



The Road to Self-Discovery

When Heather Lost Her Job, She Found Herself



When Heather lost her job during COVID, her world turned upside down. She'd been a senior administrative assistant for 24 years. Now, on top of worrying about staying safe, she was faced with the added stress of income insecurity.

"I was devastated," she remembers.

"I sunk into a deep depression. I didn't want to talk to anyone or go anywhere or do anything.

"I spent a lot of time digging deep into myself. I discovered that I'm not such a bad person.

"I realized that I had been expecting too much of myself. I learned patience. And I learned that everyone has their own story and I needed to respect that.

"Perhaps, I thought, there was a reason why I lost my job – maybe I lost my job so I could find out who I was."

When the city opened up, Heather looked for work, but at 61, she soon realized that she was not going to get hired.

"I don't blame the companies. Should they hire me, someone who would retire in a few years? Or someone younger, who would be there for a while?"

Heather has lived in the same apartment in the community for 25 years; a gregarious woman, she knows a lot of people. Call it serendipity, but a friend told her about our Mustard Seed location, and today, she enjoys breakfast most days, "shops" the Clothing Boutique and books appointments at the Foot Care Clinic when she needs to.

And has found community, which matters as much as the meals.

Heather is single and never had kids. Her mom died a few years ago, and she never knew her dad, who was Indigenous. So community – at Mustard Seed and in her neighbourhood – offers her a sense of belonging.

"I've made friends in the drop-in," Heather says. "You talk to people and if you have a problem, they can sometimes help you solve it. People support each other without judgement.

"And the staff are always in a joyous mood. They are friendly, helpful and generous with their time. And when they see someone in need, they do whatever they can to help."

The community beyond Mustard Seed matters to Heather, too.

Today, she's a crossing guard in the neighbourhood, and talks about how much she adores the kids she sees safely across the street.

"Many come from troubled homes," she says. "I always look each one in the eye and wish them a good morning, so they know they're valued. One of the kids came back to thank me after she started high school. 'You always said good morning with a smile on your face' she said. 'And you told me I could do anything'. That meant a lot."

These days, she's been spending time with Sister Audrey in the drop-in — learning how to pray the rosary.

"I've always been interested in different religions," she says. "I'm not really religious but I am spiritual. It's the way I live."



Thanks to generous people like you, many individuals like Heather are supported. Help us change more lives and visit our website to make your gift today:
www.fontbonneministries.ca/donate

Fontbonne Ministries, Today and Tomorrow

Preserving the Legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph

Fontbonne Ministries new mission and vision statements, and strategic plan will guide our response to the challenges that lie ahead, and seize the opportunities that will present themselves.

We invited Joan Breech, Chair and President of Fontbonne Ministries Board of Directors, to share how she sees this strategic plan preserving the living legacy and the tremendous dedication of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

“So much changed as a result of COVID including the services Fontbonne provided and the clients served. Staff responded without hesitation in meeting the immediate needs and challenges created by the pandemic just as the Sisters of St. Joseph have done over the past 170 plus years.

“We learned a great deal about the most vulnerable in our community. These learnings informed our new mission statement, vision and strategic plan and will guide us as we empower our staff to develop inclusive programs, in conjunction with our community partners, delivered in an integrated fashion, for those in our community who are most socially isolated.

“In the early days of Fontbonne, our vision was to be a sustainable expression of the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph. It is not just about what the Sisters did but how they did it, respecting and valuing each person they encountered and fostering a climate of mutual support and collaboration. Our new strategic plan, supported by the values which have always guided our work, will be our lasting legacy.”

Our Vision: Nurturing Community, Dignity and Spirit

Our Mission: Inspired by the legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph, we foster community and wellbeing through welcoming and inclusive programs for the most socially isolated among us.

Our Strategic Priorities

Evolving: Foster a Vibrant Community through Inclusive Programs

- Focus our impact by clarifying our target participants
- Align programs with our mission to holistically and inclusively address participants' needs
- Evolve programs to support participants in an integrated way

Engaging: Cultivate Strategic Partnerships for Mission Excellence

- Partner with organizations that share our values to efficiently deliver programs and services
- Coordinate and provide effective referral services to enable our participants
- Benefit from sharing space and resources with partners offering complementary programs and services

Enduring: Ensure Long-Term Financial Viability & Growth

- Establish and confirm financial structures and processes to ensure viability
- Establish consistent and ongoing funding resources
- Preserve the legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph

Empowering: Strengthen & Develop Our Organization & its People to Flourish

- Engage and enable our people to support the effective delivery of programs
- Strengthen and diversify the Board to support the organization's transition
- Improve and ensure cost effectiveness of operations and infrastructure





Our Values

Respect:

We value each person as a distinct expression of God's love and invite each other to discover and to celebrate our unique gifts.

