

CCSAC Annual Report – 2023

In operation since 1967 and comprising 22 central Ottawa churches, the Centretown Churches Social Action Committee (CCSAC) works to improve the quality of life for the most vulnerable in our community.

CCSAC is a not-for-profit corporation and a registered charity under the Income Tax Act. Its main focus is the Centretown Community Food Centre, which operates as the food bank for a large central Ottawa catchment area. In addition, CCSAC has several smaller initiatives intended to mitigate the impact of poverty on residents of central Ottawa.

With a strong ecumenical focus, CCSAC provides its members an opportunity to collaborate on projects and share information. It also ensures the voice of central Ottawa churches is heard on various social justice and poverty-related issues. Representatives have a fiduciary responsibility to oversee the expenditures of all resources contributed by the member churches or secured through various fundraising activities.

Centretown Community Food Centre in 2023

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, depending on family size. Visitor numbers increased significantly as the year progressed and food prices rose. In 2023, 12,437 individuals were served, including many families with children, an increase of 54 percent over 2022

In May, the Food Centre moved to a new, accessible location at the Catherine Stree Community Service Hub which was a highlight of the year. With more space, it was possible to offer clients a grocery store shopping model which provides greater choice and more dignity to the food bank experience. The Food Centre is working very well in the new location, and has been renamed the Centretown Community Food Centre to reflect its strong commitment to serving the community.

Finances became a growing challenge in 2023 given the rise in demand and impact of inflation on prices noted above. Transition funding from the city of Ottawa to offset the 2021 loss of the Food Centre's operating grant ended in 2022, adding to the financial uncertainty it now faces. There is an intention to apply for another grant if new municipal grant opportunities occur. In the meantime, CCSAC and the Food Centre worked hard to raise additional resources, and used some of its contingency reserve to cover the operating deficit.

CCSAC in 2023

In response to these new challenges, in 2023, member churches contributed a total of \$89,302 to CCSAC-related activities, comprised of \$31,816 donated to CCSAC, and a further \$57,485 donated directly to the Food Centre by individual churches and their congregational members. This was a healthy increase over 2022 donations, and is particularly appreciated given the many other calls on congregational resources. We remain grateful for the continuing generosity of our member churches and friends within the community.

CCSAC ran its eighth annual "Walk for the Centre" in 2023 to raise money for the Food Centre. Strong support from member churches and the Ottawa community resulted in an additional \$39,308 for the Food Centre. As well, CCSAC was pleased to raise the profile of the growing severity of food insecurity in central Ottawa during the campaign.

During 2023, CCSAC undertook two programs to address the poverty in central Ottawa. A successful Summer Health and Hygiene project assisted several local partners in providing toiletries and other hygiene items to people in need. These are the kind of practical items that day programs and other charities have difficulty providing from their operating budgets, but are much-appreciated by their clients. In late 2023, CCSAC again ran its Winter Warmth project, in partnership with several local charities. Quilts and warm winter clothing were provided for people who often cannot afford to buy their own and also put food on the table. During 2023, CCSAC partnered with Centre 507, Daybreak, Catholic Immigration Services, St. Luke's Table, Haven Too amongst others.

The CCSAC Annual General Meeting was held at Blessed Sacrament Church in September 2023. Sahada Alolo, Manager of Community Affairs and Volunteer Engagement at Multifaith Housing Initiative, spoke to the group about MHI's exciting development plans for affordable housing in LeBreton Flats.

Community Partnerships and Advocacy

Increasing CCSAC's reach with other organizations involved in poverty mitigation remains a priority. We continued to participate in the Centretown Neighbourhood Community Development Planning Table which brings together agencies providing services to the vulnerable population of the downtown core. CCSAC was very pleased to have been one of a relatively small number of agencies invited in 2023 to join the Ottawa Poverty Reduction Strategy Community Roundtable. The Roundtable is providing advice to the City of Ottawa on the development of a new poverty reduction strategy. Dominion-Chalmers representative Christine Kincaid is representing CCSAC on the Roundtable.

CCSAC continues to intervene judiciously on serious poverty-related issues where it is considered that the voice of 22 downtown churches might make a difference. CCSAC wrote to the Premier and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to express concerns about the limited amount of funding to address homelessness initially made available to Ottawa. We were pleased to see that the funding allocation was eventually adjusted upward.

Individual CCSAC churches remained active as well in 2023. Three member churches offered community kitchens that provided space for families living in temporary shelters without access to cooking facilities. While take-up was limited, the concept remains a promising one. In addition, Centretown's first community fridge, Public Foods, which was developed by Glebe-St. James United Church, operated well throughout the year. By the end of 2023, the fridge was receiving foods from several grocery stores and restaurants that would otherwise have gone to garbage bins.

Communication

CCSAC continued its efforts to reach member congregations and stakeholders in 2023. Four issues of its newsletter highlighting the outreach activities of CCSAC and member churches were distributed electronically to a growing number of recipients. CCSAC representatives continued to write articles on varied topics for community newspapers. In addition, the CCSAC Facebook page, now with more than 200 followers, provided regular updates on diverse topics.

Continuing the Speaker Series launched in 2021, CCSAC welcomed several guest speakers this year to our monthly Zoom meetings. These included Ariel Troster, Councillor for Somerset Ward, Richard Leblanc, Executive Director, Centre 507; Nickie Snagg of Good Companions, and Dan Therrien, President of St. Vincent de Paul Stores.

The Year Ahead

The financial challenges facing the Centretown Community 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 pressures currently being experienced. In this vein, the 2023 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. CCSAC will host its ninth annual walkathon in 2024, and it is hoped that all CCSAC churches and members of the community will again join us on October 6, 2024.

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 Food Centre Management Committee, its Manager, Diana Mahaffy, and the Centre's small part-time staff as well as its dedicated volunteers, all of whom contributed to the relocation and to keeping the Food Centre operating well again this year.

In addition, I would like to thank the representatives of CCSAC who so ably represent their churches. A special thanks to the CCSAC executive, Emmy Verdun, CCSAC vice-chair and incoming treasurer; Mary Mussell and Elizabeth Demaray, CCSAC co-secretaries; Elizabeth Kent, Walkathon Committee chair; Susan Palmai, Community Outreach Committee co-chair; Mary Mussell and Lorna Kingston, CCSAC Newsletter co-editors; and Anisha Eipe, Facebook editor. A thank you as well to Janet Rivers who has stepped down after serving as CCSAC treasurer for the past three years.

Kristine Burr, Chair, CCSAC
April 2024