

Annual Report
2024-2025

Celebrating 25 Years

A Legacy of Caring & Compassion



Fontbonne Ministries

Celebrating 25 Years of Nurturing Community, Dignity & 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 Vision

Nurturing community, dignity, and spirit.

The Sisters of St. Joseph breaking ground for Fontbonne Ministries on Queen Street East



Our Values



Respect: We value each person as a distinct expression of God's love and invite each other to discover and 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.



Message from the Board Chair and Senior Leadership Team

Dear Friends,

This past year marked a significant milestone for Fontbonne Ministries: 25 years of walking alongside people in our community.

Since our founding, Fontbonne has responded to need as it appears, listening carefully, adapting thoughtfully, and remaining rooted in the values that first guided the Sisters of St. Joseph to this work. While much has changed over the past quarter century, that commitment has remained constant.

As this report shows, the need for steady, compassionate care is as urgent as ever. Rising housing costs, food insecurity, chronic health challenges, and social isolation continue to shape daily life for many in our city. In response, Fontbonne's programs meet people where they are, offering not only services, but consistency, respect, and human connection.

Throughout the pages that follow, you will meet individuals whose lives intersect with Fontbonne in different ways. You will read about a woman finding stability and privacy in permanent housing after years of uncertainty. You will learn how access to regular foot care can prevent serious health complications and help people remain mobile and independent. You will see how shared meals, affordable food, and simple conversation can become entry points to trust and belonging. And perhaps most importantly, you will see how relationships between participants, staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters shape a community where people feel seen and known.

These stories are not exceptions. They speak to the steady work that happens every day across Fontbonne's programs.

At 25 years, Fontbonne remains a place of welcome and response. We are proud of what has been built over time and mindful that this work is ongoing. The needs we see today call for the same attentiveness and resolve that shaped Fontbonne from the beginning.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Whether through your time, advocacy, partnership, or generosity, your support helps ensure that Fontbonne remains a place where people can find steadiness in uncertain times and feel supported as they move forward.

With gratitude,



Joan Breech
Director and Board Chair

More Than a Meal:

Dignity, Connection, and Belonging

At Fontbonne Ministries, nourishment has always been more than food on a plate.

Rooted in 25 years of compassionate care from the Sisters of St. Joseph, it is an expression of hospitality, an everyday way of saying, “Welcome, you belong here.”

At the drop-in, hot meals are prepared and shared each day. For many who come through the doors, this is the most consistent and nutritious meal they will have all day. For others, it offers something just as important: human connection that can be hard to come by when daily life is so unstable.

Chef Drew knows this reality intimately. “I’ve been on both sides of the line,” he says.



“Nobody wakes up and says they want to be homeless or hungry. Things happen. And no matter how you got here, you still deserve the same as everyone else.”

Drew brings decades of professional kitchen experience, along with lived experience of addiction and recovery, to his role at Fontbonne. Working in a modest space, he prepares meals for up to 150 people a day, stretching donor dollars through careful planning and determination.

Drew believes strongly in offering meals that are hearty, balanced, and comforting.

“Just because someone is living on a low income doesn’t mean they should be eating bad food,” he says. “I cook to see smiles. If they’re happy, I’m happy.” The meal itself is only part of what is shared.

Drew describes how food becomes a way to build trust through small gestures that help people feel noticed. He recalls one participant who was reluctant to come downstairs for meals, and how he began bringing food to them directly, knowing that otherwise they might not eat.

“Sometimes people just need someone to notice them,” he says.

That same spirit is visible just outside Fontbonne’s doors (or indoors during the winter months) at the Good Food Market, where affordable, fresh produce—supported through our partnership with FoodShare Toronto—is made available to the wider community.

Robyn, a longtime volunteer, has spent her professional life in community service.

“The market is way more than fruit and vegetables,” Robyn says. “It’s about people who wouldn’t normally interact standing in line together, talking, helping one another out.”

Each Wednesday, the market brings together seniors on fixed incomes, neighbours accessing food support for the first time, and community members looking for affordable produce. Everyone is welcome, and that openness is intentional.

