

The Next West Neighbourhood House: Recovery and renewal

*A five year plan to
transform our House*



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WEST NEIGHBOURHOOD
HOUSE
Formerly St. Christopher House

This is a plan for the next five years at West Neighbourhood House written in the midst of a pandemic that has changed not only how we work, but also how we live.

It is the culmination of a series of important conversations that have occurred over the past year which have helped to refocus the organization and renew its sense of purpose.

These conversations have been, at times, searching and difficult. Together they have re-centred West Neighbourhood House on the important experiences of Black and racialized members of our team and community. West Neighbourhood House also understands the colonial legacies and systems of oppression that make reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples an urgent task. These conversations led us to renew our values and strengthen our resolve to put these values to work in the decisions we make at all levels of our organization.

Both the pandemic and the history of neighbourhood houses make clear that social progress requires radical change at all levels of our society and always within and across our organization. The idea of *radical* change reminds us of the importance of *roots*. And so in this plan and in our work ahead we focus on the roots of oppression, the roots of our history, and the roots that bind a community, and on which we build our new home.



Together Now

For more than a century, West Neighbourhood House has made its home in an area immediately west of Toronto's downtown core. Our neighbourhood has raised, housed, educated, employed, empowered and cared for generations of Torontonians — many of them the city's newest residents. Our organization has had a constant role in connecting, rallying, supporting and serving this community while adapting ourselves to its constant evolution.

The COVID-19 pandemic has damaged or taken thousands of lives in our city. It has disrupted schools, suspended services and shuttered businesses. Protecting public health has required extended periods of social isolation. We know this isolation has led to more depression, dysfunction and despair. We see this reflected in calls to help lines, rising opioid use, family breakdown, financial stress and dislocation.

These pressures have been exacerbated by a longstanding and deepening housing affordability crisis. The simple fact is that individuals and families from all but the highest paid sectors of the economy can no longer afford adequate housing across much of the city. This is as true in West Toronto as elsewhere and it is remaking our community.

Now as we enter what we hope is the latter phase of a pandemic we must focus ourselves on how we renew our connections with one another, and work to ensure that our community has a future as a vibrant home with room for everyone.

Change Now

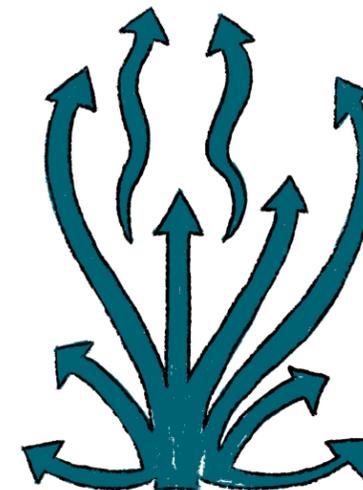
We are living through a period of concurrent economic, environmental, social and public health crises — crises which exacerbate inequities and deepen the divisions in our community. West Neighbourhood House stands against these divisions and instead exists to strengthen local residents and community to overcome these and other challenges.

In this respect, West Neighbourhood House rejects paternalistic approaches to service provision, and building on the history of the settlement house movement, embraces its identity as a community ally, champion and partner.

To meet this moment, we must adapt and continue to reimagine how we work. This requires coupling the rigour, quality and accountabilities related to the work we do with a deeper focus on the assets and capacities of those we work with. It requires employing our values as a compass when we find ourselves at a crossroads, and breaking apart old models where they frustrate our ability to work more collaboratively and in partnership.

Our last plan described three priorities:

1. To deepen our theory of change work in order to better employ evidence, incorporate innovations and improve services;
2. To pursue new uses of West NH properties for community benefit in order to develop affordable housing as well as new revenue strategies while engaging the community.
3. To transform the role of a "Neighbourhood House" in order to reimagine what it means to be a neighbourhood house and be a catalyst to support diverse groups in the community to engage with each other in transformative ways.



Our new plan reaffirms these priorities while sharpening our focus on what will be required to realize our aspirations.