Advocacy:

We respond to society's evolving needs and mobilize positive change through transformational leadership.

Community:

We work together with neighbours and partners to build strong relationships that are mutually supportive and collaborative.

Compassion:

We give our full attention to each person and show understanding, empathy and sensitivity to their needs.

Accountability:

We use the resources entrusted to us with care, and make sustainable choices that will benefit future generations.

Sharing Our Vision

Our strategic priorities include preserving the legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph, integrating learnings into a plan that will embed the Sisters' values into the fabric of our organization for years to come.

Novices from the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood come to Fontbonne for a three-month training experience. We share similar values, although we live a world apart: a commitment to compassionate support of vulnerable and marginalized members of our community.

Over the past five months, we welcomed Sister Josephine from Kenya and Sister Audrey from Democratic Republic of Congo. Each spent their time with us supporting programs including the drop-in, kitchen meal preparation, the food market and women's craft program.

We asked Sister Josephine and Sister Audrey to share the one experience with us that resonated with them the most, and the core values they put into practice at Mustard Seed.

"I developed a deeper compassion for the participants," Sister Josephine said. "I connected with them. I listened to their stories – and I was committed to putting a smile on their faces! – so they knew I cared about them.

"Compassion was the most important value – I could feel it in my heart. Empathy – so many had nothing. And treating each one with the dignity and respect they deserve."



Sister Audrey was touched by the care and love Mustard Seed participants have for each other.

"I was touched by the care and love our sisters and brothers have for each other," said Sister Audrey. "They were so full of joy. I learned to give myself completely without looking for feedback or praise, to pay careful attention to their needs – often, being heard was as important as being fed.

"Respect is the value that comes to mind first. Respect for the whole person, with their strengths and their weaknesses. To love and understand them where they are."

Healthy Feet, Happy Life

How Foot Care Helps Susan Live Life to the Fullest



Susan and The Chariot get around in style.

For many of the people who count on Fontbonne, poor foot care is a fact of life that can result in arthritis, loss of muscle mass, circulatory disorders, severe back pain and a higher risk of heart disease and diabetes.

Regular access to a licensed chiropodist can make a significant difference in the overall health and well-being of our community. This healthcare service is not covered by OHIP and finding free or low-cost foot care is a challenge in Toronto.

Just ask Susan.

Susan, a painter and poet, lives with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and has problems with balance, so healthy, happy feet are critical to her ability to enjoy a full and rewarding life.

But she lives on a fixed income, so there's never enough money at the end of the month to pay for the care she needs.

That's why we – and Susan - are so grateful for the generous support of **La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso**, which has allowed the Downtown Toronto East Foot Care Clinic to work collaboratively to create welcoming spaces, purchase foot care equipment and supplies and hire chiropodist Dr. Minh Nguyen, who is available three days a week (Monday - Wednesday) at Fontbonne's downtown location as well as a day each (Thursday and Friday) at the Metropolitan United Church and St. James Cathedral Centre.

"I can't bend down to take care of my feet. During COVID, getting my feet looked after wasn't possible," Susan says. "I asked my social worker if she knew anyone

who could help and she referred me to Dr. Minh – he likes us to call him that."

Thanks to the care Susan gets once a month at our Foot Care Clinic, she no longer has debilitating foot pain.

And that's not all.

"My gait has improved," she says, "because I am not stepping carefully; I'm putting equal weight on each foot. After a treatment, I feel like I'm walking on marshmallows. Not sticky marshmallows but ones that are soft and pillowy!"

Dr. Minh, Susan says, is not just professional, he is kind and caring, too. And that means a lot.

"We have delightful conversations during my treatment," she says. "He has taken the time to get to know me as a person, not just as a patient, which helps to build a professional friendship. He is sensitive to my MS – the muscles in my legs sometimes cramp and he stops treatment until I can loosen them. I also have diabetes, and he always checks my feet to make sure I'm not developing neuropathy – nerve damage.

