

ANNUAL REPORT, 2022



Restorative Justice Housing Ontario

Safe, supportive and sustainable housing

Chair's Message

Greetings to all of you who support us by volunteering, by funding and by providing guidance. This past year finally felt as if we were no longer a start-up. We had stability in the three men's houses that we continue to manage, and we finally achieved the goal of opening a women's house at the end of 2022.

The men's houses were occupied throughout the year, having a capacity of 13 men. There was a loyal cadre of volunteers who supported the men as we cautiously eased out of Covid restrictions and learned what it was like to really live in community. Barbeques and weekend brunches, trips to the grocery store and for coffee, and shopping for clothing all felt normal. Finding extra support for mental illness and for potential employment continue to be challenging. We continue to improve our integration with social service and faith-based groups who share our motivation to provide housing to ex-prisoners. We also continue to raise our profile among those who guide ex-prisoners transitioning back into the community.

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ANNUAL REPORT, 2022

Chair's Message (continued)

Joseph Lauren, our Program Director, continued to respond to the acute needs of male residents in addition to supporting them on a regular basis with sensitive and pro-active care. As Covid cases declined, volunteers were able to pitch in with more services and support; but we are indebted to Joseph for his work throughout the early months of 2022.

A major change for the year was the opening of a house for women and the hiring of Michelle Joseph, our Women's Program Manager, who comes to us with a wealth of senior experience guiding agencies. Michelle found the location of the new women's house in Toronto and got it organized, developed a fledgling network of agencies and people who guide female ex-prisoners back into the community, and started to select the occupants. We are incredibly grateful to La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso, which offered us multi-year funding as the founding sponsor for our women's program. This stability allowed us to get it started and will allow us to manage its ongoing challenges.

Governance continues to be a major focus as we stabilize and grow. We were sad to say good-bye to founding director Harry Nigh and to director Gillian Sandiford. We are forever grateful for all that they contributed to get us started. We were delighted to welcome Diego Toro, who had experienced living in our housing, Donald Klein, who as an advisor offered considerable assistance to our fundraising and now co-chairs that Committee, and to Elizabeth White, who brought to us decades of experience in the transition of ex-prisoners and has been instrumental in supporting the opening of our women's program. In addition, the board has formalized more of RJHO's processes, such as having audited financial statements and clear records of decisions at board meetings.

We live in a time of uncertainty and change. Seeking sustainable funding remains a challenge, but in the meantime, we are learning a great deal about how to operate our houses, how best to support our residents, and how to integrate our programs into the broader community.

