

GOOD WORK NEWS

The Working Centre, 58 Queen St. S. Kitchener, ON N2G 1V6

Issue 165

June 2026

Subscription: A Donation Towards our Work

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Mark your calendars! Queen Street Commons is celebrating its **20th anniversary on June 12, 2026!**

Drop by Queen Street Commons for an evening of gathering, refreshments, and live music by the New Vibes Jazz Quartet.

FRIDAY, JUNE 12 2026 4:00 - 7:00 PM



Re-opened with a new design, Queen Street Commons Cafe offers an affordable menu of plant-based food and fresh roast coffee.

Queen Street Commons is an inclusive environment where all are welcome and is now available for booking community and private events.

Visit us at 43 Queen St. South in Kitchener, or online at: www.theworkingcentre.org/projects/commons-cafe

Remembering Arleen Macpherson

(May 16, 1937 – January 18, 2026)

By Joe Mancini

On May 9th 2026, we celebrated Arleen Macpherson's immense contribution to the development of The Working Centre community. For over 30 years from (1987 - 2017) Arleen offered unwavering commitment to support those who have been left out. Her work was marked by her natural ability to combine prayerful reflection with thoughtful action. Her practicality was demonstrated by taking on St. John's Kitchen and creating a place of welcome and hospitality. This work stretched from organizing and cooking in the kitchen, to walking gently with those facing struggles, to writing and reflecting on poverty and relationships.

Arleen knew the importance of action in the midst of poverty. Her father had been injured in a mining accident. Consequently, she and her six siblings grew up at their grandparents' small hotel in Gowganda in Northern Ontario. Money was scarce, as were jobs,



and the family had to make do by pitching in together. Arleen was uniquely skilled to combine her life experience with her practical ability to organize and problem solve and could easily relate to the hundreds of people who came each day to St. John's Kitchen for a meal. Many, like her father, were unemployed for years because of a serious injury. Many others struggled with the loss of family, alcohol, mental health issues, and Arleen was always there

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The Impact of St. John's Kitchen Warming Centre

By Cathleen Gretchell

This winter, The Working Centre opened an Overnight Warming Centre at the new St. John's Kitchen, opening the doors at 8:30 pm and closing by 8:00 am. For three months, the Overnight Warming Centre provided a continuous overnight place to stay, reducing the daily search for shelter space. The open intake ensured that people could count on the space being available. At the same time, we ensured those using the space were registered as unsheltered. As we approached the closing of the warming centre, many of our community members shared

their concerns and hopes.

- "If we have nowhere to go with the warming centre closing, they're going to have folk congregating/sleeping downtown... Not trying to break laws just trying to survive"
- "Many of us are actually scared and not sure what we are going to do."
- "I can feel and see the energy changed after that first night outside."
- "Be great if opened year-round, cause don't have to worry about sleeping in stairwell/damaging property, less going out and doing stupid

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Forty-Second Year

Issue 165

June 2026

Good Work News

Good Work News was first produced in September 1984. It is published four times a year by The Working Centre and St. John's Kitchen as a forum of opinions and ideas on work and unemployment. Four issues of Good Work News constitutes our annual report. There is a circulation of 13,000 copies. Subscription: a donation towards our work.

Editors: Joe Mancini, Stephanie Mancini

Contributors: Taginder Clair, Douglas MacLellan, JP Smola, Rob & Michele Way, Oluseun Olayinka, Cassandra Polyzou, Ayman Eldesouky, Susana Escamilla, Solene Jollivet, Cathleen Gretchell, Christina Mancini

Editorial comments, changes of address and new subscriptions should be directed to:

The Working Centre

58 Queen St. S., Kitchener, Ontario, N2G 1V6

Phone: (519) 743-1151 • Fax: (519) 743-3840

Email: donations@theworkingcentre.org

Web: www.theworkingcentre.org

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Celebrating Places of Belonging at the 37th Annual Mayors' Dinner

By Solene Jollivet

On April 11th 2026, we welcomed over 800 guests to celebrate the 37th Annual Mayors' Dinner on the theme of **Places of Belonging – The Heart of Inclusion**. Set in the warmly lit Bingemans' Mashall Hall with colourful flowers, plants and displays decorated throughout the space, we gathered to join in community and share stories.

Highlighted among us were three extraordinary individuals who encompass the values of the work they immerse themselves in daily: commitment to inclusion, resiliency during change, and offering a warm welcome to others.

Michele and Rob Way from Hockey Helps the Homeless have spent the last 13 years connecting hockey to community. Through their work, Hockey Helps the Homeless and their charity partners have supported countless individuals by not only funding emergency responses but investing in prevention, stability, dignity and pathways forward.

Oluseun Olayinka, Executive Director of Adventure4Change, has centered a core belief at the heart of her work: "Belonging is not a luxury, it is an infrastructure." Having always seen herself creating spaces of safety and hope

for children, youth and mothers, Oluseun has gone on to do exactly that in Waterloo Region through Adventure4Change programs welcoming families into community spaces, providing after-school programs to support youth and helping families navigate complex systems so that they are not alone.

The Working Centre also highlighted how Community Tools projects support inclusion and belonging, in particular the newly-reopened Queen Street Commons Café and Worth a Second Look Furniture and Houseware thrift store. Stories demonstrated the ways that community members engage in reciprocity with each other – giving to the community through opportunities of service.

