Springs of Hope

Fontbonne Ministries

Fall 2026 Newsletter

Providing Compassion and Care: Making Foot Care Accessible to All



Minh Nguyen gives a patient the care that keeps them on their feet.

In 2021–2022, Fontbonne's Footcare Clinic recorded 367 visits. In 2024–2025, it recorded 1,423. That's nearly four times as many visits in three years.

In 2021, Fontbonne Ministries, Metropolitan United Church and St. James Cathedral Centre worked together to form the Downtown Toronto East Footcare Clinic. The partners hired a chiropodist, Minh Nguyen, to work across their sites and equipped treatment spaces. With funding from La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso, they began offering foot care free of charge. Minh provides services three days a week at Fontbonne.

The clinic was set up to be open to anyone. Patients don't need a health card, proof of citizenship or proof of social assistance, and anyone who prefers can be seen anonymously.

Minh treats many patients who are homeless. They spend their days on foot, moving between meals, washrooms and places to rest.

"When every step hurts, the whole day becomes a struggle," he says.

Over time, ill-fitting shoes and wet socks lead to thick calluses, ingrown nails and wounds that go unnoticed. For people with diabetes, those wounds can become ulcers, and an untreated ulcer can lead to hospitalization or amputation.

Older adults face a different problem. "Many of my senior patients are physically unable to look after their own feet," Minh explains. "Arthritis, Parkinson's disease or failing eyesight can turn something as simple as trimming a toenail into an impossible task."

Minh often has to improvise. When prescribed antifungal medication is too expensive for his patients, he makes his own. When a patient with dementia needed toenail surgery but couldn't tolerate being touched, he used a topical anesthetic and played music to help keep the patient calm.

"When standard treatments don't work for our patients, we find another way," he says. "We don't stop until we've found something that works."

Social workers, community agencies and family doctors now refer low-income patients to Fontbonne, knowing it may be their only option for foot care. For many patients, the clinic is how they first connect with Fontbonne. A patient who comes to trust the person treating their feet is more likely to come back for a hot meal, dental care and other supports.

Treatment at the Fontbonne Footcare Clinic is free, thanks to the generosity of our donors. For Minh, the reward is watching patients walk farther and move with more confidence.

"When people can't get around, their lives shrink," he says. "Getting them back on their feet gives them a little more of their world back." ■

Bringing the Fontbonne Mission to Life

Meet Moussa Nyabenda

When Moussa Nyabenda joined Fontbonne as Director of Partnerships and Programs, he saw a chance to give back and help others. "I chose to join Fontbonne because its mission and values reflect what has always mattered to me: helping people access the support and opportunities they need to move forward," he says.

With more than 23 years of experience in social services, Moussa understands the difference the right support can make in a person's life. His career began in the education system, where he saw that some young people were facing challenges far beyond the classroom. Some were living in shelters while trying to keep up with their studies. He began volunteering with a youth shelter, leading homework and math clubs and helping young people stay connected to their education.

"I could see the impact right away," he says. "That's when I knew this was my path."

Today, that same commitment guides his work at Fontbonne, where he helps build the systems and partnerships that make services possible, from policies and staff training to bringing new resources and expertise into the community.

At the heart of his approach is a simple question: What do people need today, and how can we respond?

"The people who access our programs are changing, and so are their needs," Moussa says. "That means our programs have to evolve as well, so we can keep pace with them."

With up to 100 people coming through Fontbonne's doors each day, bringing services directly into the building can go a long way.

"If someone is already here, they're far more likely to use the service," Moussa says.

The new dental hygiene clinic is one example. By bringing care into a familiar community setting, Fontbonne is making an important service easier to access.

Fontbonne is also working with partners to expand housing options. Looking ahead, Moussa hopes to bring mental health and primary care services on site and develop a mobile foot care unit for seniors who may have difficulty travelling to appointments.



Moussa's door, and his smile, are always open.

Each initiative begins with a need. Each partnership is a way to meet it.

Moussa also invites donors and community partners to see that impact firsthand.

"Come and see what we do," he says. "You will see how your support can make a meaningful difference in someone's life."

For Moussa, that difference does not stop with one person. When someone receives the right support at the right time, the impact can reach families, strengthen relationships and contribute to a stronger community.

