

CCSAC Annual Report – 2022 - DRAFT

Comprising 22 central Ottawa churches, the Centretown Churches Social Action Committee (CCSAC) works to support people who are isolated or living in poverty. It also ensures the common voice of central Ottawa churches is heard on various social justice or poverty-related issues. CCSAC is an incorporated not-for-profit organization and a registered charity under the Income Tax Act.

CCSAC provides its members an opportunity to collaborate on projects and hosts monthly meetings to share information and ideas. Its principal program is the Centretown Emergency Food Centre, the local food bank assisting vulnerable people living in central Ottawa, to achieve food security. In recent years, it has also undertaken several new initiatives to mitigate the impact of poverty on many residents of central Ottawa.

Centretown Emergency Food Centre in 2022

The Food Centre operated three days a week, providing clients with nutritious food supplies – staples, fresh produce and dairy and meat – for up to five days in pre-packaged bags, depending on family size. The number of visitors increased this year to pre-pandemic levels as food prices rose and the pandemic restrictions eased. In total, 8088 individuals were served, including many families with children.

As noted in last year's report, in 2021 the City of Ottawa switched to a new community services funding model, asking charities to compete for five-year sustainable funding. The Food Centre was not successful in the competition, but did receive one year of transition funding for 2022. As the annual grant represented about 27% of the Food Centre's operating requirements, finding solutions to this situation has been a priority of both CCSAC and the Food Centre Management Committee. As 2022 ends, work is underway to find more accessible and larger space as city officials have indicated accessibility and offering varied services are important criteria for future funding. Centretown United Church has been a generous and supportive landlord for decades, and CCSAC and the Food Centre Management Committee are grateful for this partnership as we explore new avenues.

CCSAC in 2022

In 2022, member churches generously gave \$71,913 to CCSAC-related activities. This included \$23,568 given to CCSAC, and a further \$48,345 donated directly to the Food Centre by member congregations. This is a significant increase over 2021 donations, when churches were still struggling with the impact of lengthy closures due to pandemic-related restrictions. We remain grateful for the amazing generosity of our members.

CCSAC held a successful in-person Walk for the Centre this year, with almost every member church participating in the event. The walkathon is held to raise funds for the Emergency Food Centre and to increase awareness of the food insecurity facing many right now. We were pleased to welcome Ottawa Centre MP Yasir Naqvi and Ottawa Centre MPP Joel Harden this year, and they reinforced the importance of food security for all during this time of rising prices. People were very generous, allowing CCSAC to provide an additional \$36,000 to the Food Centre.

Recognizing the many challenges facing churches and the community in general, CCSAC held a strategic planning session in late Spring to chart a path forward for our organization. Under the guidance of the Reverend Sharon Moon, lively discussions were held on the future role of CCSAC within the central Ottawa community. An action plan was developed and work is now underway on a number of recommendations arising from the meeting.

CCSAC continued to partner with organizations working to alleviate the direct impacts of poverty in the catchment area. CCSAC focused on donating funds for the purchase of items for which partners such as shelters and day programs do not have sufficient resources. The Summer Health and Hygiene project again provided assistance with the purchase of toiletries and other supplies for the Restoring Hope and Fourth Avenue Baptist youth shelters

and Ottawa Innerscity Ministries. We also donated desk fans to Daybreak and Cornerstone to help their residents deal with summer heat. Our Winter Warmth project donated funds to the new Public Foods Community Fridge and Pantry to purchase essential food items; to Daybreak Housing for winter blankets; to Cornerstone Housing to help rehabilitate a residence damaged in a fire; to the Anglican Day Programs to help cover extra costs necessitated by the temporary closure of St. Luke's Table; and to Centretown United Church for their Christmas Hamper Project.

Community Partnerships and Advocacy

Increasing CCSAC's reach with other organizations involved on poverty issues remains a priority. We continued to participate via Zoom in the Centretown Neighbourhood Community Development Planning Table which provides information-sharing opportunities and brings together players providing services to the vulnerable population of the downtown core. A CCSAC-initiated project of the Planning Table involves establishing a food resiliency database for our catchment area, identifying organizations dealing directly and indirectly with food security and assembling statistics on the use of these services. Ultimately, it is hoped the database will serve as the basis for consultations with residents of Centretown on avenues to greater food independence.