The annual Mayors' Dinner continues to serve as a reminder of the power of togetherness. As belonging grows scarce in communities that face systemic challenges, we must approach the work arm in arm so as not to leave anyone behind. We continue to be grateful for the support we receive for Working Centre projects, community members and the desire for change.

We look forward to gathering again next year, in April 2027, for the 38th Mayors' Dinner.



Making Home Project Receives Conservation Award

The Working Centre, Perimeter Development and BNKC Architects Inc. shared an Excellence in Conservation Award for their work on the Making Home project at 97 Victoria St. N. The annual awards recognize groups and individuals striving to preserve and champion the province's cultural, natural and built heritage. The project at 97 Victoria St. N. turned a former warehouse for the Mitchell Button Company into part of a campus for The Working Centre offering supportive housing units, a new home for St. John's Kitchen and various other services and supports for people experiencing homelessness. A third storey was added to the brick building built in 1927. The two original floors were renovated, and a new mass timber addition and courtyard were added to the site. "This project serves vulnerable populations while celebrating the physical characteristics found in the built heritage landscape of downtown Kitchener's warehouse district serving as a leading example of heritage conservation and community impact working hand in hand," the Ontario Heritage Trust said.

In the photo above Elie Newman from BNKC Architects accepts The Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Excellence in Conservation from The Honourable Edith Dumont, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario and John Ecker, Chair, Ontario Heritage Trust.



Special Easter Baskets

The St. Vincent de Paul Society of St. Louis Catholic Church put together special Easter baskets of chocolate and personal care items for the residents of Water Street Hospitality House. Joe Mancini, Tanya, George, and Faith receive the baskets delivered by Greg & Mary Stevens on Good Friday.



Top: Jamie Schlegel speaks on behalf of main sponsor RBJ Schegel Family Foundation; Kitchener Mayor Berry Vrbancovic and Waterloo Mayor Dorothy McCabe give remarks during the dinner.

Bottom: Oluseun Olayinka with friends and family, and the Rev. Florence A. Juma offering a land acknowledgement and blessing.

Developing A Social Medicine Hub

Remarks at the 37th Mayors' Dinner by Stephanie and Joe Mancini

Every day at St. John's Kitchen we witness a drug crisis that continues to grow. We see sons and daughters, sisters and brothers lost to a drug trade that leaves lasting scars and horrific damage to body and psyche. We know it is a violation of human dignity and community solidarity. How can we respond to help reduce the level of poverty, the lack of connection, the lack of housing, the bitterness of being left to fight for one's own survival?

When you see a new drug alert being announced, this is lives impacted. Daily we are helping people to prevent overdoses as deep addictions drive people to take the drugs that are literally poisoning them. Our teams are watching people's breaths, counting their oxygen levels, doing CPR, and using Ambubags to aid breathing. Nalaxone responds to the fentanyl in the body, but not to the growing number of additives and sedatives in the drugs. We call EMS several times a day and people are sometimes escorted to hospital and sometimes stay with us for monitoring. Watching people move from near death back to consciousness has become a regular activity.

People dealing with homelessness have often already been destabilized from relationship breakdowns, physical health issues, mental health issues, or being excluded from the labour market. The addiction to debilitating drugs only worsens the situation.

This evening is about public spaces and inclusion. St. John's Kitchen is a place that witnesses the love expressed as we practice this welcome. Many here helped us to

build this beautiful space. When we designed the new SJK, we knew it was possible to open as a Warming Centre. Going into the winter, it was clear that there was a lack of shelter spaces. Each night, as we closed the doors to SJK, this stark reality struck home.

With frigid temperatures forecasted through January, we could feel the unbearable burden people were carrying trying to find warmth and shelter. We felt the moral imperative to open our doors overnight.

Overnight Warming Centre

It was a blessing that by mid-January we had both the generous community donations and the people to be able to open this space through the night to provide warmth and shelter. The conditions were minimal, with 2 blankets each and people sleeping on the floor, but each night we saw increasing numbers of people coming, and we are now hosting over 140 people a night. One team member who came to the warming centre from one of our housing projects noted she will miss the lovely humans she has gotten to meet at the Warming Centre. Gregory Boyle reminds us that unshakeable goodness exists in everyone.

Housing at 97 Victoria

Many have asked about the 44 housing units at 97 Victoria that we proudly showed off in September. While the main floor was completed, we just received substantial completion of the building on March 26th of this year. The countdown starts now. We want to fill those units as soon as possible but we also need full support to ensure we have the on-site counselling, social engagement activities, and medical

supports to fully help people progress past the barriers they face.

And finally, the 22 dorm units on the second floor at 97 Victoria will be supported through Regional Supportive Housing, making space to offer the kind of housing, health, and daily living supports that help people move away from street culture and build their lives in community.

We are creating housing with the same welcome and non-judgement, which will be a space where people can rest enough to see the positive changes they can make in their lives once they feel safe. We are building a vision where this housing, with the medical clinic on the main floor will start to exist alongside the dominant drug culture, gradually seeding the help and hope that people can escape the grasp of the drugs that take over their lives.

Social Medicine Hub at 97 Victoria with WRHN

We are excited to share tonight that we are working with Waterloo Region Health Network (WRHN) Medicine to establish a Social Medicine vision that embraces the principles of social medicine and integrates the work of The Working Centre and other community partners with a hospital supported presence in community.