"When one person is struggling, the whole community is affected," he says. "And when we help one person move forward, we create a stronger community for everyone." ■

"Come and see what we do. You will see how your support can make a meaningful difference in someone's life."

Where Everyone is Welcome

A Friendship, a Neighbourhood and a Seat at the Table

Juanita and Eugene met 20 years ago over a game of pool. "She beat this guy twice, and he was like the best player," Eugene remembers. "I was watching and thinking, who's this ringer?" All these years later, the neighbours are still close friends, and these days you'll find them together at the Fontbonne drop-in almost every day.

Juanita has been part of the Fontbonne community for many years and has taken part in group programs like the women's art program. Since she lost her leg to an infection last year, getting around has been harder, so until her electric wheelchair arrives, Eugene brings her to the drop-in. "I'll phone Eugene, or he'll phone me, to see if the other can make it for breakfast."

With grocery prices what they are, the two friends count on Fontbonne. Eugene doesn't sugarcoat what the drop-in means for him: "If I didn't come here, I'd go hungry. But it's not just take what you can get. Chef Drew makes it like going to a restaurant. Everything is fresh. My goodness, the soup and sandwiches are so good."

Beyond the drop-in, Juanita has seen the chiropodist at our Footcare Clinic and relies on the clothing boutique, especially as winter approaches. "There are a lot of good services here," she says. "And if the staff can't help, they'll refer you to someone who can."

For both of them, though, Fontbonne is about more than a meal. "It's a gathering place," Eugene says. "The staff run events and BBQs with fun stuff like trivia games and prizes. Everybody has a good time. It's always a nice, friendly atmosphere."

Outside of Fontbonne, Eugene draws, writes, and plays guitar and keyboard. Juanita makes dream catchers and tends the spider plants blooming on her balcony. But it's the people who keep bringing them back to the drop-in, and the feeling that there's always a seat at the table for them.



Old friends Juanita and Eugene start most days together at Fontbonne.

"Nobody looks down on you," Juanita says. "It's welcoming, and you're always happy that you came."

When Eugene meets someone on the street who's struggling, he tells them: "Just go around the corner. There will be something you can get there to help you." ■

A legacy of caring and compassion is possible with the support of our community. Together, we can make a difference for those who need it most by making a donation today: **fontbonneministries.ca/donate**.

A Season of Care and Community

A Tree for You, a Gift for Fontbonne

This year, your Christmas tree can do a little extra. We've partnered with Treasy Trees, a Canadian company that delivers fresh, real Christmas trees right to your door. A team member dressed as a nutcracker brings the tree on the date you choose and sets it up in its stand for you.

When you order through our special link, 15% of your purchase comes back to Fontbonne Ministries. It costs you nothing extra, and it helps keep our drop-in, foot care, clothing boutique and programs running through the winter months.

Deliveries are available across Toronto and much of the GTA, from mid-November until just before Christmas. Popular sizes and dates go fast, so order early! ■

Order your tree here:

Tickets on Sale: Riverside Antler Breakfast

Join us for the 15th annual Riverside Antler Breakfast, a festive community fundraiser supporting vital local programs.

The event takes place Friday, December 11, from 8–10 a.m. at the Ralph Thornton Community Centre (765 Queen St. E.). Proceeds will support Fontbonne Ministries' Food Program, which serves more than 30,000 meals annually, as well as programs for low-income seniors and youth at the Ralph Thornton Community Centre, a community cornerstone for nearly 45 years.

Tickets are $25 and include a holiday buffet breakfast prepared by Fontbonne, festive programming and entertainment, and a silent auction featuring items from local businesses. ■



Santa and friends bring the holiday cheer at last year's Antler Breakfast.

Order tickets here:

Community Corner

Care That Comes to the Community: A New Dental Partnership at Fontbonne



A free cleaning close to home is worth smiling about.

At Fontbonne Ministries, health care has always meant meeting people where they are. That tradition, carried forward by the Sisters of St. Joseph, took root when Sister Rosemary McGinn, a retired nurse, trained in foot care to serve the people coming through our doors. This summer, it grew in a new direction.