Early in 2022, members of the CCSAC board and Food Centre Management Committee participated in virtual meetings with diverse groups of Canadians from across Canada to discuss ways to achieve further success in reducing poverty in Canada. The consultations were initiated by the National Advisory Council on Poverty. Reflections from these national consultations will be included in the 2022 report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty that will be issued early in 2023.

Closer to home, we explored the possibility of a new anti-poverty initiative, Stone Soup, for the Centretown area, but concluded that it would not be suitable at this time, given the continuing impacts of the pandemic on businesses and residents in central Ottawa. We continue to explore other possible initiatives such as community kitchens that would provide space for families living in temporary shelters without access to cooking facilities. Three CCSAC churches are considering providing this service. This year did see the launch of Centretown's first community fridge, Public Foods, which has been developed by Glebe-St. James United Church, one of CCSAC's member churches. In addition, gardeners from the Ottawa East Community Gardens provided fresh produce this year to the Emergency Food Centre, another example of partnerships within our Central Ottawa catchment area.

As the year closed, CCSAC communicated with all three levels of government in support of the ongoing Downtown Ottawa Revitalisation Task Force (DORTF), encouraging decision makers to reach out via these consultations, to those most affected by the continuing decline of the central core of the city, including CCSAC member congregations.

Communication

CCSAC continued its efforts to reach member congregations and stakeholders in 2022. CCSAC prepared information on refugee programs in Ottawa that was shared with member congregations. Four issues of the newsletter highlighting the outreach activities of member churches were published and distributed electronically to a growing number of recipients. Members of CCSAC continued to write excellent articles on a range of topics for community newspapers. In addition, the new CCSAC Facebook page provides regular updates on diverse topics, and now has more than 100 followers.

Continuing the Speaker Series launched in 2021, this year CCSAC welcomed several guest speakers to our monthly Zoom meetings. These included a talk on Fourth Avenue Baptist's youth program, Haven Too, by then-coordinator Brandon Rabideau and a presentation by Executive Director Rachel Robinson on the three Anglican Day programs' work throughout the pandemic. In June, Daybreak's Richard Johnson spoke to CCSAC about this residential program for adults in Central Ottawa.

The Year Ahead

The challenges facing the Emergency Food Centre will continue to be a major preoccupation in the coming year, as we attempt to forge new partnerships and look for ways to address the funding shortfall caused by the loss of City of Ottawa support. In this vein, the 2022 Walk for the Centre with its excellent turnout was an important signal of the support the Food Centre enjoys amongst many in our catchment area. Walk for the Centre 2023 is already planned for October 1, 2023.

Further work on the action plan arising from the Strategic Planning Retreat will be a priority, including developing updated resources for new representatives and an information package for CCSAC clergy. We are improving CCSAC's governance structure to ensure that we are well-positioned to support those in need in Central Ottawa.

I would like to thank our member churches and clergy for their generous support and encouragement throughout the year. A special thanks is due this year to Allison Dingle and members of the Emergency Food Centre Management Committee, manager Diana Mahaffy and the Centre's small staff as well as its dedicated volunteers, all of whom have kept the Food Centre operating throughout the pandemic.

In addition, I would like to thank all the representatives of CCSAC who so ably represent their churches. In addition, thanks to the CCSAC executive, Emmy Verdun, CCSAC vice-chair, Mary Mussell and Elizabeth Demaray CCSAC co-secretaries; Janet Rivers, Treasurer; Elizabeth Kent, Walkathon Committee chair; Martha Musgrove and Susan Palmai, Community Outreach Committee co-chairs; Mary Mussell and Lorna Kingston, CCSAC Newsletter co-editors; and Anisha Eipe, Facebook editor.

Kristine Burr, Chair, CCSAC
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