Social medicine is a proactive approach to health that prioritizes care for marginalized populations. The approach is to support people dealing with the abject poverty of homelessness with specialized supports and care.

The core of this growing partnership is to build on The Working Centre's substantial resources, both physical assets and on-the-street-outreach work. 97 Victoria will be a social medicine hub where:

First. We turn the 87 Victoria Hospitality House into an 8-bed house to provide a 12-week respite for those homeless being discharged to the street, or who are unable to

go to hospital.

Second. The development of a Dunn House model of housing, a social medicine model of supportive housing using the top floor of our new 97 Victoria housing. For people who are experiencing homelessness and accessing the Emergency Department regularly, the prescription is housing with healthcare supports. This builds stability towards wellness and appropriate care.

Third: The 3,000 square foot St. John's Kitchen Medical Clinic will serve as a base for wider integrated social medicine projects and provide care where people are. Can we reduce barriers to help people avoid the Emergency Department and to receive care in a harm reduction context? Community Paramedics are poised to offer support in the clinic and on-call.

Fourth: The social medicine concept is rooted in the same Outreach model of our work with people in encampments, on the street, in motels, or in precarious housing. This low-barrier mental-health and addictions care builds relationships that help people to feel safe and cared for. The work of our SOS and street outreach, along with the work of our health care partners like the CHC and Sanguen, will integrate with the clinic as we develop and strengthen wrap-around supports.

With creative partnerships, we are building on the beautiful gift of our new campus at St. John's Kitchen, a purpose built space that can help us respond to the deep despair and harsh living conditions of people living without access to safe and stable housing.

With determined hope we learn from the people who are a part of St. John's Kitchen and Outreach, understanding more about how to love and care for people. Our goals are new services, new housing, deep inclusion and belonging, forms of community solidarity that need to grow.



Many guests enjoying the evening including the finalists in the heads and tails game, our new partners from the Waterloo Regional Health Network Foundation, Rob and Michele Way and many different groups. The Mayors' Dinner is a great way for friends, family, organizations and businesses to come together for an evening of fundraising while recognizing the work of building social connections and community.

Inclusion Through Opportunity

Remarks at 37th
Mayors' Dinner by
Rob and Michele Way

The success of Hockey Helps the Homeless in Waterloo Region is driven by an incredible local committee—deeply passionate, generous with their time, and committed to this work. Their work and heavy lifting translates into supporting 6 local charity partners who collectively work hard to support those experiencing homelessness in our community.

A quick question. Raise your hand if you watched the Women's, Men's or Paralympic Gold Medal Olympic hockey games. Look around this room – so many of us are rooted in the game and invested in the outcome.

Hockey is deeply woven into the fabric of our country, our towns, our homes.

At Hockey Helps, we say, "It's bigger than the game!" It is a powerful tool for bringing more people into the work of supporting those experiencing homelessness.

Hockey Helps the Homeless runs Pro-Am hockey events from coast to coast. Last year alone, 21 events across Canada invested more than \$5 million into frontline homelessness programs. Right here in Waterloo Region, our own event invested \$352,000 locally, and over \$2.9 million in 12 years.

And those numbers aren't abstract. They're meals served, beds provided, counselling sessions delivered, addiction supports accessed, youth finding stability and families staying together.

Just as important as the dollars raised, is how we do it.

Because Hockey Helps isn't just a fundraiser – it's a tool for education & inclusion.

It combines the love of a game, with support for those less fortunate. It creates a means for participation. It gives people permission and a reason to step in.

Let me paint a picture of what participating with Hockey Helps feels like.

For most players it begins long before they hit the ice. They reach out to friends, families, colleagues and clients. They ask for financial pledges and share the Hockey Helps story. Something important happens: they are given a tool,



Rob and Michele Way live, work and have raised their family in Waterloo Region, building deep roots in both the business and nonprofit communities. For decades, Rob and Michele have dedicated significant volunteer time and financial support to help advance the missions of The United Way, The Sunshine Foundation, and KidsAbility among many groups they have supported

an opportunity and an invitation to engage others and they move from passive supporters to active ambassadors.

On actual game day, the pro experience begins. From greeters carrying your bag, a jersey with your name bar and all the support of hosts, trainers, food and most importantly a chance to share the ice with an NHL alumni or Olympic athlete. And in this hockey world you feel part of an amazing team surrounded by the knowledge that you are making a difference.

Before the whistle of the first game, a charity partner, with the players on bended knee, tells of the importance of the work supporting those who are homeless. And how this tournament is more than a hockey game. You're reminded that every dollar connects directly to real people, right here in our Region.

As John Neufeld would say, I once thought the difference between me being housed and those experiencing homelessness is as far apart as the length of this ice surface, but now I know it's only as wide as this blueline.

By the end of three exciting games, you're exhausted—but it's the good kind. The kind that comes from effort, connection and purpose.

You leave with great memories, knowing you were included in something that truly matters and makes a real difference.

That's the magic of Hockey Helps the Homeless.

Yes, it's about playing hockey like a pro for a day. More importantly, it's about giving people a tool and an invitation to act, using something they already love doing, to help those less fortunate.

