



Our July 2022 issue

“The road of life twists and turns and no two directions are ever the same. Yet our lessons come from the journey, not the destination.”

- William Arthur Ward

So much has happened at Fontbonne Ministries since we last had a chance to update you through the pages of *Springs of Hope*.

In October 2021 Fontbonne Ministries moved its corporate office from the Sisters of St. Joseph’s administrative building at 101 Thorncliffe Park Drive to 791 Queen Street East – already home to Fontbonne Place, Mustard Seed, and In Good Company.

With new flooring, a coat of paint, some shelving and new office furniture, Sister Gwen’s former home in Apartment 101 was transformed into an office space for Fontbonne Ministries’ Senior Management Team.

On December 7, 2021, we were visited by the Sisters of St. Joseph

Leadership Team, who conducted a blessing ceremony for the staff and the new space.

Thank you, Sisters, for your leadership and compassion over more than 20 years, supporting Fontbonne Ministries to become a multifaceted social service agency. Today and into the future, it is your legacy.

On February 2, 2022, sponsorship of Fontbonne Ministries was formally transferred from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto to the Catholic Health Sponsors of Ontario (CHSO).

With this transfer, the Sisters have stepped back from direct operational oversight of the organization’s activities.

On the same day, a new, post-transfer Board of Directors was elected:

Sister Georgette Gregory, CSJ
Chair

Sister Anne Marie Marrin, CSJ
Vice-Chair

Joan Breech, CPA
Treasurer

Pat Stoddart
Director at Large

Sister Annette Lacroix, CSJ
Director at Large

Hume Martin
Director at Large

We look forward to partnering with the new Board of Directors in providing innovating and responsive supports to those we serve.

“Social isolation is one of the most devastating things you can do to a human being; I don’t care how old you are.”

- Rosalind Wiseman



When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived on the worldwide stage in March 2020, it was clear that “business as usual” across the Fontbonne Ministries sites would be anything but.

Initially, when little was known about the virus and how it was spread, we focused on the most visible urgent community need – food access. Three days after the first Ontario state of emergency was proclaimed on March 17, staff at Mustard Seed served the first of *thousands* of take-away lunches and haven’t stopped since. By early 2021 they were within sight of the 10,000-lunch mark; by August 2021 it was close to 15,000, and surpassed 20,000 early this year.

Behind the scenes, staff and volunteers were noticing the troubling trend that was being reported almost daily: how lonely people were. Participants at Village Mosaic – seniors – were isolated at home, many unable to see friends and family in person for days – and then for weeks and months as the pandemic lockdowns dragged

on. What started as five-minute phone calls became sometime hours-long conversations just so the participants could hear another voice.

Clients of In Good Company, our friendly visiting program – whose lives were profoundly affected by isolation even before the arrival of COVID-19 – began to express to the phone volunteers that they feared dying alone.

Studio on the Hill participants were feeling the loss of connection and community over clay.

As provincial COVID mandates and long-term isolation continued, we became concerned about the mental and emotional well-being of our participants. Many were accustomed to attending classes and events at our locations several times a week – all of which were vital to reducing the chance of them developing, or deepening, anxiety and depression.

While the hundreds of telephone calls made by staff and volunteers were bridging the gap in the short

term, there was something crucial missing for our participants – the opportunity to connect with the friends they had shared in-person programs with.

A new effort began with Program Manager Andrea Linton and her team at Village Mosaic with conference calls where a group of participants could get together for activities that worked without a visual component, like trivia games and themed “Name That Tune” contests, and lots of animated conversations with people they could not meet in person.

With the generous assistance of [Ontario Trillium Foundation](#), we were able to pilot virtual programming for the first time with the provision of Zoom programming that reached a group of 15 people across Toronto with the provision of an iPad and data plan for the one-year duration of the project. With devices in hand – and one-on-one support for those who were technology-averse – participants went on trips around the world, took art lessons, played cards, bingo and trivia games,

Doing the ordinary...

with

exercised, meditated and, most importantly, came together while staying apart.