To do this, our new plan articulates our values and identifies five areas of transformation:

1. **Transforming our decisions** describes a new approach to how decisions are made within the organization as well as what resident-partners should expect;
2. **Transforming our work** describes our intentions with respect to the experience and empowerment of residents;
3. **Transforming our relationship with our community** describes how we want to be understood by our community;
4. **Transforming ourselves** describes the work we need to do to dismantle systems of oppression and ensure that our organization benefits from the diversity of talent and perspectives that exist in our city;
- 5.
6. **Transforming our home** describes the steps we are taking to make the most of the redevelopment of 248 Ossington Avenue.

Our values

These are the values of West Neighbourhood House, its Board of Directors, Staff and Volunteers. This is a living document which we will revisit as we move forward, learning from both our successes and failures. None of these values stands alone - each needs to be understood in relation to the others.

Land

- We acknowledge and honour the land we are on - the traditional territories of many First Nations, now home to diverse First Nations, the Inuit and Métis peoples, and to settlers and newcomers, coming both voluntarily and forcibly, in this generation and generations past - and we are mindful of broken covenants and strive to make this right, with the land and with each other.
- We commit to shared action and accountability that addresses climate change, with attention to its disproportionate impacts on populations and individuals facing marginalization.

Equity and Social Justice

- We acknowledge and recognize the impacts of systemic racism, oppression, and discrimination, resulting from dominant white, colonial, classist, heteropatriarchal, ableist structures, and commit to addressing root causes.
- We commit to challenging inequity and injustice in the House and in society, and to creating equitable access to opportunities for individuals and groups facing marginalization.

Responsive practices and positive organizational culture

- We commit that our day-to-day work and interactions among staff, participants, volunteers, and community members will reflect compassion, trust, respect, equity, innovation, non-judgment, harm reduction, conflict resolution, finding common ground, accountability, inclusion, responsiveness, learning-unlearning, transparency.
- We commit to decent work, and to a structure with empowered staff and clarity about roles and responsibilities.

Neighbourhood-based, community-centered

- We are “place-based” and see the House as an asset belonging to the community, a place for addressing conflict and polarization, and a catalyst for sparking local change - the “campfire” of the neighbourhood.
- We commit to honouring the histories, traditions, cultures, languages, labour, events, and people who shape our neighbourhood, both longstanding and recent residents, and to focusing on community development as well as individual service.

Co-creation/Collaboration

- We commit to upholding and valuing the integrity, passion, knowledge of community participants and to meaningful inclusion of participants in program design, evaluation, advocacy, and change strategies.
- We commit to working collaboratively and creatively with multiple partners inside and outside the sector, including governments, funders, grassroots organizations, and others aligned with our mission, vision, values, and with connections to diverse communities.

Our five strategic transformations

A. Transforming our decisions

We believe that West Neighbourhood House exists at a time when social, economic and environmental injustice requires organizations to act differently and to adopt measures and practices that go beyond conventional accountabilities.

1. We will ensure that staff members understand and can employ our values in their daily work and routines.
2. We will ensure that the skills and sensibility to recognize and dismantle racism and oppression are widely held across the organization.
3. We will engage with local Indigenous communities and undertake to reconcile the advantages we have enjoyed as the beneficiaries of stolen land and colonial structures.
4. We will accelerate our efforts to be a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient organization while also mitigating the differential impacts of climate change on structurally vulnerable members of our community.
5. We will evaluate our work and make decisions informed by community derived data.

B. Transforming how we work

We believe that we are of greatest benefit to our community when we work in partnership with residents animated by a spirit of belonging and innovation.

1. We will renew and reinvest in our traditions of community organizing and community-led innovation;
2. We will foster a more versatile, responsive and risk-taking culture and reward a ‘community-first’ attitude.
3. We will ensure that our collaborations with local Ontario Health Teams yield community-centric and person-centric approaches that lead to better, more integrated care;
4. We will invest in hybridizing our in-person and online programs to benefit more residents;
5. We will ensure staff have the time and skills to work alongside residents to be effective local stewards and advocates.

COVID-19: Perseverance and agility during an extraordinary time

In 2020, the House stepped up to respond to our community's needs like never before.