“If it were only available to one group, you wouldn’t get the community-building part,” Robyn explains. “It’s the mix that matters.”

Over time, Robyn has come to know many of the regular customers. She remembers conversations from week to week and checks in.

“Calling someone by name tells them they matter,” she says. “They feel seen and people respond to that.”

Small acts of generosity unfold regularly: a customer covering the cost for someone short a dollar, neighbours chatting while they wait, recipes shared between transactions. Individually, these moments may seem ordinary. Together, they create a sense of belonging that is increasingly rare.

“I feel privileged to volunteer here,” Robyn says. “I give my time, but I receive so much too.”

As food costs continue to rise across Toronto, Fontbonne has seen more people accessing its food programs for the first time. The strain is being felt across the city. Through it all, Fontbonne remains committed to meeting people with dignity and respect.

“We have seen how at Fontbonne, the market is more than a place to buy food,” says Mireya Forero, Community Markets Support Senior Coordinator at FoodShare Toronto. “It’s a space where neighbours stop, talk, and begin to know one another.”



Growing Access Across Toronto

FoodShare advocates for food justice by supporting community-based food initiatives and through ongoing advocacy and public education.

They support **51 community markets** across the city, providing access to affordable, fresh food in neighbourhood spaces.

In 2025 alone, these markets **sold more than 307,243 pounds of produce**, equal to over one million servings.

From the meals prepared in the kitchen to the produce offered at the market, food continues to be one of Fontbonne’s most powerful ways of bringing people together.

Drew puts it simply: “Everybody deserves the same. Nobody is more important than anybody else.”

At Fontbonne, that belief is reflected daily in shared meals, respectful conversations, and the steady constancy of a place to return to week after week.



Drop-in:

A Place to Be in Peace

Fontbonne was created 25 years ago with the belief that people deserve to be met with care, consistency, and respect. That way of showing continues throughout the drop-in today.

Bernard had walked past the building for years without knowing what happened inside. A friend from his church mentioned there was foot care available, and that was enough to bring him through the door. He did not expect to stay.

“I was positively surprised when I came in,” Bernard recalls. “Everyone was so welcoming, and the rules were not rigid compared to other places. I realized there were plenty of services all under one roof.”

Bernard came to Canada from Europe in the early 2000s and lived independently for many years. Changes to his housing situation, rising costs, and declining health began to close in. His experience was not sudden. It unfolded gradually. Over time, Fontbonne became a place he returned to, not for any one service, but because of how it felt to be there.

“This is really a decent place where you can just be in peace,” he says. “In other places, I’m always tense. Here, I can sit. I can eat. I can just be here without feeling like I must protect myself all the time.”

That sense of ease includes having a place to rest during the day.

“Being able to lie down is very important, not just for me, but generally for everybody. When you’re dealing with health issues, especially circulation issues like me, you need to get off your feet, literally and figuratively. You need to rest properly. If you don’t have that opportunity, things get worse.”

The way people are met at the drop-in reflects a broader culture across Fontbonne, one shaped by the Sisters of St. Joseph’s attention to presence, follow-through, and respect. Kenny, Fontbonne’s housing worker, sees how that approach resonates with people coming through the door.

“A lot of people have been disappointed before,” he says. “So when they come in, the first thing they want to know is whether their experience here is going to be any different from the other places in the city.”

“We listen first. We explain what support looks like at Fontbonne and make it clear that everyone belongs here. And then, we keep showing up.”

Mornings at the drop-in begin with breakfast, and throughout the day, people can access practical supports like the clothing boutique.

Bernard gestures to his winter coat as he talks. “It came at exactly the right time,” he says. “And it’s not just about having something warm. It’s about not standing out. About being able to go somewhere without feeling embarrassed.”

Shaw is newer to Fontbonne. He started coming a few months ago after a friend suggested it. He is still sleeping in his car and, at times, in a tent. His days now have a loose but reliable structure.

“I come in for breakfast and coffee, sit for a while, watch a movie or just rest on a mat,” Shaw says. “If Kenny is around, I ask about housing and job opportunities and then head to the library to look for work.”

