



Formerly St. Christopher House

CONTACT:
Reception 416-532-4828
info@westnh.org
www.westnh.org

ADMINISTRATION:
588 Queen Street West
2nd floor
Toronto, ON Canada M6J 1E3
Fax 416-504-3047

Social Development, Finance & Administration
City of Toronto
City Hall
14th Floor East, 100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5H 2N2
Email: opendialogue@toronto.ca

March 20, 2015

Attention: Poverty Reduction Strategy

West Neighbourhood House (formerly St. Christopher House) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the development of a poverty reduction strategy for the City of Toronto.

West Neighbourhood House has been a neighbourhood centre in west Toronto since 1912. We work with diverse individuals, families and groups to promote personal and social change in order to achieve a safe, healthy and accepting society for all.

We welcome a City Poverty Reduction Strategy: We applaud the City's initiative on addressing poverty. We also appreciate that the plan will be deliberate and strategic in using the City's resources and powers to counteract disturbing trends of growing inequality.

Process: We believe that the City of Toronto's Strategic Actions 2013-2018 already sufficiently articulates the Mission, Vision and Values to guide a Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy.

We acknowledge the City of Toronto's support to community agencies and groups who participated in the development of the Province of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy. We valued the City's role in ensuring that the experiences and ideas of marginalized populations were prominent in discussions and deliberations. We anticipate the City will similarly include those perspectives prominently in the Toronto process and we offer our assistance in outreach.

588 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON Canada M6J 1E3
The Meeting Place
Newcomer Outreach Program

248 Ossington Avenue
Toronto, ON Canada M6J 3A2
Adult Literacy and
Learning Programs
Family and Newcomer
Programs
Music School
Older Adult Centre

1033 King Street West
Toronto, ON Canada M6K 3N3
Employment Services
Financial Advocacy
and Problem Solving
Adult Learning Programs

1497 Queen Street West
Unit #103, Toronto, ON
Canada M6R 1A3
Family and Newcomer
Programs
Parkdale Meeting Place



United Way
Member Agency

Charitable Registration No.
11925 7525 RR0001

Strategies and solutions: The causes of poverty and public policy reforms that would address poverty and inequality are well documented. I refer specifically to two for your reference:

- the ***Time for a Fair Deal*** report from the multi-stakeholder Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults (MISWAA) project led by David Pecaut (Toronto City Summit Alliance) and Susan Pigott (St. Christopher House),
- Neighbourhood Change reports led by Professor David Hulchanski (University of Toronto Cities Centre) with St. Christopher House, specifically the ***Policy Options*** report.

Specific recommendations:

- Provide funding through Social Development, Finance and Administration community grants to stabilize and expand **Financial Advocacy and Problem-Solving (FAPS) programs**. This is a program model developed in West Neighbourhood House that gets money (mostly from other levels of government) into the pockets and communities of low-income people: - 6,300 people received \$13 million in 2014 in the communities of downtown west Toronto, Agincourt, and Jane-Finch. I am attaching further information about this very effective poverty reduction strategy.

We note that there are arenas of municipal authority that are not usually associated with poverty reduction but hold some significant promise for improved living conditions for low-income people. Specifically we urge the City to address the serious problems with the insufficient number and generally poor quality of affordable housing:

- Adopt **inclusionary zoning** for new residential development to increase the number and locations of truly “affordable” housing units, specifically housing affordable to low-income people;
- Consider ways to **protect currently affordable rental housing** from “rental gentrification” that is sweeping through mid-rise apartment buildings. We are deeply concerned about the “Manhattanization” of our city.
- **Increase inspections and enforcement of housing quality standards** to ensure that all Torontonians live in buildings that are in a good state of repair and that, as above, repairs and renovations do not lead to loss of affordable units and displacement of low-income people downtown;

We join you in continuing to work with and advocate to other levels of government to use their tax, transfer and regulatory powers to significantly reduce levels of poverty.

Need for quick wins: Our preliminary discussions with * program participants at West Neighbourhood House found a “consultation fatigue”. The people most affected by poverty have not seen any significant changes to public policy and their daily life.

Without a clearer sense of where the City can make a difference, false expectations of what is possible might further alienate people from democratic institutions.

Wherever possible, we encourage and trust the City to act immediately on good ideas or opportunities that are already in deliberation (eg inclusionary housing) or that emerge throughout the process.

We appreciate and support the City’s leadership in developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Yours sincerely,

Maureen Fair
Executive Director

On behalf of West Neighbourhood House and with the input of the Community Action Group on Social Issues (*CAGSI)

*CAGSI is a group of 12 community members reflecting the diversity of age, socio-economic and ethno-cultural groups living in the south-west corner of the old City of Toronto. The group is made up of community leaders identified from the membership of diverse West Neighbourhood House programs. CAGSI helps to:

- inform the Board and the senior staff of West Neighbourhood House on different social issues and the public policy reforms and strategies
- get feedback and engage other community members in establishing positions and strategies and engaging in social change, and
- educate or engage the public on the positions and reform ideas that have been developed.