Behind every statistic is a person. Someone's child. Someone's parent. Someone who never imagined this would be their story. I remember one of our team captains sharing with me that he had found a way to help his brother, because his family had lost the ability to do that, when they lost him to the streets. He told me he learned how the charity partners were helping him and that by simply playing hockey, he had found a way to support him. He had found a way in.

Our charity partners are doing extraordinary work, often under immense pressure. When we invest in homelessness programs, we're not just funding emergency responses—we're investing in prevention, stability, dignity and pathways forward. We're investing in people.

That's why Hockey Helps the Homeless fits so well with how we think about giving back.

We believe in inclusion through multiplication. We believe in exponential giving, one person's support growing to a network of support.

When one person gives, that's good. When that person is given a tool to invite five others, that's better. When hundreds of players are empowered to fundraise—engaging their networks, their workplaces, their families—the impact multiplies. It's truly the power of collective giving.

Hockey becomes the hook. Community becomes the force. Inclusion becomes the engine.

Most people care. They care about our neighbours and those less fortunate. They care about dignity and opportunity. But many won't act—physically or financially—unless they're invited. Not because they don't care. But because life is busy. Because they're waiting for a way in or maybe they don't know how to find that way in. Hockey Helps provide a doorway in.

When we first became involved with Hockey Helps in our Region, 13 years ago, as volunteers, I'll

admit, I didn't know much about those experiencing homelessness or the work of our charity partners. I had thoughts that many of you might have or had: there's jobs out there, they just need to go get one; just stop taking the drugs; just get off the street. But I learned very quickly through getting involved, listening, getting to know folks and seeing first hand that no one wakes up and chooses to live on the streets; that stories of trauma, injury, death and financial insecurity happen and change lives in an instant, as quickly as skating over that blue line. And that's when I knew that giving of our time and skills to help put on our Hockey Helps events was a way of giving back to our community.

Hockey Helps the Homeless recently did a unique outreach in Nunavut, an Inuit community with very limited resources. With 22 NHL alumni including Jordin Tootoo and Joe Thornton we brought the first ever Northern NHL Alumni tournament to their community. Through corporate sponsorships, we were able to leave in excess of \$275,000 for our most northern Canadian neighbours where food and housing insecurity is a constant reality.

Tonight, we leave you with this direct call to action, because Rob and I are always looking for ways to get folks involved: if you're in a position to sponsor, refer a player or support a frontline organization, please do!

Invite someone onto your team—whether that's a hockey roster, a fundraising campaign, a board, a volunteer initiative, or an idea that hasn't even been launched yet. Ask them. Encourage them. Give them a reason to say yes.

Because every time you include one more person, you expand the circle of care, you grow support exponentially—and strengthen the community we all share.

That's what Hockey Helps the Homeless shows us is possible: when passion meets purpose, when sport meets service, and when inclusion meets opportunity.

Let's keep inviting. Let's keep engaging. Let's keep including. And let's keep multiplying the difference we make, together.

Because in the end, inclusion isn't just a principle—it's the most powerful tool we have.



Thank You to New Vibes Jazz Quintet for providing the music at the 37th Mayors' Dinner, including Andy Macpherson on vibraphone, John Zadro on piano, Jay Boehmer on drums, Sam Meakin on trombone and Dan Brennan on bass.

Hockey Helps the Homeless is a not-for-profit hockey charity with over 20,000 donors, 3,000 players, and 1,000 volunteers that participate annually, and together, we "play with purpose". All net proceeds stay local in the city they are raised in, and support our 60+ local homeless support agencies across Canada. Since 1996, HHTH has granted over \$33 million to shutout homelessness.

The next Waterloo Region Tournament will be held on **Friday, October 30th, 2026 at RIM Park.**

www.hockeyhelpsthehomeless.com



Building Strong Social Infrastructure

Remarks at 37th Mayors' Dinner by Oluseun Olayinka

Tonight, I would like to begin from somewhere a little unexpected, but very important to me, Africa.

In many African communities, social capital is not just a concept, it is a way of life (Mbaya, 2011). It is the shared understanding that my wellbeing is tied to yours. Children are raised collectively. When someone is struggling, the community steps in. Belonging is assumed, not negotiated.

Research has confirmed what many cultures have long known and practiced: 'strong social connections make people healthier, happier, and more resilient.' (Zaid & Liamputtong, 2025)

North America, including Canada, once lived this reality too. Community centers, shared meals in clubs and associations, neighborhood programs, and faith spaces created places where people were known and supported. Over time, many of those spaces weakened, and today we are living with the consequences.

Thankfully, we are relearning something essential: **Belonging is not a luxury. It is infrastructure.**

That belief sits at the very heart of my work.

When I was 16 years old, I had a dream. In it, I saw myself working with children, youth, and their mothers, creating spaces of safety, growth, and hope. That dream shaped my life. It is why I took two different community development courses in South Africa, convinced this calling was meant for my home country, Nigeria.

So much so, that I almost didn't marry my husband, now of 20 years, because he had a dream of living in Canada one day. And I had this big dream that I thought was for back home. Life, as it turns out, had a wider vision.

Years later, after job transitions and resettlement, my family and I found ourselves here in Waterloo Region. And it was here that I realized something profound.

The community I had seen in my dream was not back in Nigeria.

They were right here in the Region of Waterloo. These were families navigating complex systems. Children with immense potential but limited access. Mothers carrying responsibility without adequate support. People not just needing services but needing a place to belong.

