

Unity Project for Relief of Homelessness in London

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

Working to end the experience of
homelessness for those in our care.





Land Acknowledgment

Unity Project for Relief of Homelessness in London acknowledges that we gather and carry out our work on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, Attawandaron, and Chonnonton.

London is situated on lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum, a treaty grounded in peace, friendship, and shared responsibility. This agreement reminds us that the land is meant to sustain all who live here, and that we are called to care for it — and for one another — with respect and reciprocity.

We recognize that Indigenous Peoples have cared for these lands since time immemorial, and that the impacts of colonization, displacement, and systemic inequities continue to shape the realities of homelessness today. Many individuals we serve are First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, and their experiences are inseparable from this history.

As an organization committed to dignity, belonging, and housing stability, Unity Project affirms our responsibility to support truth, reconciliation, and decolonization. We strive to listen, learn, reflect, and act in ways that honour Indigenous rights, voices, and ways of knowing.

This acknowledgment is both a statement of place and a commitment to meaningful, ongoing action.

Executive Message



Chuck Lazenby
Executive Director



Dirka Prout
Board Chair

The 2024–25 year was one of resilience, reflection, and renewed commitment. Strengthened by the dedication of staff, community, and agency partners, we focused on stabilizing operations while continuing to respond with care and compassion to growing needs. As we settled into our indoor–outdoor configuration of resident rooms, we embraced both opportunities and challenges, using this period to learn, adapt, and strengthen our work.

Supporting people to remain in shelter until successfully housed remains at the heart of our work. At the same time, shared, small-scale living spaces and the absence of controlled entry created ongoing pressures. Interpersonal conflict and the accumulation of belongings beyond what limited spaces can safely accommodate were the most common reasons residents were asked to leave. These realities required consistency, clarity, and thoughtful responses.

We undertook comprehensive review of policies and procedures to guide how we support residents and ensure clear, fair and consistent expectations. Focused staff training contributed to greater stability and cohesion in daily operations.

As emergency shelter services stabilized, we reintegrated front-door services for non-residents, expanding our reach and responding to urgent gaps. Access to washrooms, basic needs, advocacy, and in-the-moment supports once again became available to individuals who might otherwise have nowhere to turn.

Our Housing Stability Workers provided in-home case management to more than 35 individuals, a vital component of our broader response, helping people sustain housing, navigate challenges, and reduce the risk of returning to homelessness.

The homelessness crisis deepened, and demand for services exceeded capacity. Waitlists became increasingly necessary, while steady non-resident traffic reflected both unmet need and the trust placed in Unity Project as a place of safety and support.

Public discourse around homelessness remained intense and often heavy. While many people are deeply affected and eager to offer solutions, the reality is that homelessness is not primarily caused by local policy and cannot be solved at the municipal level alone. Nor can it be resolved by charities and frontline agencies whose role is to support the person in front of us while contributing expertise to a stronger local system of care. Meaningful progress will require sustained federal and provincial investment, policy reform, and political will. Holding this truth alongside daily urgency was challenging, and at times discouraging, for staff and leadership alike.

Looking ahead, our new facility development offers a tangible and hopeful path forward. As we finalize designs and pursue government support for the majority of capital costs, this project represents the culmination of decades of experience. Our Home for Good will be a modern emergency shelter and stabilization hub designed to support people from first contact through a clear pathway to housing.

Each day, we see the impact of steady, compassionate work and the difference it makes in people's lives. With strong community relationships and a shared vision, we move forward with optimism toward a future where everyone has a place to call home.

Thanks to our Board of Directors | Dirka Prout (Chair), Mike McGregor (Vice Chair), Paula Lombardi (Secretary), Depo Ogunruku (Treasurer), Bill Madder, Patrick Mahon, Selvin Mejia, Bronagh Morgan, Joanna Redden

Frontline shelter services

Over the past decade, Unity Project has continuously adapted its emergency shelter and housing stability services to meet the shifting realities of the housing and homelessness crisis.

In 2017, we formalized a housing-and stability-focused approach to shelter delivery, creating a practical toolkit to integrate Housing First principles into daily operations. What had once been a values-driven practice became a defining organizational priority and game-changing example to our community: looking beyond basic needs to support people experiencing homelessness in securing permanent housing, with the resources necessary to sustain stability, recovery, and belonging.

Over this same period of time, a focus on housing outcomes was driving the City's homeless prevention strategy, and by late 2019, this shift was easing pressures on the shelter system.

That momentum changed abruptly in March 2020 with the onset of COVID-19, and required our relocation to a hotel. In partnership with the City's Coordinated Access system, we expanded capacity and prioritized individuals with complex health and housing needs, including couples and people with pets.

Though born of crisis, the hotel model revealed important lessons. Private rooms enhanced dignity, safety, and stability. Participants experienced greater calm and privacy, while staff were able to dedicate more time to housing-focused supports rather than conflict management.