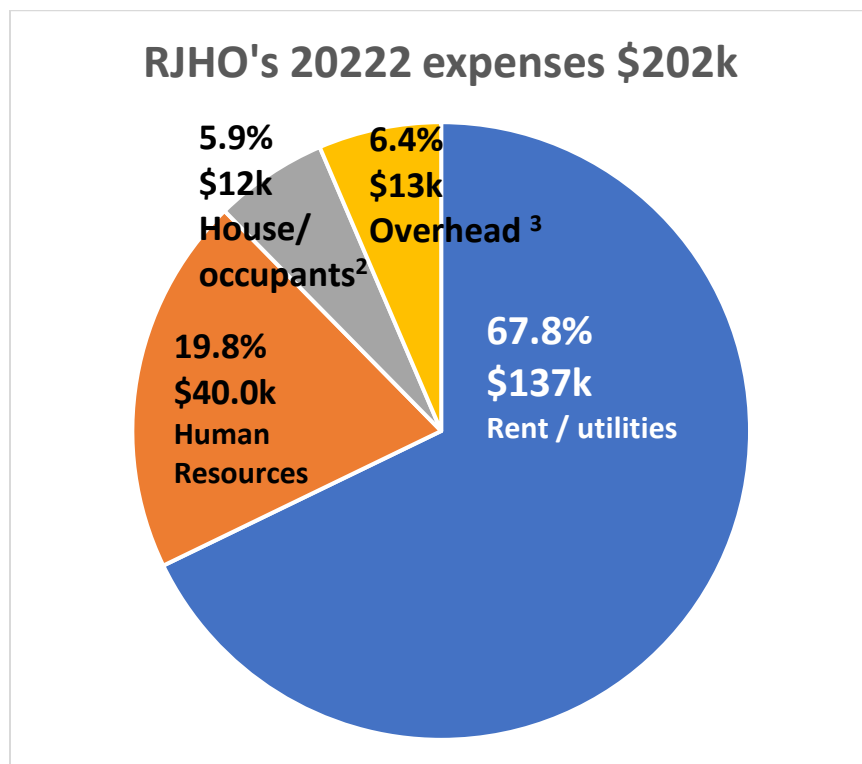
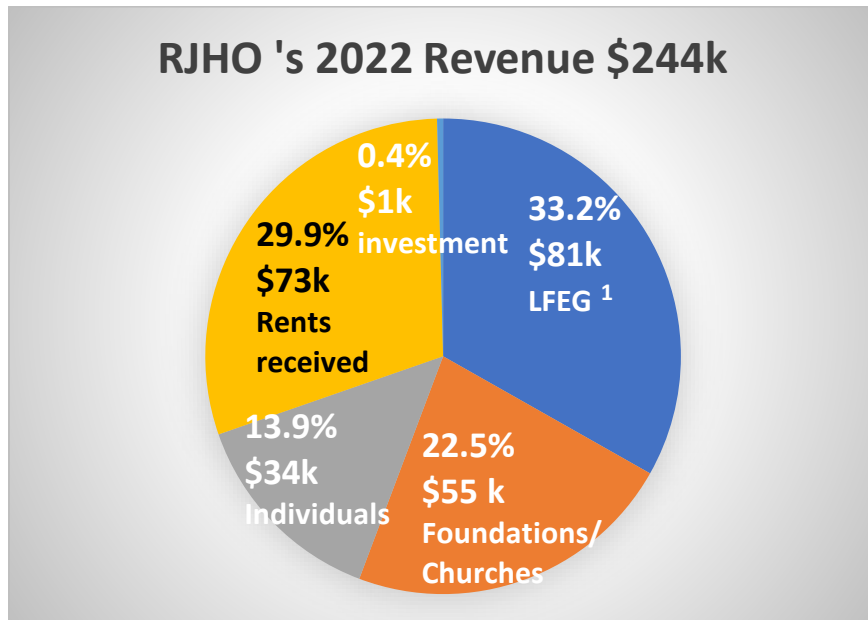
The heart and soul of RJHO is our residents, supported by our volunteers. Together they exemplify the very best of a non-discriminatory world of joy, of hope and of commitment to nurturing the common good. As the accompanying story of one of our residents indicates, RJHO provides a welcoming and supportive environment to people who want to turn their lives around.

We appreciate that all of you receiving this report support our vision of the fundamental human right to safe, secure, and affordable housing. Thank you for all that you have done to support us.

Jim Harbell
Chair, Restorative Justice Housing Ontario

ANNUAL REPORT, 2022

The pie charts below summarize our annual income and expenditures.



1. La Foundation Emmanuelle Gattuso
2. Additional house costs and support costs
3. Insurance and audit costs

ANNUAL REPORT, 2022

Other indicators of success

In addition to the financial statistics, other indicators reflect the work of restorative justice such as: greater connection to community, progress towards fuller independence and better health.

- The three men's homes were **fully occupied** with 13 residents.
- Opening in November, the women's house had 2 residents by year end for 4 available spaces.
- Four residents had **transitioned to accommodations**. These moves reflect better financial and relationship situations than when they first arrived.
- Four residents **resumed relationships with members of their families**, after years, and in one case, after decades of estrangement.
- One resident **volunteers** at the Christ Church St. James foodbank
- Five residents have found full or part-time **employment**
- Two resident have completed **courses** in BuildingUP, a program which provides training in the trades for ex-prisoners
- One resident has begun an Electrician **apprenticeship** program
- One resident has joined a **volleyball** league
- Three residents have joined **faith communities** (Christian and Muslim) and attend services regularly
- **Health**
 - One person has had his diabetes diagnosed and treated and he has managed to lose 50 pounds (to the end of April 2023)
 - One person completed radiation and chemotherapy treatments following major cancer surgery in late 2021 and has been declared cancer-free by his oncologists.

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Below is the personal story of one resident

JR's Story

JR arrived at one of the Restorative Justice Housing homes late in 2022.