“The staff are not just here to do a task and leave. You can tell they care about the people who walk through the door. They actually want to help.”

He also remembers being invited to provide feedback about the drop-in.

“People actually listen here,” he says. “They want to know what works and what doesn’t. That’s not common when it comes to these kinds of services.”

At Fontbonne, the drop-in is not chaotic, rushed, or transactional. It is orderly, calm, and predictable. A place where people can eat, rest, and gather themselves before stepping back out into the day.

Bernard puts it simply, “You can breathe here.”



Homelessness Doesn't Pause During the Day

Homelessness is often associated with shelters and nights outdoors, but for many people, the hardest hours are during the day. Research shows that once overnight shelters close, **people without stable housing** spend long stretches moving between public spaces, transit, and temporary stops – visible across the city, but **often overlooked in how services are designed and structured**. This form of “daytime homelessness” shapes daily routines, health, and safety in cities, while receiving far less attention than overnight shelter needs.*

*International Journal of Homelessness, University of Western Ontario

A Place to Land:

Toni Finds Home at Fontbonne Place

In a city where rents continue to climb and affordable housing is increasingly out of reach, stability has become a luxury many people simply cannot afford. Older single women are among the most affected, often living on fixed incomes, navigating health challenges, and facing long waits for safe, appropriate housing.

Located in Toronto's Riverside neighbourhood, Fontbonne Place is a low-rise building with 18 rent-geared-to-income, one-bedroom apartments. It was intentionally built by the Sisters of St. Joseph to provide permanent, affordable housing created for senior women who might otherwise be homeless or precariously housed.

Toni is new to Fontbonne Place. She is still getting used to the quiet, the space, and the privacy of having a place of her own. "I still can't believe this is mine," she says.

"I don't have to share. I don't have to hide. I can just be here."

Before arriving at Fontbonne Place, Toni's life had been shaped by years of instability. In her early forties, she was running her own business and doing well. Then, in quick succession, she lost both parents, left an abusive relationship, and experienced serious health issues. "Too many things happened at once," she says. "I just couldn't keep my footing."

After nearly 25 years of being substance-free, Toni fell back into addiction. She lost her business, her income, and eventually her housing. For several years, she moved between friends' couches before covertly staying in a single room at her ex-husband's rent-geared-to-income apartment—careful not to draw attention to herself. "I barely left the apartment," she says. "My life became very small."

Eventually, she was offered housing through another organization. It was a roof over her head, but it came at a cost. Toni was the only woman, sharing a kitchen, laundry room, and bathroom in a house of much younger men.

Her room in the attic meant she had to navigate steep, ladder-like stairs despite having arthritis and recovering from cancer surgeries. "I was always on guard," she explains.



“You’re thinking about what you’re wearing, when you can use the bathroom, the pile of dirty dishes in the sink that you need to work around just to make yourself dinner. It wears you down.”

She also lived with constant fear of losing the one companion who kept her grounded: her dog, Luna. “I spent two years worrying I’d be found out and told to leave,” Toni says. “That kind of chronic stress takes a toll on your body.”

Toni first came to Fontbonne looking for meals and a safe place to spend time during the day. She tried other drop-ins in the area, but this one felt different. “There was no chaos; no fighting,” she says. “And there were women, both staff and participants. I didn’t feel like I stuck out in the same way.”

It was through the drop-in that Toni learned about the housing upstairs. Once she realized Fontbonne Place was women-only, accessible, and pet-friendly, she began asking questions—persistently. “I kept checking in,” she admits, laughing. “I really wanted this place.” When the call finally came, it felt unreal.

Walking into her apartment for the first time, Toni was stunned. “There’s a full kitchen, a dining area, a living room, and a big bathroom,” she says. “The closets are huge. There’s even a Juliet door I can open for fresh air.” Much of the apartment was already furnished. “I didn’t even own a chair before,” she adds. “I walked in, and everything I needed was already here.”