For some, safety meant closing our physical doors but opening virtual ones. Programs pivoted quickly, moving activities to telephones and online; supporting participants in the rapid change. Programs like "Older Adult Centre without Walls" emerged so that homebound people and others who did not want to travel to our locations could connect to our health promotion, exercise, and social activities.

For others, for those who had nowhere to go during the stay-at-home orders, safety meant keeping our doors open. The Meeting Place Drop-in sprang into action, doors open and re-focused on people who were homeless. We immediately implemented daily COVID-19 screening, organized immunization clinics, outreached to people living in encampments, and advocated.

For others still, West NH provided outreach, infrastructure and support so that neighbours could self organize into mutual aid groups. These groups helped more than 1,500 people weather the pandemic, and mutual aid leaders have been playing a critical role in vaccination efforts.



A neighbourhood transforming

Total population:	217,194
Indigenous residents:	4,155
Low-income residents:	40,820
Racialized residents:	81,665
First generation immigrants:	88,055
Second generation:	124,375



In 2020

- 13,325 participated in one or more of our 22 programs
- 1,690 people experiencing homelessness visited the Meeting Place Drop-in 2020
- 1,500 residents supported through mutual aid networks in 2020.

FROM large, multi-generational households & single adults
TO single family households & single adults

FROM predominantly working class neighbourhoods
TO mixed-income neighbourhoods with pockets of low income and a shrinking middle-class

FROM low-rise, low density built form
TO a growing number of high-rise, high density condo and apartment buildings

FROM launch pads for newcomers
TO "maturing" neighbourhoods welcoming of diversity

110 years of working and learning with our community

Early programming included a focus on children, youth and mothers such as one of the first Well Baby Clinics. The House supported families when adult family members were off to wars, during the Spanish flu pandemic and later the Depression.

**1920s,
30s, 40s**

'Self-run' clubs for every age group elected a Chair and Secretary, and held their own meetings to determine group activities.

St. Chris was an early leader in addressing the "digital divide."

Kensington Market was home to waves of refugees and newcomers to Canada as well as a large Canadian Black community. St. Chris music groups, basketball teams and lacrosse teams brought these diverse residents together. Many "St Chris kids" from those days still reunite annually in the summer.

**1950s
Changing demographics**

1950s - Meals on Wheels
Meals on Wheels started at the House.

**1970s
Activating civil and social rights**

The House partnered with University of Toronto's School of Social Work and developed [groupwork](#) in community settings.

**1963 -
Incorporated as an independent organization**

Staff lived with the community in the House. Poverty, poor health, illiteracy and discrimination are recognized as barriers to social and economic wellbeing.

**1912 -
St. Christopher House opens in Kensington Market**

The House was founded by Sir James Woods, Libby Carson, and the Presbyterian Church who were inspired and informed by the ["settlement house"](#) movement.

**2008 -
Financial Empowerment and Problem Solving Program is launched**

**2005-
Neighbourhood Change Project**
SSHRC research partnership with the University of Toronto and international partners analyzed local gentrification with City, national, and international impacts

2009 - Fair Deal Report
Multi-stakeholder process final report influences Ontario's first Poverty Reduction Strategy, as well as the development of TFSAs and the Working Income Tax Benefit at the federal level.

2013- Informal Economy
Community-based research and public policy development to support diverse low-income workers in the informal/gig economy

**2022
Recovery and renewal:
A five year plan is launched**

2017
Increased community organizing, research, and advocacy on affordable housing

2014 - St. Christopher House is renamed West Neighbourhood House

Community Undertaking Social Policy
The House hosts Policy Fellows who work with people with lived experience on public policy development

Advocacy, protest and community organizing against the 21.6% cut to welfare rates by the provincial government.

**1990s
Fighting the war waged against the poor**

The Meeting Place Drop-in emerges out of a student project for socially isolated adults. House staff worked with local community partners on the Meegwetch affordable housing building on Niagara Street.

Cleaners Action Group
Advocacy, education and peer support led to better employment contracts for immigrant women that cleaned downtown offices.

St. Chris Domestic Violence program, one of the first to focus on immigrant women, spun out from disclosures from adult ESL students and members of the Cleaners Action Group.

**1980s
Growth and expansion**

Government funding catalyzes youth employment programs and community health for seniors.

