



2023 Annual Report

Supporting the community, providing hope

Presented by:
RJHO Executive Leadership
June 16, 2024

Safe, supportive, and sustainable housing

A message from the Chair of the RJHO Board of Directors

A message from the Chair of the Board of Directors

Friends of RJHO,

When I started writing this, I wondered if one of the recent words of the year would capture 2023 for RJHO. As I perused the various words of 2023 on websites, I rejected them one by one – not ‘fully’ although we do have a long waiting list, definitely not ‘gaslighting’, and ‘authentic’ is just too challenging to define and suffers from overuse. ‘Pivot’ meaning to be responsive and flexible, does apply to us, but does not to sum up our year – besides it too seems highly overused.

So, I have come up with a simple word that I believe captures our optimistic feeling as we start 2024 – confidence. From those days six to seven years ago when we had no idea what we were doing or where we were going, we have come a long way.

In 2023, we had the confidence to place ourselves intentionally in transition – to ask what a more established agency would look like, what resources we need to get to that point and, most importantly, what aspects of an expanded vision and goals could be achieved.

Necessity drives us forward at a relentless pace. Every day, the waiting lists for people asking for our housing help increases – particularly for men. During 2023, our fundraising gained momentum, with help from a professional fundraiser, kindly supported by one of our funders. This momentum resulted in our best year in funding, giving us the confidence to drive the organization forward to the next level. To get there, we need better processes for tracking our residents, our funders, our stakeholders, and our volunteers. We need professional management and increased expertise in mental health and addictions. We began the process during 2023 to move forward with these initiatives, with the hope that 2024 will see many of them come to fruition.

A message from the Chair of the Board of Directors

We saw the need to rent another men's house, this one in Toronto's east end which we took possession of at the end of 2023.

Sadly, several of our residents became seriously ill during the year, which amplified and made urgent our need to provide volunteer support. We are getting over this hurdle but have noted that this is an area for further development in 2024.

The context of our work is challenging – Canada's housing system has never faced more stressful times, inflation eats away at the meagre support on which our residents live, the prison system remains traumatic and not rehabilitative, and volunteerism is slow to return following the pandemic. While this is all cause for worry, we intentionally strive for optimism, and in doing so we are finding the confidence to grow, to deepen our relationships and most importantly, to better support our residents.

I hope that you will continue to support us, to share in our hope and to work with us to accomplish more transition housing for ex-prisoners. The world needs more confidence.

Best,



Jim Harbell

President and Chair of RJHO



**Our donors and Financial Contributors:
Without your support RJHO would not be
possible**

2023 Annual Report: Donors and Financial Contributions

RJHO is immensely grateful for the support received from:

- La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso
- Coghlan Family Fund at Toronto Foundation
- Kindred Charitable Foundation
- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto
- Echo Foundation
- Robert Kerr Foundation

Without your support our work and mission would not be possible.

2023 Annual Report: Community Partnerships

RJHO is extremely grateful for service level support and partnerships with:

- The John Howard Society
- Houselink & Mainstay Housing
- The Jean Tweed Centre Justice Programs
- The Neighbourhood Group
- Margaret's Housing & Community Support Services
- The Salvation Army
- Fred Victor Centre
- Dixon Hall
- Street Haven
- SHIPSHEY
- Building Up
- Friends of Dismas
- Yonge Street Mission