James, the social worker at Fontbonne, sees how much physical space matters. “The building itself is part of the care,” he says. “It was thoughtfully designed to feel generous, clean, and calm. Even after 25 years, it’s beautifully maintained. That communicates care in a very tangible way.”

He notes that the scale of Fontbonne Place is just as important as its design. “It’s small enough that people know one another, but not so small that anyone feels on top of each other,” James explains. “That balance creates the conditions for community to form organically, without pressure.”

For many residents, including Toni, that stability changes what feels possible. “When you’re always worried about where you’re going to sleep, you can’t think beyond the next day,” Toni says. “Now I can focus on my health. I can start planning for my future.” After surviving breast cancer and, more recently, lung cancer, being able to rest without fear of being uprooted has been critical.

James sees this shift often. “Once people aren’t living in constant survival mode, there’s space,” he says. “Space to heal, to reflect, and to reconnect with themselves and with others.”

Toni is beginning to open up. She’s joining conversations, sharing ideas, and thinking about swimming, yoga, and reconnecting with parts of herself that were put on hold. “For over a decade, I was barely managing,” she says. “This place makes me want to be part of things again.”

When asked if she sees Fontbonne Place as her forever home, Toni doesn’t hesitate.

“I’m not going anywhere,” she says. “This is the first place in a long time where I feel settled.”

In a city where housing is uncertain and often out of reach, Fontbonne Place offers something steady and lasting: a home where women facing housing instability can finally exhale, live with dignity, and focus on what comes next.

Housing Insecurity and Women in Canada

The average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Toronto was about \$2,343* per month in the first quarter of 2025, according to the Toronto Regional Real Estate Board rental market report. **Recent national data show that women account for more than one-third of people experiencing homelessness.** Many, particularly older women, experience hidden forms of homelessness such as staying temporarily with others or in short-term accommodations.

* Government of Canada’s Everyone Counts 2024 report

Finally Comfortable on Her Feet: Sam's Story

Fontbonne Ministries is rooted in a long tradition of health care carried forward by the Sisters of St. Joseph.

When Sister Rosemary McGinn, a retired nurse, asked herself how she could offer more hands-on service to the community at Fontbonne, her research led her to a short foot care certification designed for nurses. For the next ten years, she welcomed each person who came through the door, tending not just to sore feet, but to the individual needs of each person, laying the foundation for a clinic that continues today.

That same spirit of practical, personal care carries through the Footcare Clinic now led by Dr. Minh. Today, the clinic serves seniors, people living on low incomes, and people without stable housing—many of whom arrive after years without consistent care.

As a chiroprapist, Dr. Minh sees some of the most severe foot issues in the city.

“These aren’t just cosmetic problems,” Dr. Minh says. “They tell you a lot about what someone is dealing with in their life. Foot issues often reflect chronic illness, mental health challenges, poverty, or unstable living conditions. When daily life is unpredictable, personal hygiene and self-care can fall away, not from neglect, but from necessity. For people living outdoors or moving between shelters, damp socks and cold shoes can lead to trench foot, a painful condition caused by prolonged exposure to wet conditions. Skin breaks down. Infections follow. Walking becomes excruciating.”

For people living with diabetes, the risks are even higher. Reduced sensation means injuries go unnoticed. Small wounds become ulcers. Infections can spread quickly.

“In the worst cases,” Dr. Minh says, “it can mean hospitalization or amputation.”

Sam understands what it means to live with foot problems for years.

Now in her late seventies, she first came to Fontbonne’s drop-in in 2011, after her husband died. Fontbonne soon became part of her routine. She came for meals, programs, and conversation. She enjoys being around people and, just as much, being a listening ear.



“I like talking with the other participants,” Sam says. “Sometimes they tell me things they don’t tell anyone else. I try to help if I can. Sometimes people just need someone to hear them.”

Sam learned about the Footcare Clinic through a friend she met at the drop-in who lives at Fontbonne Place.

Past experiences elsewhere had made her cautious.