C. Transforming our relationship with our community

We believe that we need to continually re-introduce ourselves and our ethos to the community to ensure that we remain accountable, relevant, welcoming and accessible.

1. We will invite the community to hold us accountable for our values, commitment and impact.
2. We will prioritize community leadership, collaboration and co-creation that redresses disparities in power, capacity and knowledge.
3. We will become better known and respected as an invaluable, multi-faceted resource that serves as a platform for local talent, local solutions and social justice.
4. We will respond to demographic changes by adapting our offerings while taking steps to ensure that our resources and capabilities are directed towards those most in need.
5. We will develop targeted campaigns that introduce ourselves to new residents and businesses, especially those most likely to benefit from our programs.
6. We will use the redevelopment of 248 Ossington Avenue to renew our fundraising and volunteerism capabilities.



D. Transforming ourselves

We believe that the agency and growth of every resident and team member is paramount.

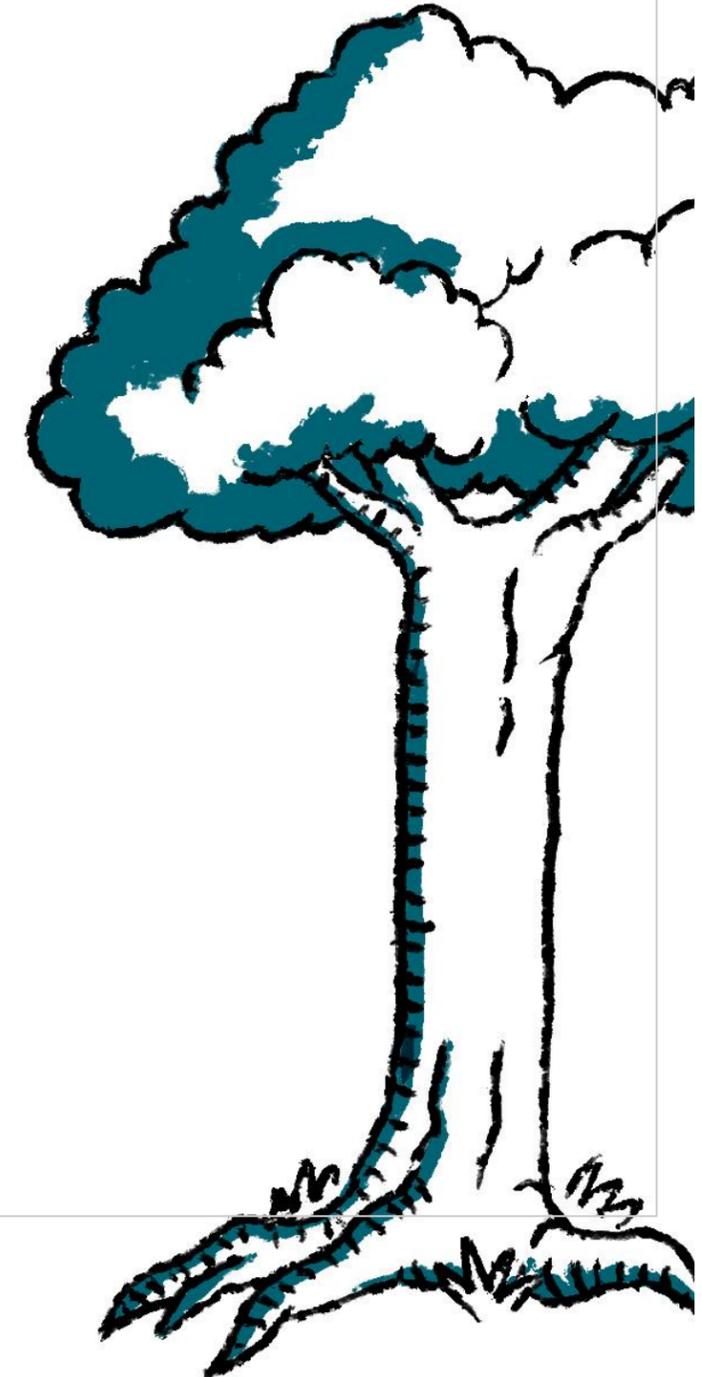
We use decisions — strategic, organizational, programmatic, and personal — as an opportunity for reflexive learning and practice.