"So many people have helped me to be me – including Dr. Minh. "People say I have *sisu* – Finnish for guts and determination. Perhaps I do. But I believe it is my responsibility to show my gratitude by being enthusiastic about life."

Fontbonne's free Foot Care Clinic relies on the generous support of donors to help people like Susan access the care they need. To support our free Foot Care Clinic, please visit our website today: www.fontbonneministries.ca/donate

"We have renewed our support for the foot clinics for several years because we know their importance to this community who is so often on their feet. We also know that treatment is difficult to access which makes this service all the more necessary. Left untreated, even minor problems can quickly escalate into serious ones with long term repercussions."

– James Booty, Executive Director
La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso

Second Act

A Search for Meaning Leads to a Life of Joy

Sandy Lima has been volunteering at our Mustard Seed location for a year now, in the kitchen and the drop-in.

She comes on Saturdays because she still works as a primary school teacher.

But at a ceremony held September 8th, Sandy officially became a candidate for the Sisters of St. Joseph and has recently moved into their formation house.

“I heard the call to a religious life when I was in my 20s,” Sandy says. “But at that time, I didn’t get the kind of encouragement that would have given me the courage to follow the call. So, I became a teacher instead – for 24 years, now! – a career that I love.”

Sandy thought she had everything to be happy – she travelled, enjoyed relationships, bought whatever she wanted – she even got a tattoo - but realized she still felt empty, somehow. She made a commitment to pray every day for guidance, her faith grew stronger and the call began to bubble up again.

Prayer led Sandy to The Sisters of St. Joseph website where she discovered Sister Kristine Fernandes’ story - not so different from her own, really - and opened the door to her next life’s chapter.

“When I was in the community, I knew this was where I needed to be,” Sandy remembers. “Here I was, a stranger in their home, and they welcomed me with so much love, compassion and respect. The Sisters don’t just talk their mission and values, they put them into action every day.



Volunteering reminds Sandy to see beyond appearances and embrace the whole person.

“Volunteering at Fontbonne Ministries reminds me to see beyond appearances and see the person - the child that we all are, with the same needs to be loved, accepted, and welcomed, revering the inherent human dignity we are all born with, despite our differences. It’s all about human connection. The values of respect, advocacy, accountability, community, and compassion - the values established by the Sisters of St. Joseph - make this vital need for human connection possible.

“Being in the drop-in humbles me. The participants lead difficult lives but I don’t feel pity; I admire their strength and courage to get through each day.

“I often see a participant in the drop-in who I first met when I volunteered at the Winter Welcome program at my church. He always tells me, ‘Sandy, you look so happy when you’re here’. Clearly, I’m where I belong.”



www.fontbonneministries.ca/volunteer

Community Corner with Tabule Riverside

Meet Chef Rony and Diana

Sharing Food With the Community

According to Statistics Canada, 8.7 million Canadians, including 2.1 million children, lived in food-insecure households in 2023.

Too many people live day to day worrying about running out of food, compromising on quality and skipping meals because they can't afford to put food on the table.

And that means more than empty bellies. Lack of access to affordable nutritious food is associated with chronic health conditions including diabetes, obesity and heart disease. Mental health suffers. And the chance of social isolation increases.

Diana Sideris and Chef Rony Goraichy, who own the Tabule Restaurant Group, which includes Tabule Riverside, know that access to food is a basic human right.

That's why the restaurant shares homemade red lentil soup and mujaddara, made with rice, brown lentils with onions, every month with the people who count on Mustard Seed for meals.

We are immensely grateful to Tabule Riverside for becoming a community partner. This act of sharing food restores dignity and brings relief to so many facing adversity in our community.



Chef Rony Goraichy and Diane Sideris think access to food is a basic human right.

"Our decision to support food security stems from our deep commitment to nourishing our community and our personal experiences. During COVID, we had time to reflect on our values, both as a business and as individuals. Creating good food and memorable experiences is our passion, whether it's being part of someone's celebration or bringing a brief moment of happiness to someone having a tough day. Rony and I grew up with financial struggles and the stress of putting food on the table was often present. We believe that everyone deserves access to healthy, nutritious food and the joy that a good meal brings, and supporting food security initiatives is a small way we can make a difference."

– Diana Sideris, Tabule Restaurant Group



To find out how you can help us to meet the changing needs of the community we serve contact: **Wendy Bray** at wbray@fontbonnemministries.ca to learn more.



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