“I’m fussy about my feet,” she says, laughing. “I’ll admit that. But I’ve had problems with them for years. At other places, the appointments felt rushed. One person cut me and then tried to blame it on blood thinners, but I’m not on blood thinners! I became anxious about anyone touching my feet. They got so bad that I wouldn’t even take my socks off. I avoided many situations and stopped swimming altogether.”

Chronic fungal infections in both of Sam’s big toes meant thick, painful nails that never seemed to improve. Dr. Minh treated the underlying infection using approaches shaped by his own research and experience, developed after seeing standard treatments fail in this population.

From the start, Sam noticed how different the experience felt.

“When I came to Fontbonne, things felt much better. Dr. Minh is an angel. I call him Twinkle Toes,” Sam says, laughing.

“Because he’s so gentle. I didn’t even feel what he was doing, just his hands holding my toes.”

Now, she says, her feet feel lighter. Better than they have in years.

That kind of relief changes more than comfort. When foot pain is managed, Dr. Minh sees people walk farther, stand more confidently, and move with ease again. At Fontbonne, foot care has never been just about feet. It is about making sure people can move through their days safely, comfortably, and on their own terms.

As Dr. Minh puts it, “You can have full use of your arms and a clear mind. But if you can’t get from one place to another, your world gets very small. Helping people stay on their feet helps open that world again.”



Fontbonne and the other members of the Downtown Toronto East Footcare Clinic gratefully acknowledge the generous support of La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso.

Trench Foot: When Exposure Becomes Injury

While commonly associated with military history, trench foot remains a current and preventable risk for people experiencing homelessness, particularly during Canadian winters. Symptoms can include swelling, numbness, skin breakdown, and infection. Left untreated, trench foot can lead to permanent nerve damage, serious infection, and lasting loss of mobility.*

For people living outdoors or moving between shelters, avoiding prolonged exposure to cold, wet conditions is often impossible. **Access to foot care services plays a critical role in early identification, treatment, and prevention of trench foot.**

Regular foot care can prevent injuries from becoming serious enough to limit mobility or require hospitalization.

* Toronto Public Health – Cold Weather Response & Health Impacts; Street Health Toronto



FONTBONNE BY THE NUMBERS

September 2024 – August 2025

FONTBONNE FOOD SERVICES:

Served 30,627 meals and snacks and hosted 2,213 Good Food Market visits.

Good food brings people together. Last year, Fontbonne's food programs were a steady presence for many in the community.

DROP-IN SERVICES:

Welcomed 16,191 drop-in visits.

People come for what they need—and stay because they're welcome.

Last year, the drop-in offered a consistent place to land, providing essential support with dignity and care.

FONTBONNE PLACE:

7 of the original residents still call it home.

Long-term housing changes lives.

Fontbonne Place offers permanent, affordable housing designed for stability and independence.

THE FOOTCARE CLINIC:

Accommodated 1,423 visits.

Healthy feet keep people moving. The clinic provided essential care that helps prevent pain, infection, and loss of mobility.

THE CLOTHING BOUTIQUE:

Distributed 6,992 clothing and hygiene items.

Clean, season-appropriate clothing matters. Fresh socks, a warm layer, or basic hygiene can help someone go about their day like anyone else.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Steve and Anne's commitment to Fontbonne Ministries has grown over time, shaped by hands-on involvement, and a shared belief in meeting people with dignity and respect.

Steve first came to know Fontbonne through the legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph, long before the current building opened on Queen Street East. As a teacher chaplain with the Toronto Catholic District School Board, he brought students, and later groups of educators, to Fontbonne for days of service. Anne shared in that commitment, and together they stayed connected through volunteer involvement and consistent giving.

That connection deepened during COVID. After reading about volunteers who made sandwiches for a shelter, Anne helped organize a group of about 25 friends to make sandwiches every Saturday. They called themselves the Sandwich Sisters and delivered food weekly to Fontbonne's food program throughout the pandemic.

As Fontbonne's programs evolved and hot meals returned, Steve and Anne asked a practical question. What is most helpful now? The answer led them to shift from annual giving and weekly sandwich-making to monthly donations that support Fontbonne's meal program. Several members of the Sandwich Sisters group chose to do the same, providing predictable support that helps staff plan meals week to week. Others continued contributing in ways that worked best for them.