1. We will better distribute leadership and accountability throughout the organization while preparing a new generation to take the helm.
2. We will create new development opportunities for staff that increase our abilities to integrate technologies and collaborate more effectively with colleagues and residents.
3. We will shift to less specialized staffing models that emphasize versatility and problem-solving.
4. We will incubate new collaborative service models and partnerships and work to disseminate our social and programmatic innovations.
5. We will ensure that advocacy and policy influence will be a prominent feature of our approach to social change.

E. Transforming our home

We have a once in a generation opportunity to redevelop 248 Ossington as an uncommon and much-loved community asset. Our ambition — fiscal, programmatic, architectural — must serve the long term interests of the community and exemplify our highest ideals.

1. We will ensure that the financing and revenue model for the new house maximizes our asset while safeguarding the financial health of the organization.
2. We will offer significant affordable housing in perpetuity as part of the redevelopment plan.
3. We will insist on architectural excellence that yields a truly innovative, climate-resilient, sustainable, multi-purpose site fostering innovation and community connection.
4. We will ensure that the new house will be the product of our ideals and give expression to our renewed values.



Our Indicators

We will know West Neighbourhood House is transforming when the House makes significant strategic and operational decisions based on our values, data, theory of change, and responsible use of resources. This will mean:

1. West NH **meaningfully involves diverse community members in the ongoing co-design, data-gathering, and evaluation** of programs, community development activities, and advocacy.
2. West NH develops **mechanisms towards Reconciliation** in the development, design, and evaluation of programs, advocacy, and strategic initiatives.
3. West NH works in **partnership with grassroots groups and small organizations** to support responsiveness and initiative within the community, particularly for advocacy on systemic problems.
4. West NH completes the Implementation Plan based on the Organizational Review about **anti-Black racism**. West NH continues to address diversity, equity and inclusion/belonging issues and opportunities, including **more distributed leadership/authority**.
5. West NH continues to co-develop, test and use **digital innovations in programming** for participants and supports for community members.
6. West NH **gathers and uses data rigorously** to understand and share the impacts of our work on people's lives.
7. West HN puts a "shovel in the ground" at 248 Ossington **creating a green, sustainable community asset** that provides both affordable housing and new space for House programs and community use.
8. West NH significantly **increases the community's awareness** of our work, especially among new residents as well as businesses.
9. West NH **reduces its environmental impact** and works with marginalized individuals in the **community to prepare for climate change**.

West NH will track its transformation against these nine indicators, reporting out annually to our Board, our community and the broader public.

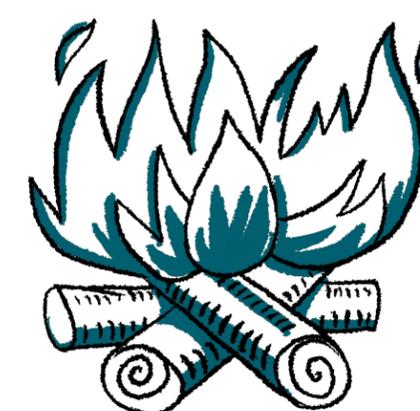
In five years, our neighbours experience the House as...

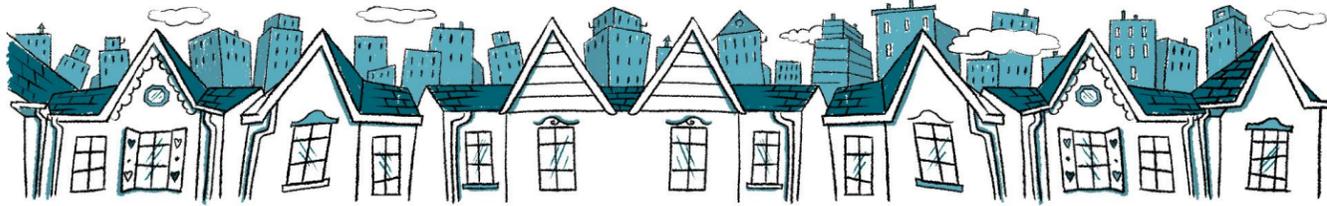
...an ally and a capacity builder, grounded in anti-oppression and anti-racism, that works with them to take action on climate justice, affordable housing, community safety, adequate income and other issues that affect this community. Local leadership is strong and West NH is immersed in an ecosystem of community and systemic change that centres people's lived experiences, identities, community knowledge and professional training.



