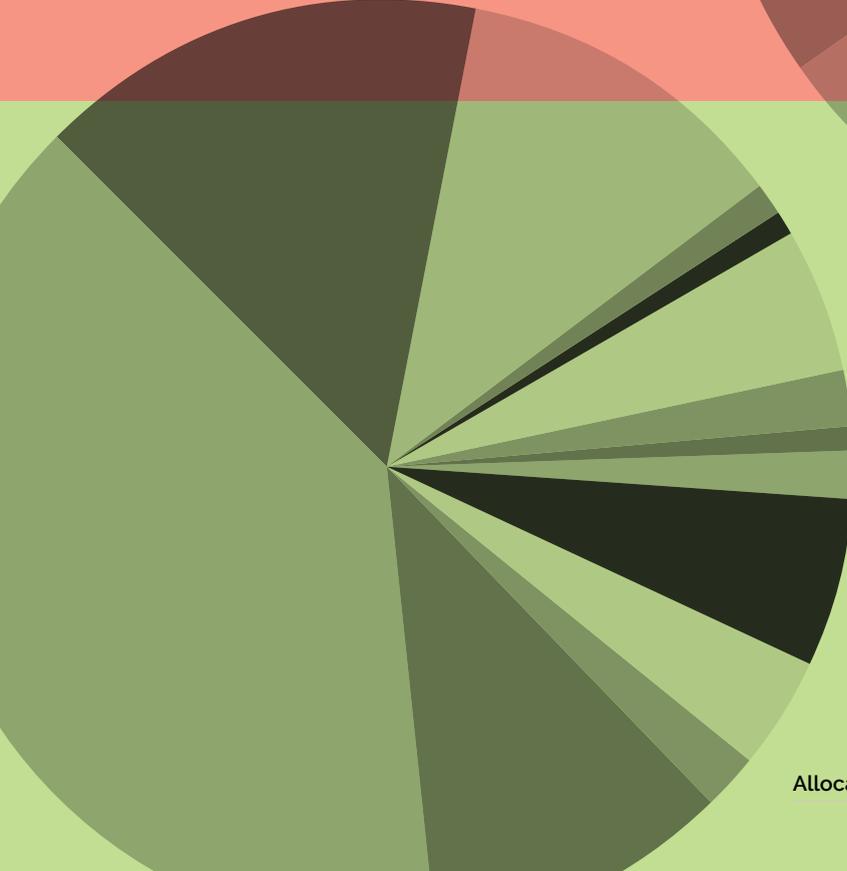
Revenues

- Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network - 42.4%
- Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) - 27.2%
- City of Toronto - 4.1%
- Rental income from tenants - 15.8%
- Income from partner agencies - 0.9%
- Property Management - 1.6%
- Investment income - 0.1%
- Fundraising and donations - 1.2%
- Amortization of deferred grants - 3.5%
- Dedicated fundraising income and donations - 2.0%
- Other - 2%



Expenses

- Materials and services - 5.8%
- Utilities - 4.0%
- Mortgage interest - 2.0%
- Depreciation - 11.4%
- Wages and benefits - 40.0%
- Head lease rent - 15.5%
- Administration - 11.5%
- Municipal taxes - 0.2%
- Insurance - 0.4%
- Program costs - 5.3%
- Dedicated program costs - 2.0%
- Fundraising and grant acquisition - 0.5%
- Allocation to major repairs and replacements reserve fund - 1.4%



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- | | |
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- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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| Carol Thames
<i>Program Manager</i> | Colleen Vandeyck
<i>Manager of Human Resources & Administration</i> |
| Charles Lior
<i>Finance Manager</i> | |

Best Wishes to Our Long Term Staff Who Retired This Year

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Dorothy Harraher
<i>27 years</i> | Carmen Carrasco
<i>11 years</i> | Bryan James
<i>12 years</i> |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|

TO OUR DONORS AND FRIENDS, WE THANK YOU

On behalf of the Board of Directors, staff, members, participants and volunteers, we wish to extend our heart-felt thanks to the many friends, patrons and advocates who make our work possible.

To our core funding partners, whose support has enabled us to help people living with mental health and substance use challenges move forward in their recovery.



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Houselink Community Homes also wishes to acknowledge and thank the many donors whose contributions have made a strong and lasting impact upon those we serve.

Patrons and supporting organizations \$10,000+

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