He was born in Newmarket. When he was two months old his family moved back to the Azores for several years, then to Massachusetts in 1979, when he was 10. He was arrested in 2005 for second-degree murder and served 17-years of a sentence in different U.S. penitentiaries then was deported on his release.

In its decision the parole board wrote, "During his incarceration he participated in numerous programs including Restorative Justice, Alternatives to Violence, positive psychology and earned his high school equivalency diploma. He presented a well-structured re-entry plan including work opportunities and he has strong family support. The Board is encouraged that he plans to continue with his involvement in Restorative Justice."

Here is his story.

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ANNUAL REPORT, 2022

"I went to 4th grade in the Azores, in Portuguese school. When we came here I was put in grade 7 in a bilingual class. I couldn't speak English. Kids were picking on me. I used to wear polyester clothes and kids used to pick on me because of it, so I used to beat them up. They threw me out of school. I used to skip school and stay home."

"My parents were strict, often hitting me. I got beat up all the time. One time I was in school and I had a welt from a wire, here (gesturing to his neck), my mom had hit me with a wire. When I got to school the lady saw me and said, "You got to go to the nurse." I said, "I ain't going to the nurse. I don't want to get my Mom in trouble". So I ran out of school. When I got home she gave me another beating. I got this beating because I didn't want to put my mother in jail. After that, my dad stopped my mom from beating me up."

"I started drinking, around 13 or 14, taking booze from my Dad. I got picked up for juvenile offenses lots of times. I was a punk. I hung around with the wrong crowd."

"Before I went to prison I did bridge work working in iron and concrete for 15 years.... I got front page of the newspaper on the South Shore newspaper. I built the walls of the bridge. I tied the rebar."

"I lived in New Bedford Massachusetts. I had two kids but was never married. My son now works for the school board and my daughter works for the government. They been waiting for me for so long. They want to come up and see me." (JR is clearly proud of them.)

"Their mother was romantically involved with the guy I killed... but I didn't know it at the time. I looked out the window and saw this guy hitting my car with a baseball bat, so I went out and told him to stop then he started hitting me. I grabbed him. I had a knife and stabbed him to make him stop. I got him in the heart and he died. I got sentenced and spent time in different penitentiaries."

"I got paroled Aug 16, 2022. I was surprised. The CO (Correctional Officer) called me and said parole wants to see me. I said to myself 'Oh no!' I went to her office and told me "sit down". I said to myself "Oh shit! another setback." I had had my hearing in June and it usually takes six months so I figured there was trouble.

She said, "I've got good news. They gave you parole".

"All that weight! It was like when you have a baby. I didn't know what to do...I started crying. I went back to my cell. When I called my granddaughter to let her know that I got parole I had to leave a message. After, she got out of school, she called me back and had to leave a message. I finally talked to her that night. She was all happy."

"I had talked to Joseph, (Joseph Lauren, RJHO's Program Director) on an off for three years. I had been doing programs in restorative justice and I found him on the Restorative Justice web site. I was going to be a facilitator for other guys when I got parole, and the courses were something that led up to that."

"When I got parole, everything changed. My whole life changed. I was deported."

"I feel so fortunate. I don't think I'm worth it."

"When I got here I felt so overwhelmed and so appreciative for all the stuff you guys (RJHO) do for us. I'm grateful. I don't drink. I don't do drugs anymore. I don't care about the drugs. I'm just hoping I can find someone who will take me for who I am and understand."

ANNUAL REPORT, 2022

“I get along with the other guys. They’re good people.”

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“Jonathon, who works for Margaret’s. He’s a real nice kid. He takes me to my appointments. I didn’t know how to go on the train, and I have so many appointments. This kid comes out of his office and he meets me and takes me to my appointments to get my ID, my birth certificate, now I’m getting my SIN (Social Insurance Number). I’m going to have all my stuff. Hopefully, by the end of the summer for my licence.”

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“I’m going to learn another trade. I want to get an apprenticeship somewhere.”

Meanwhile JR cooks, makes coffee, does light maintenance around the RJHO homes and volunteers at a local foodbank. He is, in many respects, a model resident.

To learn more about Restorative Justice Housing or
to make a donation or
if you are interested in learning about opportunities for volunteering
visit our web site rjho.ca