Our return to the Old East Village facility in May 2023 marked both a homecoming and a reinvention. With capital support from the City of London and a London Community Foundation program enhancement grant, we retrofitted the site to operate a hybrid indoor-outdoor model serving 38 individuals in double-occupancy rooms: 12 interior beds and 26 exterior sleeping cabins.

Now in our second full year of this configuration, the challenges are undeniable. Limited control over entry and shared living spaces contribute to complexity and tension. Most significantly, participants are staying longer. Severe rental scarcity, escalating housing costs, and minimal increases in income supports mean rent supplements are often essential for housing access. Securing these supports requires connection to Housing Stability Workers, creating system bottlenecks that slow transitions.

The reality is clear: the housing crisis now directly shapes the duration and depth of homelessness. Yet Unity Project remains unwavering. We continue to adapt, advocate, and evolve — guided by the belief that homelessness is not inevitable, and that dignity, stability, and belonging remain at the heart of our work.

Impact and Outcomes

- 80 people aged 19 to 85 supported through 24/7 shelter
- 42 identified as male, 38 as female, and 2 as trans or non-binary
- 23 identified as Indigenous
- 36 couples or family units
- 22 arrived with pets, including 12 dogs, 9 cats, and 1 other companion animal
- 17 moved into permanent housing
- 31 actively working toward housing
- 21 were exited from the program (various reasons)
- 11 unknown and other outcomes

Housing Stability Program

People living in poverty experience disproportionately high rates of chronic homelessness, untreated physical and mental health challenges, food insecurity, and deep social isolation. They also face persistent barriers navigating income supports, rental markets, and complex service systems.

Unity Project's Housing Stability Program (HSP) provides moderate- to intensive-level, relationship-based case management for individuals with higher needs and a history of homelessness. Referred through the City of London's Coordinated Access system, participants receive support to secure housing and ongoing in-home assistance to sustain stability, wellness, and community connection.

With majority funding from United Way Elgin Middlesex and sustaining support of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, two Housing Stability Workers (HSWs) support 30–40 individuals annually. Participants are met weekly or as needed to implement personalized plans addressing medical, legal, income, tenancy, family, mental health, addictions, and essential life skills such as budgeting, shopping, cooking, cleaning, and coping strategies. HSWs conduct intake, case planning, case conferences with partners, data tracking, and administer a discretionary Participant Support Fund.

Assessment tools guide progress. The VI-SPDAT establishes baseline needs and goals, with reassessments measuring reductions in acuity over time. A Housing Needs Assessment identifies existing supports, gaps, and referrals required for long-term success.

HSWs walk alongside participants throughout the housing journey — attending viewings, assisting with move-in needs, helping furnish homes, strengthening independent living skills, and supporting successful tenancy and wellbeing.

Success in HSP is measured not simply by housing placement, but by stability that lasts. For many, this begins after years of homelessness, trauma, and system disconnection. Progress is reflected in growing trust, renewed confidence, and reaching out for support before challenges escalate into crisis.

For the broader community, success means fewer returns to homelessness and reduced pressure on emergency systems. For participants, it is deeply personal: a door that locks, a safe place to land, and a sense of belonging restored – a reasonable life moving forward.

Impact and Outcomes

38 individuals supported

25 maintained housing

9 newly housed

2 graduated from the program

1 exited from the program

1 sadly died



Condensed Financials

April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025

INCOME

Homeless Prevention Program	\$1,600,000.00
Insurance Proceeds	\$129,630.00
Donations and Fundraising	\$539,197.00
Foundation Grants	\$74,415.00
United Way Elgin Middlesex	\$130,000.00
Transitional Housing Rents	\$26,735.00
Amortization Deferred Contributions	\$62,333.00
Interest	\$23,256.00

TOTAL INCOME \$2,585,566.00

EXPENSES

Program	\$1,977,731.00
Administration	\$177,314.00
Fundraising	\$202,551.00
Amortization Capital Assets	\$113,318.00
Interest on Long-Term Debt	\$56,250.00

TOTAL EXPENSES \$2,527,164.00

ASSETS

Cash	\$1,052,577.00
Investments	\$269,951.00
Accrued Interest	\$11,995.00
HST	\$24,930.00
Prepaid Expenses	\$19,093.00
Capital Assets Fund	\$3,767,795.00

TOTAL ASSETS \$5,146,341.00

LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable	\$229,613.00
Remittances	\$6,117.00
Deferred Revenue	\$93,720.00
Restricted Funds	\$805,803.00
Long-Term Debt	\$1,250,000.00
Deferred Contributions	\$1,396,264.00
Fund Balances	\$1,364,824.00

TOTAL LIABILITIES \$5,146,341.00



**Complete audited financial statements
available upon request: info@unityproject.ca*



Thanks for standing with us

We are deeply grateful to the supporters who converted compassion into action this year. More than 900 donations — gifts, grants, and goods — fortified our operations and delivered life-giving resources for the participants and pets in our care. We can only recognize a selection of donors where permission allows. We thank every contributor for their generosity.