Over time, Steve and Anne took tours of the drop-in and clothing boutique and met staff.



Seeing the programs up close helped them better understand how Fontbonne responds to the real needs of the community it serves. What continues to resonate with them is Fontbonne's willingness to adapt.

“The needs of the people coming through the doors change,” Steve says. “And Fontbonne responds. That gives us confidence that our support is being used where it matters.”

They point to the everyday details that reflect this approach. People ordering coffee at a counter and sitting with a mug, not a paper cup. The clothing boutique where individuals choose what they need. Foot care and meals offered in ways that respect the person receiving them.

“It never feels like an assembly line,” Steve says. “People are treated like customers, like individuals.”

Over the years, Steve and Anne's involvement has taken many forms, from donating clothing and writing Christmas cards to encouraging friends to get involved. What began with small acts of service has grown into a community of support.

“Small things can have a big impact,” Anne says. “And staying connected is what makes it meaningful.”

Fontbonne is grateful to Steve and Anne for their long-standing support and for the many ways they have helped others stay connected to this community.

Fontbonne Ministries

General Fund

(September 1, 2024 - August 2025)

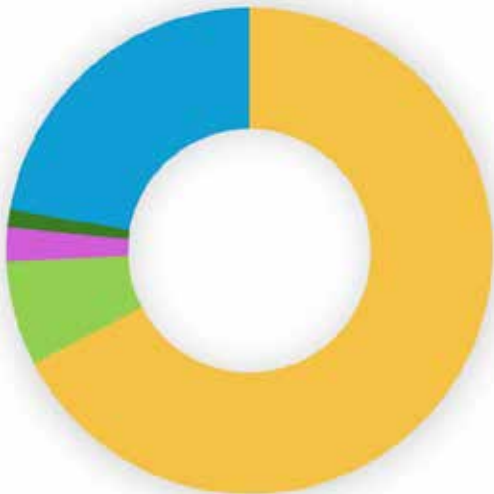
Revenue and Other Funding	2025	2024
Donations	\$ 1,831,494	\$ 1,672,961
Rental Income	189,559	213,347
Studio Income	61,465	59,106
Other Income	31,802	13,565
Transfer from Endowment Fund	606,018	435,020
Total All Funding Sources	\$2,720,338	\$2,393,999
Expenses		
Salaries and Benefits - Management/ Administration/Fundraising	\$624,888	\$692,800
Property	339,370	417,513
Program - Salaries/Benefits, Supplies and Support	643,443	672,614
Audit/Legal/Accounting	373,171	104,067
Office/Other	187,766	186,124
Amortization	55,242	54,230
Total Expenses	\$2,223,880	\$2,127,348

To receive a full copy of the financial statements, please contact Fontbonne Ministries at:
791 Queen Street East, Toronto ON M4M 1H6
Telephone: 416.465.2889 • Email: info@fontbonneministries.ca

Fontbonne Ministries

Where the Money Goes

(September 1, 2024 - August 2025)



Revenue and Other Funding: \$2,720,338

- Donations 68%
- Rental Income 7%
- Studio Income 2%
- Other Income 1%
- Transfer from Endowment Fund 22%



Expenses: \$2,223,880

- Salaries and Benefits - Management/Administration/Fundraising 28%
- Property 15%
- Program - Salaries/Benefits, Supplies and Support 29%
- Audit/Legal/Accounting 17%
- Office/Other 8%
- Amortization 3%

Board of Directors

Joan Breech

Director and Board Chair

Sister Annette Lacroix, CSJ

Director

Hume Martin

Director

Patricia Stoddart

Director

Helen Vander Hoeven

Director

John West

Director

2024-2025



Fontbonne Ministries

Corporate Office: 791 Queen Street East, Toronto, ON M4M 1H6

www.fontbonneministries.ca

Connect With Us!

Tel: 416-465-2889 | **Fax:** 416-465-6744 | **Email:** info@fontbonneministries.ca



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Charitable Registration No. 86408 4090 RR0001