2023 Financial Report

2023 Annual Report: Financial Reporting

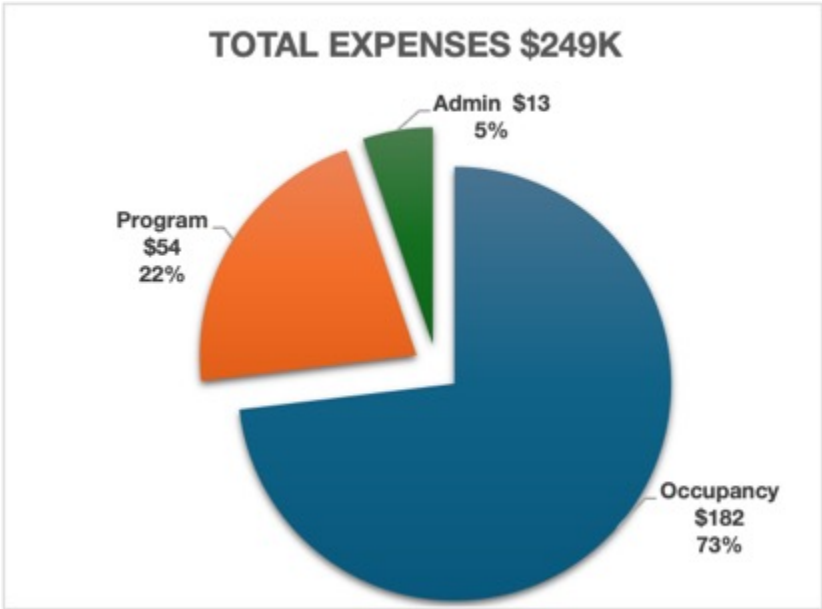
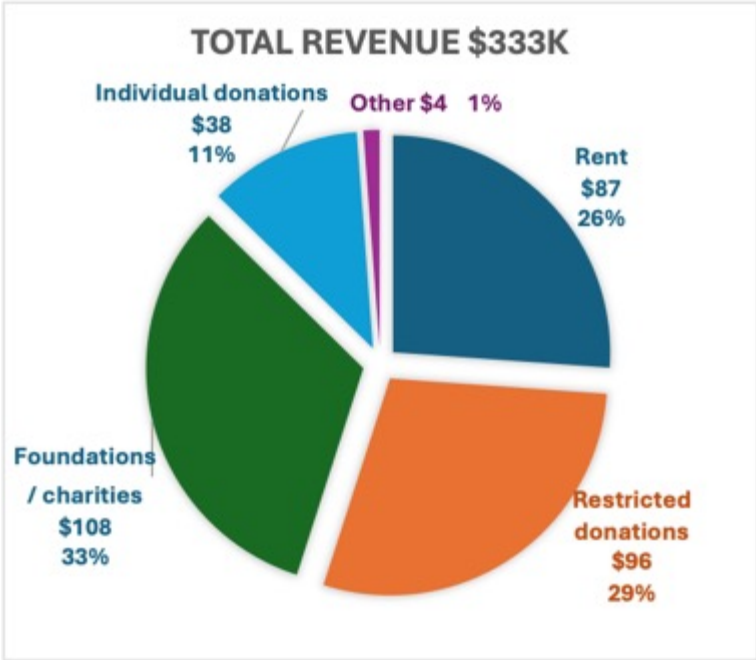
2023 was a successful year financially as well as in expansion to include a fourth men’s house in east Toronto, opened in January 2024, support to occupants and witnessing progress by individual residents.

Continuing and new generous donors enabled the maintenance of our desired reserve to ensure ongoing viability with a cushion encouraging continued expansion and increased integration and therapy programs.

Restricted donations refer to support for specified locations/projects which are ongoing or have begun at the outset of 2024.

Expenses for the year reflect the reality of rental costs in Toronto which is increasingly expensive.

Program costs include the salaries and fees to our program directors and community development costs.



Safe, supportive, and sustainable housing

Women's Program

2023 Annual Report: Women's Program

Over the last year, the women's program has undergone some significant changes. These changes are designed to improve the success of women living in the house as well as fine tune our referral systems. In our experience and reflected in the data, women leaving corrections most often have high and complex mental, physical and emotional issues. Many of these issues require an intensive case management approach with access to specialized services that support women to transition into the community, stabilize and grow. Therefore, we have made having a case manager a necessary requirement for all our referrals. We struggled with this as case managers are in short supply and high demand and did not want to restrict our housing, however, we found that without case management the residents were not often able to stay housed. Working with case managers allowed residents to get access to much needed services and also to be held when the inevitable relapses and bumps in the road occur.

While this new requirement has many benefits for our residents, the lack of capacity across the health care and social services systems continues to be a real barrier. Long wait lists for mental health and substance use support can easily allow women to fall through the cracks. We will continue to work with our partners to develop the most supportive environment for all our residents.

As we move into our third year, we are using all the lessons we have learned to undertake quality improvement in our recruitment and housing of women leaving corrections. We believe that we will continue to improve and grow.

As RJHO welcomes its first Executive Director, the Women's Committee is hopeful for more growth in the future.

Men's Program

2023 Annual Report: Men's Program

The men's houses have an extensive waiting list such that when a vacancy presents itself as a result of a successful transition or unsuccessful departure through a parole suspension, the empty room is made available and filled relatively quickly with a new resident.

2023 saw 5 men transition out of our three houses and 5 new men enter.

A New House with capacity for 4 new residents was approved in 2023 opened in 2024!

A current landlord offered to make another property available when possible

Two residents received parole approval to transition to living with their families

Interview with a Resident of our Newest RJHO Home in East Toronto

2023 Annual Report: Resident Interview – Ben’s Story

My name is Ben,

I was living at Bunton Lodge on Sherbourne street after getting out of Kingston where I was serving a life sentence for second degree murder.

I’d been given Joseph (Lauren, Program Director’s) number a long time ago. One of the guys at Bunton passed it on to me. I held onto it for about 14 months before I finally gave Joseph a call to say that I was being encouraged to start looking for a place.

When I called, he said, “Good timing. We have a bar b q at one of the houses this month” So I headed up there and met Joseph and some of the other volunteers and Wendy (Leaver, a board member). I was informed that she was the one doing the initial interviews for people being accepted into the houses. When I met her she told me she got an email from Pastor Rudy...who is a volunteer chaplain whom I met in the institution in Kingston. He’s known Wendy for years so he sent her a text telling her a little bit about me and his experience with me. He really talked me up, because when Wendy met me she said, “We don’t have to have an official interview because I know everything I need to know from Pastor Rudy.”

I really enjoyed the bar b q and enjoyed meeting the volunteers, Joseph and Wendy and I think it was the following month I attended the next bar b q and that’s when Joseph informed me that he had a room available and that I could check it out. I was ecstatic to get something that quick.