That realization led me to



Oluseun Olayinka is a wife, mother of four amazing children, nonprofit executive, and doctoral scholar committed to strengthening families and communities. She serves as Executive Director of Adventure4Change, a registered Canadian charity based in Waterloo, Ontario, and is a PhD student in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University

Adventure4Change.

Adventure4Change exists to build belonging, stability, and opportunity for children, youth, and families who are often excluded from traditional systems.

What makes our work different is not just what we do, but how we do it.

We create safe, welcoming community spaces families can call "home."

We provide after-school children and youth programs that support academic success, leadership development, and identity formation, especially for children who would otherwise be left behind.

We help families navigate complex systems, education, social services, and community resources, so they are not alone in the process.

But most importantly, we build social capital.

At Adventure4Change:

- Our programs are designed not just for relief, but for growth, so children and youth can imagine and step into brighter futures.
- Our decisions are community informed. Those closest to the challenges help shape the solutions.
- Our staff and volunteers come from the very communities we serve. Representation is built into our model.

And the outcome we care about most is this:

Lives positioned to become confident, contributing members of our society.

Over the past few years, this approach has allowed

Adventure4Change to grow from a small, niche organization into a recognized regional contributor, serving more families, building stronger partnerships, and creating lasting impact across Waterloo Region.

This is what places of inclusion look like in practice. This is belonging with structure. This is community work that lasts.

And here's why this matters for all of us: When people belong, neighborhoods are stronger.

When families are supported, systems can focus on prevention and quality not constant crisis response.

When young people are seen and invested in, the future of our region

becomes more hopeful, and more equitable.

This is belonging with structure. The work of inclusion does not belong to any one sector. It requires collaboration between government, nonprofits, businesses, faith communities, and residents.

Tonight, as we reflect on Places of Inclusion, The Heart of Belonging, my invitation is this:

Let us continue to invest in spaces that create real belonging. Let us treat social capital as essential infrastructure. And most importantly, let us build communities where everyone has the opportunity not just to survive, but to contribute and thrive.

Thank You for Supporting the 37th Mayors' Dinner

RBJ Schlegel Family Foundation

A special thank you to RBJ Schlegel Family Foundation for being the main sponsor for the 37th Annual Mayors' Dinner

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COMMUNITY TABLES

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ZOHRAIN LADHA

CENTRE IN THE SQUARE

STEVE MENICH AND MARY ELLEN CULLEN

CITY OF KITCHENER

CITY OF WATERLOO

JOHN & HEATHER MOTZ

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Thank you to all Working Centre donors, contributors, and community partners who supported this year's event.



Adventure4Change's goal is to prevent poverty and negative life trajectories by inspiring self-discovery using the A4C model to enable communities to make meaningful contributions to society.

www.adventure4change.org

Fostering Inclusivity Through Community Enterprise

Remarks at 37th Mayors' Dinner by Ayman Eldesouky and Cassandra Polyzou

For over 20 years The Working Centre has been hosting Community Enterprise projects like Queen Street Commons Café, Recycle Cycles, Worth a Second Look Housewares and Furniture, and Computer Recycling to name a few.

Community Enterprise projects are practical and productive examples of enterprise. They are active and working businesses that also focus on building community and inclusion.

Why do we put such effort into these enterprise projects? Its all about building our individual and collective ability to break down



Ayman Eldesouky and Cassandra Polyzou presenting at The Mayors' Dinner about the Community Tool projects

isolation, to create spaces where we can live into hope for our world, where we can get to know each other better.

Krista Tippett states: "I think belonging is our true nature. The civil rights elders used to talk about remembering with a hyphen, remembering, [...] Embodying this thing that has always been true and we have to make it physically true again. It's hard for us to feel our belonging even in our circles of kindred worlds, and it's almost impossible right now to imagine our belonging to people across the spectrum of our society."

Being a part of shared spaces often means we have to slow down and be present in this place, to listen to others. We participate in shared spaces because it strengthens each of us as community members, because it helps us to imagine a different future together. People thrive when they feel like they belong.

- A refugee learning to speak English, after just coming through the trauma of war and settling

in a new country, regularly coming to volunteer, building a community of connection around themselves;

- A young woman, once an unsheltered youth who hung out with other youth at the back of the Queen St Common Cafe, worked hard to separate from the world of drugs to keep her children safe as they grew. She has returned to sign her children up to volunteer as they pursue their university educations.
- A young man joined us as part of the ACE program, a non-credit school board program leading to a certificate of accomplishment and after 5 years at Worth a Second Look, building confidence and skills, he is now being offered a full-time job at a grocery store as he graduates from high school.
- A man who has become isolated in his apartment with high agoraphobia through COVID, is repeatedly coming to Queen Street Commons Café, spending time around people, often having difficulties moderating his intensity, and gradually being supported to remember what it is to be around others.
- A single mother brings her 2 children to Recycle Cycles each year as they grow out of their bikes, allowing her children to ride and play with other children.
- A refugee from Sudan came to Worth a Second Look to outfit his apartment. He had no money, so we set him up with a bed and kitchen supplies for free. He came back later when he could to pay for the items and started to volunteer to build language skills. After schooling he found work and got married. As the new couple were moving to their new home, they came to find their furniture at WASL. His family of friends at WASL paid for his household items as a wedding gift. He and his wife continue to volunteer in the store.