...trusted, welcoming and inclusive spaces of support - online and In-Real-Life - where community members and program participants are engaged and supported to develop their own pathway. Our community and program participants work with us to develop programs and activities, they tell us what they like and don't like, and we have the systems in place to document, learn and adapt.

...one of their own. West NH is reflective of the diversity of the neighbourhood and a place where people and businesses learn about each other. As the neighbourhood 'campfire', people seek it out for stories, exchange and collaboration. It is a place where conflicts and inequities are addressed, and where reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is actively pursued.





A new House for all of us

Over the next year, we hope you will come to know West Neighbourhood House in new ways. As the pandemic recedes, we will spring forward with initiatives aimed to renew our relationships and ensure that you know our door is always open.

We want to be seen as a partner — your go-to for living in a more just, more closely connected community. Realizing this vision and creating this community is a job for all of us.

And as the redevelopment of 248 Ossington Avenue proceeds we look forward to working with you to help shape what will become an incredible new 'house' in the heart of West Toronto.

As a community member, you can join us in:

- Making West Neighbourhood House part of your house and learning how we can work together to support you and your loved ones
- Volunteering with our programs and partners to strengthen our community
- Organizing with us to advance issues of concern to the community
- Holding us accountable to our values and commitments

As a staff member, you can join us in:

- Incorporating our values in your work with community
- Introducing new innovations that advance our priorities
- Supporting one another to achieve greater equity and social justice
- Connecting with residents and bringing the spirit of the house to life

As a supporter, you can join us in:

- Investing in our vision and ensuring we have the resources we need
- Encouraging innovation and programmatic renewal
- Sharing our vision for community, greater equity and social justice

Join us: westnh.org



We built this plan together.

This Plan and our vision of transformation was created with the contributions of dozens and dozens of community members, staff, friends and board members.

We would like to thank:

- The House's dedicated volunteer leaders – our Board of Directors
- Strategic Planning Committee Members who led the Strategic Planning process - Rona Abramovitch, Emily Paradis, Prasad Rao, Christine Yip, Rick Eagan, Martha Goodings, Adrienne Lipsey, Maureen Fair, Norma Frank, Zaria Duncan, Lynne Woolcott.
- All the people – community members, volunteers, community partners and staff who participated in the Community Check-in Process, which is a foundation of this plan:
 - The 60 community leaders and residents who took the time to share their voice and experience through field interviews and the 12 staff who did research and analysis through the Study Group.

- The 27 community members who participated in the Community Panel. Over 20 hours and four weekend sessions, they reflected the diversity of the local community, debated and assessed community needs and assets, and made recommendations for stronger Downtown West Neighbourhoods. We thank Adrienne Stanton, Bennett Philips, Beverly Leung, Brant Thompson, Car Martin, Charles Barnes, Christopher Ferguson, Daisy Galang, Danielle Da Costa, David Vereschagin, Devan Islas, Dustin Woods, Elizabeth Gallou, Emilie Terebessy, Frances Kong, John Coutts, Jonathan Watton, Karen Hughes, Kelly Le, Keshia Palm, Khadija, Michael Alstad, Peter Raiwe, Rebecca Lui, Sarah Power, Valentina Passos Gastaldo, and Wendy Suh

- Susan Pigott, Dr. David Hulchanski, Adriana Beemans, Hermann Ellis Jr., and Rob Howarth for presenting to the Community Panel.

- The over 100 staff, volunteers and Board members who participated in surveys, interviews and/or group discussions towards the development of the “Organizational Review on Anti-Black Racism”, which is another foundation of this plan.

- Shane Joseph, consultant, who led the “Organizational Review on Anti-Black Racism”.

- MASS LBP, consultants, who led the Community Check-in process and supported the Board in developing the Strategic Plan.