Virtual programming is here to stay even as we move slowly but surely out of the pandemic. Being able to connect digitally is critical for the holistic well-being of participants not yet comfortable with in-person

programming, and for those who are housebound. We've just started testing hybrid programming – which combines in-person (at multiple locations) and on-line participation – and look forward to rolling it out across our sites in the near future.

Social connection – creating safe spaces and caring communities

for those who might otherwise not have access to them – is central to Fontbonne Ministries' mission. We are grateful for the many lessons that the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us, and for the continued resilience and enthusiasm of our participants as we found new ways to serve and support them.



Virtual Euchre with Village Mosaic

“The Zoom programs are outstanding in quality and variety. I feel deeply grateful to have been able to participate.”

- T., a Village Mosaic participant

“I feel like a million bucks – I have new feet.”

- S., a Toronto Downtown East Foot Care Clinic participant

Through the generous support of **La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso**, the Toronto Downtown East Foot Care Clinics, led by Fontbonne Ministries, opened for service in December 2021.

The Foot Care Clinics are the result of a collaboration of members of the Toronto Faith Communities Downtown Hub (Faith+Hub) – Metropolitan United Church, St. James Cathedral, St. Michael's Cathedral and Fontbonne Ministries, supported by St. Michael's Hospital and their response to the lack of available foot care services for those struggling economically.



Dr. Minh, Foot Care Clinic

In the first five months of operation, the Clinics (open four days per week on a rotating basis at Mustard Seed, Metropolitan United Church and St. James Cathedral) provided

357 appointments serving 147 unique clients.

Of these, 56.4% were men and 43.6% women. The vast majority (78.9%) were over the age of 50, with ten clients over the age of 80. Almost 85% of clients reported their residence as low-income/subsidized housing or shelters, and ten self-identified as being homeless.

Led by the amazing chiroprapist Dr. Minh (who very quickly became the highlight of the clinic experience reported by clients), the Foot Care Clinics have met, and are continuing to fill, a significant service gap in the downtown east neighbourhood.

“Individual commitment to a group effort: that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.”

- Vince Lombardi

Since our beginnings, we have been blessed by the generosity of our donors and volunteers.

Our donor community is made up of many religious congregations, community organizations, volunteers, program participants, staff members and family and friends.

Our volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds: some are participants-turned-volunteers, some have relatives and friends who participated in our programs, and some simply saw a chance to contribute and be present.

We have also been grateful for the numerous collaborations and partnerships that enable us to continue serving the needs of the day, needs that have become even more pressing and urgent as COVID has exposed and deepened inequalities in our society.

Every success that we have had at Fontbonne Ministries since the beginning and especially since



2020 has been the result of united teamwork and collaborative vision.

We have been able to serve and make a difference because so many people, whether donor or volunteer, has provided an important piece of a larger puzzle. They may have provided funds, administrative skills, frontline efforts, or a specific set of gifts in interpersonal relationships or service or creativity that helped us and helped others.

Each piece has been essential and valuable, and our path through and beyond COVID-19 will be much the same; we will continue to serve and seek out unmet needs and look for new methods, means and resources of reaching those who need us.

We don't doubt that the global situations of pandemic and war can make it harder than ever to be as generous and giving as we'd like.

We deeply appreciate those who offer the time they can even as they balance work and family obligations; we are thankful to those who have offered the donations they are able to give even as they face increased economic pressures. What we are most grateful for is the spirit of love and care that is behind each hour that is volunteered and that comes with each dollar that is given.

You can visit fontbonneministries.ca to see all the ways your time and treasures can help those in need during these difficult times.



Fontbonne Ministries

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Fontbonne Ministries Mission

We are a welcoming community where you are not alone, and everyone belongs.

As an inclusive social service organization, our programs foster personal well-being and creativity and respond to food and housing insecurity, social isolation and loneliness.

Wherever you are in your life, the spirit of our founders – the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto – inspires us to join with you in nourishing mind, body and heart.