The community that builds around these projects means people belong and are known. People participate in the work of the project, with each person giving according to their ability. The work can involve collecting e-waste or learning the skills of cleaning hard drives. Our furniture pick up service means learning how to gently carry couches and bulky furniture out

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Remembering Arleen Macpherson

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to listen and be supportive.

Arleen came to The Working Centre as a woman in her 50's with highly developed spiritual and community leadership skills. The Working Centre was hungry for this kind of leadership. It was not long before Arleen was at the centre of The Working Centre project.

In the December 1994 issue of Good Work News Arleen explained the kind of community we were attempting to create:

"St. John's Kitchen long ago became a place where people gathered for more than food. People come to socialize, meet friends, play cards, support one another and help with tasks. It is a rare place where people with strongly divergent points of view can spend substantial periods of time in relative harmony. It seems like the ideal place to develop and practice the virtues of gentleness, respect, love and inclusiveness that sometimes get forgotten in our competitive and often harsh world."

Arleen retired as coordinator of St. John's Kitchen in 1999 and two years later we invited Arleen to join the Board of Directors where she continued until she formally retired in 2017. The last three years Arleen was Board President, capping a

Reflections on St. John's Kitchen The Meaning of Hospitality



Arleen Macpherson

long commitment to and with The Working Centre that stretched over 30 years.

When Arleen retired she used the words, belonging, laughter, understanding, gratitude, hospitality, and openness to describe St. John's Kitchen. What she meant by those words was a description of the culture she encountered each day. "Food is an important part of St. John's Kitchen," Arleen wrote, "it is around food that we gather to recognize our common humanity and to establish a sense of belonging." Arleen weaved hospitality, courage and generosity into the fabric of St. John's Kitchen and The Working Centre. Thank you Arleen for the blessings you brought to our community.

Under Home by David Macpherson

(This song was written in 1993 by David for his mother and he sung it in tribute at the memorial service)

Feed the children and put roofs over their heads
Put shoes on their feet and keep them warm
Give them love and understanding and
At the end of the day they'll all come home

Feed the old and put roofs over their heads
Put shoes on their feet and keep them warm
Give them love and understanding and
For so many years they gave you a home

Won't you please feed me and put a roof over my head
Put shoes on my feet and keep me warm
Give me love and understanding and
At the end of the day we won't be alone

And I will feed you and I'll put a roof over your head
Put shoes on your feet and keep you warm
I will love and understand you and
At the end of the day we will be home.

Feed the children and put roofs over their heads
Put shoes on their feet and keep them warm
Give them love and understanding and
At the end of the day they'll all come home



Learn more about Community Enterprise projects at:

www.theworkingcentre.org/hubs/tools-and-enterprise

A Retrospective on My 17 Year Journey at The Working Centre

By Susana Escamilla

I had the privilege to work for The Working Centre, a truly amazing organization, which feels like a living, breathing organism, with all its parts deeply interconnected. One of those parts is the Job Search Resource Centre, where I spent 17.6 incredible years learning from and giving back to the wonderful community we serve.

I first joined TWC as an Employment Counsellor on February 4, 2008, and from day one, I felt lucky to be part of a team that was not only knowledgeable but also kind, vibrant, and genuinely caring.

Rita G., Mathew, Sonya, and I started around the same time. It was a fun time in those early days of learning, growing, and figuring things out together.

At that time, we worked with people who were on EI, new Canadians, and people who came into our Job Search Resource Centre.

We also supported the women in the Experience Matters program with resume writing, job search, and interview preparation when they enrolled in TWC's computer classes through Ontario Works.

Every Wednesday morning we used to have our weekly meeting, a full house with our team of 20 employment counsellors, front desk workers along with Jason and Michael who supported our day-to-day work, and Christa, our teacher who always brought thoughtful insight to the group.

Those Wednesday mornings weren't just about updates—they were a time to connect, share a few laughs, and remind ourselves why the work we did mattered.

When the New Canadian Program lost its funding and closed its doors, TWC stepped in to support Internationally Educated Professionals by providing career counselling, job search preparation, and job placement services. Significant renovations were undertaken to convert the basement at 58 into the hub of the NCE program, and new counsellors were hired to work exclusively with Internationally Trained Individuals (ITIs). It was a meaningful and enriching time in my life. I was supporting participants from all over the world in their journey to find employment in Canada. This experience opened my eyes to the world and deepened my sensitivity to the needs of others, reminding me that, at our core, we are all human beings.

The Second Career program began in 2008 to help laid-off Ontarians retrain for in-demand jobs. Thanks to its success and continued demand, it's still active and was renamed Better Jobs Ontario in 2022 after some changes.

Around 2009 there were significant changes when the Ministry stopped



Susana Escamilla speaking at the 35th Mayors' Dinner in 2024

supporting certain organizations and stopped mandating a central referral process. This suited TWC. Our main resource centre on Queen Street has always been the place where people come in large numbers, as we have a strong process of helping people start and develop their job search.

About this time, TWC ran a bridging program for internationally trained professionals interested in pursuing a career in social work. We were fortunate that Sophie and Bim, both graduates of the program, joined TWC as employment counsellors.

In 2010, The Working Centre was selected to deliver the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW), a federal and provincial funded program to support individuals over the age of 55 affected by layoffs in Kitchener-Waterloo. This program expected to improve participants' employability through tailored services and financial assistance for training, travel, and living expenses, helping them re-enter the workforce.