But after thinking about it...I greatly appreciated that I had the option to think about it: that I could take my time.... I had to decline because of distance. It would have been anywhere from an hour and a half to two and a half hours to get to work in Scarborough. Etobicoke is quite a distance.... It would have been at least 3 buses and if I had missed one, it would have pushed me to 2.5 hours.

2023 Annual Report: Resident Interview – Ben’s Story

I was worried that I had ‘burned my bridge’ but Joseph informed me that there were no hard feelings “We totally understand”. I greatly appreciate that he understood. I didn’t feel judged because of my decision. Joseph said that I could remain on the list and be considered for the next opportunity.

At the time RJHO was considering getting a fifth house, this one in Scarborough, so when they were checking this place out Joseph contacted me and said “You’d be a fool to turn it down!”. He said “it’s close to your work.

He called me maybe 45 minutes before he was going to drop off some gifts for the owners just before Christmas. He said, “if you want to see it and can get here in about 45 minutes I’ll stay her.”

I’d just gotten back from work. I didn’t even shower. I jumped on the subway and got here and got to meet the owners. When I saw this place, oh my goodness! The vibe was welcoming. There was a strong sense of peace in this house. Joseph showed me a room and I fell in love again.

I have the biggest room. Everyone that I tell, at work, when I describe the room, they’re all jealous.

Ben

(Ben is a pseudonym)

2023 Annual Report: Resident Interview

HOW IS IT LIVING HERE?

I like it here. When I leave work.... it takes me 38-40 minutes by transit to get here... I stay here every day from 4 PM till I go back to the halfway house....I have to be back there every night. I'm here full time from Friday night to Sunday evening. My caseworker is trying to find out if I can get permission to stay here three nights.

I recently applied for full parole. I hope to find out by the end of this month if I can be here full time.

TELL ME ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF LIVING WITH OTHERS HERE.

It's like family. I grew up with five brothers and three sisters. Then I went to prison and you're elbow to elbow with other people...personalities, no different than my brothers and sisters, then to a halfway house... which is again, still living with my brothers.

It's not the place that makes it. You make the place. I bring my personality, my characteristics, my acceptance, my willingness. It's the same with the other guys.

DO YOU SHARE MEALS?

Everyone in this house cooks except me... but I like to eat. The kitchen is where we hang out eating and talking. We try to eat together... With this gentleman over here, I just had steak and soup, chicken burgers. The other guy fed me fish, chicken and rice. I don't go hungry.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO ANYONE ELSE WHO IS IN BUNTON OR MAYBE STILL IN KINGSTON

When guys are talking to me about getting release from the halfway house and they don't know where to go I ask Joseph if I can pass his number on. I extend what was given to me. It's up to them to call or not.

2023 Annual Report: Resident Interview

Joseph added. I wanted “Ben” for the house. I knew he was a lifer. I knew he was employed nearby. I knew he was responsible. I’d heard only good things about him and how he interacted with other people: that he’d be a good representative. I know that the owners would drop by from time to time and that Ben would be a good representative meeting them if I wasn’t there.

HOW ABOUT THE CODE OF CONDUCT? DO PEOPLE EVER ASK YOU ABOUT THE “NO SMOKING” NO OVERNIGHT GUESTS....

Prior to being released on parole, rules and regulations are pounded into us. I don’t have a problem with no smoking in the house, I’m no longer a drinker...I don’t have a problem with no smoking, no drugs in house.

**Who We Are:
RJHO Staff and Executive Team,
Board of Directors and Advisors**

2023 Annual Report: RJHO Management and Board of Directors

RJHO Board of Directors

Rev. Jim Harbell	Chair	Minister, Metropolitan United Church
Eileen Henderson	Vice-Chair	
Allan Petrie	Treasurer	Retired, Financial Services, CPA / CA
Paul Dowling	Secretary	Retired, Social Housing Consultant
Carr Hatch	Director	Partner; Thomson, Rogers
Kyrsten Howat	Director	Social Worker
Donald Klein	Director	Retired; Financial Services
Wendy Leaver	Director	Retired; Toronto Police Service
Diego Toro	Director	Former RJHO Resident
Rev. Michael Van Dusen	Director	Deacon, St. Aidan's Anglican Church
Elizabeth White	Director	

RJHO Staff

Joseph Lauren	Director of Operations, Men's House Program Director
Michelle Joseph	Consultant, Women's House Program Director

2023 Annual Report: RJHO Advisory Board

RJHO Advisory Board

Maureen Brosnahan

CBC National News

Dr. David Byrne

Centennial College

Eileen Dalusong

Chaplain, Toronto South Detention Centre

Francis Hebert

Addictions Counsellor

Julianne Martin

Chaplain, Salvation Army

Rev. Harry Nigh

Friends of Dismiss Fellowship

Paula Rochman

Criminal Defense Lawyer

Adrian Vandenberg

Retired, Mennonite Central Committee COSA

Michael Walsh

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto

Virginia Wilson

CAMH