Funders

City of London
Government of Ontario and the Ontario
Trillium Foundation

Grantors

London Community Foundation (LCF) -
Community Vitality Grant
Miggsie Fund - Lawson Foundation
Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada
United Way Elgin Middlesex
Lutheran Social Services (London)
Cambia Development Foundation
London Lawyers Feed the Hungry -
Law Society Foundation
London St. Thomas Association of REALTORS®
and Ontario Realtors Care Foundation®

Third Party Events

Catholic Women's League of Canada
Forest City Eagles London Lottery
Home Sweet Home - RONA+ Foundation
London Hunt and Country Club
New St. James Presbyterian Church -
Mission and Social Action Committee
Showdown in the Downtown
Westminster Secondary School

Donor Advised Grants

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Brenda and Dave Savel Foundation -
Aqueduct Foundation
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George and Mary Turnbull Family Foundation
at Toronto Foundation
Hitchcock Family Foundation Fund -
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Gilby Foundation
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Van Der Veen Family Fund, Strategic
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Wilson and Judith Rodger Fund - LCF

With special thanks to

Unifor Local 27 and the support of all the brothers
and sisters

Ron and Susan Holliday our Giving Tuesday and
every day, every way Champions

**and to the many more third-party events and donors*

The 14th Annual UPwithART

It was the Year of the Quilt at the 14th Annual UPwithART arty-party silent art auction fundraiser, held April 25, 2024 at Museum London. More than 400 community members gathered in support of Unity Project and Museum London, raising nearly \$200,000 for culture, compassion, and community. Together, we created something truly remarkable.

Quilts are both utilitarian and beautiful — crafted to mark life events, record histories, and offer comfort and warmth. Often created communally, they represent creativity, care, labour, and home.

The quilt theme wove through the entire event, where guests bid on a quilt handmade by Unity Project Executive Director Chuck Lazenby, and another by the London Modern Quilt Guild was the door prize. Dozens of attendees put their hearts and hands to making a collaborative “Unity Quilt” exploring the meaning of home. The creation now hangs in Unity Project’s shelter reception, welcoming those entering their temporary home to envision a home of their own.

Extraordinary creativity and generosity filled the auction floor with 68 artworks, along with compelling objects and experiences donated by local businesses. Artist Rain Fenek Bloodworth designed a guest-exclusive tote bag, *Out of Luck Full of Hope*, reflecting communities of care. Singer-songwriter Jenny Berkel delivered a powerful spoken-word performance, *The Origin of Care*, created especially for the evening. The atmosphere was electric — music, delicious food, conversation, and philanthropy.

UPwithART was first mounted by Unity Project in 2005 and then again in 2007, celebrating the creative talents of residents, staff, volunteers, and founding members. In 2011, it re emerged as an annual event featuring a vibrant mix of original artworks contributed by a stellar list of established, emerging, and Unity Project participant artists, and later added the ‘collectors collection’ - historical and contemporary works contributed by local area art collectors.

Since 2019, Unity Project and Museum London have partnered in the conduct of UPwithART, interweaving arts, culture, and social justice into the fabric of a healthy, vibrant London.

Proceeds are shared equally between our two charities, except for Money Now donations, which directly support Unity Project. This year’s event contributed over one-third of the funds Unity Project must raise annually to supplement government funding of its emergency shelter programming. We extend heartfelt thanks to the artists, sponsors, collectors, advisors, volunteers, service providers, and our dedicated staff and board members who bring UPwithART to life.





Celebrating UPwithART contributors

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 Kerr Home Design
 LSTAR
 Medpoint Health Care Centre
 Royal Fence Limited
 Skinner & Skinner Architects
 ShowPro Event Design
 Benz Gallery
 Embassy Cultural House
 London Modern Quilt Guild
 Michael Gibson Gallery
 Westland Gallery
 Framing & Art Centre (Horton)
 The Ivy Academy

Artists

Mothanna Alzobi
 Michael Barber
 Ross Bell
 Greg Benz
 Marla Botterill
 Heather E. Carey
 Edgar Castro
 Jack Cocker
 Sean Couchie
 Michael Cywink
 Meghan Dauphinee
 Soheila Esfahani
 Liza Eurich
 Joscelyn Gardner
 Zara Gardner
 Andrés Garzon Espitia
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 Shannon Taylor-Jones
 Pamela Verdon

Collectors Collection

Muriel Atkinson
 Ron Benner & Jamelie Hassan
 Diana Coates
 Lucretia & Wyn Geleynse
 Patrick & Barbara Mahon
 David Merritt & Dawn Easton-Merritt
 Megan Walker & Kristyan Robinson
 Barbara & Jens Thielsen
 Flora & Ian Tripp
 Sarah & John White

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