The Working Centre prepared to welcome hundreds of older workers by opening a new resource centre at 90 Queen Street (2010-2013). The space included a computer lab for participants, rooms for workshops and meetings, and spaces for counsellors.

The eligible participants in Kitchener-Waterloo responded enthusiastically, demonstrating strong interest and a commitment to actively engage in TIOW activities for a minimum of 25 hours per week. These activities included Basic Skills Upgrading and Specific Skills Training, in addition to ongoing support through one-on-one counselling appointments, and our weekly job search support groups, where participants shared their experiences, challenges, and job search strategies in a supportive environment.

My personal experience leading the Job Search Resource Centre was incredibly rewarding. I had the privilege of witnessing firsthand how participants supported and relied on each other, which created a deeply supportive and inclusive environment. This group not only helped participants grow, but also led to some meaningful friendships. A story that I love to share is when

one of the women offered her support and encouragement to a First Nations woman, helping her take the first steps toward starting her own business. Seeing that kind of mentorship and empowerment was truly inspiring and reinforced the power of community and collaboration.

In 2013 TWC managed to get an extension of the TIOW program, which came with reduced funding and the closure of the 90 Queen Resource Centre, my responsibilities shifted a bit. While I continued with my work with TIOW participants, I also resumed supporting Employment Services. It was a beautiful transition to support younger participants again, who brought a new energy, hope, and enthusiasm to my work.

As the TIOW program was ending, a new opportunity opened up; this time focused on helping youth find employment. In 2015, TWC began supporting youth through the Youth Job Connection (YJC) program, which offered year-round support for unemployed youth aged 15 to 29 who face barriers to employment, as well as a summer program for high school students aged 15 to 18 who needed help transitioning from school to work. I had the joy of supporting a few participants during their time in this program.

Between November 2015 and December 2016, more than 44,000 Syrian refugees were resettled in Canada. At TWC, we learned and adapted to better support the needs of the refugees arriving in the Waterloo Region, helping them adjust to a new life with a different culture and language. TWC also hired Arabic-speaking staff to provide better assistance.

In 2016, I became the host of the Speak English Café, a welcoming space for anyone wanting to practice and improve their English conversation skills. It was held every Thursday evening at the back of Queen Street Commons. The weekly meetings brought people together to contribute to lively discussions, share experiences, and learn from one another. The

atmosphere was filled with laughter and conversations, fostering a sense of community and connection among participants and volunteers.

On March 18th, 2020, because of the pandemic, employment counsellors worked from home and connected remotely with participants through Zoom and phone until January 2022 when all employment counsellors came back to work. It had been a chaotic and difficult time for all job searchers.

In January 2021, the Resource Centre reopened its doors to the public along with adding plexi-glass barriers at each desk. I transitioned from Employment Counselling to answering the phone. There were over 800 voicemails waiting for a response, and I did my best to be kind and patient to return each call. During the year I answered the phone, I learned more about all the ways TWC is involved with the wider community.

In September 2022, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development selected Serco to manage all employment services in partnership with local organizations from Waterloo Wellington to Barrie. Another change in the ever changing field of supporting job searchers.

I am grateful that in the last three years before my retirement, I had the opportunity to work more closely with the employment counsellors. It was a rewarding time, as I was able to listen to their concerns and guide them with my experience. Despite the high administration of the new Serco system, I found fulfillment in building a kind and empathetic connection with the counsellors, the people at the front desk, and the amazing volunteers.

It has been a privilege to be part of such an inspiring community, and I am incredibly grateful for the experiences and connections I have made. While my time with TWC has ended, the spirit of love, inclusion, and community will remain with me forever.

My work as staff ended on August 25, 2025, but TWC is and will always be in my heart.

Job Search Resource Centre



The Working Centre's Resource Centre at 58 Queen Street South in Kitchener is a hub for work, financial problem-solving and livelihood related issues. At the Resource Centre you will find a lively drop-in space, where you can receive support in multiple languages to navigate community resources and problem solve issues that arise.



Job Postings



Employment Counselling



Resume Support



Public Access Computers



Support for New Canadians



Links to Community Resources

58 Queen Street South in Kitchener | 519.743.1151
Job Search Email: jobsearch@theworkingcentre.org

The Impact of St. John's Kitchen Warming Centre

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stuff.”

- A community member shared that the unhoused do not migrate far. If it rains, they are going to be tucked under business awnings and front porches. A warming centre would help mitigate this.
- A year-round ‘home base’ allows individuals to unwind and organize their thoughts, which is the necessary foundation for setting goals or seeking employment.
- “How do you set goals if you don’t have somewhere to lay your head down at night. How can you accept a job if you don’t know if you are going to be able to sleep.”
- “There shouldn’t need to be a tent city for six f*cking years.”
- “This place keeps people from dying. Literally watched my friends sometimes four a day be saved here. This place gives us a sense of hope.”
- “Run the warming centre all year. Staff save so many people.”
- “Some people have no connection their only sense of connection is this team.”
- It is so “helpful to have a person at ground zero saying you’re still loved and you can still turn things around. When people call you a piece of xxx long enough, you begin to believe it. People don’t have a chance to see me around good people who are supportive, only around the people I must be around.”