Through a new partnership with the Toronto College of Dental Hygiene and Auxiliaries, student dental hygienists, supervised by college faculty, now offer dental cleanings right here at Fontbonne. They work in the same building where participants come for breakfast, a rest, or a warm coat.

Each partner brings something to the table. The college supplies dental chairs, equipment, materials and a supervising instructor. Fontbonne provides the space and connects the clinic with the people who need it most.

"We're always looking for ways to support the community," says May Moulis, Program Director at the college. "This partnership does two things at once. It gives our students real-world experience and brings care to people who might otherwise go without."

For many participants at Fontbonne, a dental cleaning has long felt out of reach. The nearest free or low-cost dental services for low-income and uninsured adults in Toronto can be across the city. And after years without care, simply walking into an unfamiliar setting can feel like too much.

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Neehar Mishra: A Neighbour at the Drop-In



Breakfast is Neehar's chance to hear a few more stories.

Neehar Mishra is a familiar face at the Fontbonne drop-in. She serves breakfast, pours tea and coffee, helps with cleanup and takes time to connect with participants.

"I'm working on my application to become a Toronto police officer," she says. "Volunteer experience with people facing addiction or homelessness is considered an asset during the law enforcement application process. But I've always wanted to work directly with people, and if I get to join the force, I'd like to build relationships and support people at a local level."

"I also live in the neighbourhood, and I had seen some of the people around here before I started volunteering. What drew me to Fontbonne was the chance to get to know them better. Everyone has a story, and volunteering here has given me the opportunity to learn from people I might otherwise only pass on the street."

Volunteers make everything we do possible. Their compassion, dedication, and belief in our mission help ensure that people facing adversity can access the support and services they need. ■

You can make a difference, too. Join our volunteer team and help us continue making a meaningful impact in our community. Visit our website today to learn more and get involved: https://fontbonneministries.ca/volunteer.

Community Corner *continued*

"Clinics and schools can feel intimidating," says Shiriyah Thirukeswaran, Business Director at the college. "When care is offered in a place people already know and trust, they're far more comfortable coming in. For some, that first appointment has been a long time coming. I heard about a patient at Fontbonne who was moved to tears simply because they were finally getting their teeth cleaned. Moments like that show us how great the need really is."

Students gain something here, too. The college runs three clinics on its own campus, where many of the patients are students' family members, friends or neighbours. Working at Fontbonne lets student hygienists care for people whose lives and health needs look very different.

"Rotating through clinics like this one is really eye-opening," says Harper, a student hygienist. "It's shown me how much help I can give, not just to people who can easily book an appointment, but to people who are looking for care and can't always access it."

"We want our students to develop more than their clinical skills," May adds. "We want them to gain the empathy, communication skills, and cultural awareness needed to care for people from all walks of life."

The clinic's doors are open beyond Fontbonne's participants. Like the Good Food Market, it welcomes anyone in the community. Teneisha found out about the dental service online.



Behind every bright smile at Fontbonne is a team in scrubs.

"It's free and it's right in my neighbourhood, so I booked my first appointment," she says. "I'll definitely be coming back."

Both partners see room for the clinic to grow.

"Our goal is a fully accessible clinic where Fontbonne participants and anyone in the community can get the dental hygiene care they need," May says. "In the end, we want to bring smiles to people."

At Fontbonne, that's the kind of care we believe everyone deserves. ■

Free dental cleanings are available Mondays and Fridays: Call (416) 465-6069 to set up an appointment today!

Barriers to Dental Care

For many Canadians, cost stands between them and a dental visit. In 2023–2024, nearly one in four Canadians aged 12 and older avoided seeing an oral health professional because of the price, and among those without dental insurance, the figure rose to 45%.*

For people without stable housing, daily brushing is hard to keep up. That's why Fontbonne's clothing boutique also offers hygiene essentials like toothbrushes and toothpaste.

*Statistics Canada, "Cost-related avoidance of oral health services," Insights on Canadian Society, February 12, 2025 (data from the Canadian Oral Health Survey, 2023–2024).

Fontbonne Ministries

Corporate

791 Queen Street East
Toronto, ON M4M 1H6
Tel: 416-465-6069 | Fax: 416-465-6744
info@fontbonneministries.ca
https://fontbonneministries.ca

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