Personal Pathways: Visions for the Future

I asked our community members: “If you could change one thing in your life moving forward, what would it be and how could we support you?” Their answers reflect a deep desire for restoration and growth.

- **Family & Recovery:** MD desires to work toward recovery with the goal of being reunited with her daughter. She noted that consistent reminders and regular



The Warming Centre at 97 Victoria St. North provided safe shelter and respite to upwards of 130 people per night throughout the winter months

routine support are vital to her success. She had this from two workers in Cambridge, but when they moved on, she did not have the same kind of support.

- **Recovery:** T expressed a desire to get clean. Support would be “A place to go in recovery, especially to deal with dope-sickness. Followed by an apartment.” She also spoke of her experiences at the green attic and her dream of being able to design clothes and start her own company.
- **Support for Sobriety:** Other suggestions from community members included supports for getting clean such as, shelter; help with rehab and detox; a group home for people who are trying to get clean; someone willing to pay for a person to leave town to get clean; being allowed into recovering housing ASAP (not a 3-5 days clean requirement); a detox and sober house; opportunities to volunteer and seek employment.
- **Life Skills & Safety:** L shared the challenge of being “out here since age 11.” He envisions a safe living space that transitions from a “hard” environment (vandal-resistant), where folk can learn basic life skills and be surrounded by a supportive, non-judgmental team to a “soft” living area after a successful six months with con-

tinued supports.

- **Connection & Health:** Some spoke of wanting onsite addiction and sexual assault supports. Others to the need for accessing co-ed housing, so couples are not forced to live apart after decades together.

The Need for Year-Round Support: A Sanctuary in All Seasons

Community members have expressed disappointment, anxiety, and fear regarding the closure. Many noted that while the cold is a primary threat in winter, the extreme heat of summer creates an urgent need for cooling centres. A community member added that in all seasons they still need to sleep.

Core Findings

1. **The Centre Saves Lives:** The warming centre served as a critical overdose prevention site. Staff presence, naloxone access, and peer monitoring prevented numerous fatal overdoses and reduced the risks associated with isolated substance use.

2. **Closure Creates Instability:** Community members expressed fear and uncertainty as the site closed. While cold weather is a winter risk, heat, rain, and chronic exhaustion create equally dangerous conditions



in other seasons. The need for safe overnight rest is year-round.

3. **Strong Case for Year-Round Operations:** Participants emphasized the importance of a consistent ‘home base.’ Year-round services would reduce public sleeping, improve safety, stabilize individuals, and support pathways toward employment, recovery, and housing.

4. **Service Gaps Increase Risk:** High-risk periods were identified on overnights, weekends, Sunday mornings, and during seasonal transitions—particularly late April—when weather conditions remain harsh, but seasonal services end.

5. **Clear Aspirations for Recovery and Stability:** Community members articulated specific hopes including recovery, family reunification, access to detox and sober housing, employment opportunities, and housing models that allow couples to remain together.

System-Level Impact

The warming centre contributed to improved public safety and system efficiency by reducing emergency interventions, mitigating property impacts, and offering a coordinated point of contact for health and social services.

Conclusion

The Overnight Warming Centre demonstrates that low-barrier, dignity-centred overnight services protect life and strengthen community well-being. Seasonal operations save lives; year-round operations have the potential to substantially amplify these outcomes while reducing strain on emergency and municipal systems.

Fostering Inclusivity Through Community Enterprise

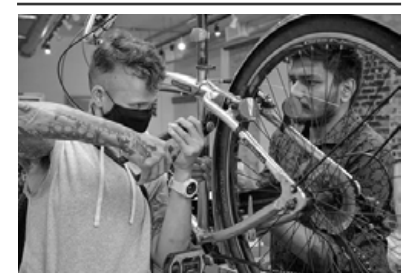
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of people’s houses. With 700 bikes donated to Recycle Cycles, it takes focus and constant movement to refurbish them for selling. Skill and knowledge and presence, generously shared. Confidence grows in an environment of trust.

Shared spaces are made viable when people from all walks of life participate. When many people get involved in public spaces we are all strengthened. These ways include donating goods to Worth a Second Look or Recycle Cycles, joining the work of sorting goods, coming for lunch at the Queen Street Commons Cafe, teaching basketball at Adventure4Change, participating in Hockey Helps the Homeless, or spending time at our local library. The possibilities are endless as we prioritize these choices in our lives.

Recently we asked some people why the Queen Street Commons Café is important to them:

“Queen Street Commons will be held as a treasured place in many of our collective memories for housing our growth as parents, families, and for all the weaving into



Workers repair a bike at Recycle Cycles Community Bike Shop

a culture of care. It was a powerful model of inclusivity for us all and for our kids as the next generation of community. And – who could forget the best brownies ever!!”

“I love that Queen Street Commons welcomes people from all walks of life, who came there for a variety of reasons – a business meeting, meetup with friends, time to read or reflect alone at a table, attend an all-candidates meeting for the upcoming elections; all of us there together.”

The simple act of being present in intentional public spaces that bring diverse people together, enriches our lives, and weaves us into a diverse community where all can participate.



Local RBC Employees Donate \$1,200 to The Working Centre

The local branches of RBC contributed \$1,200 to The Working Centre. This donation was connected to the RBC employees who volunteered at the Mayors’ Dinner. In the photo are a group of RBC employees who came to St. John’s Kitchen to get a tour and present the cheque.