

HOMELESS CONNECT TORONTO

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020



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# Letter from the Board & Executive Director

DEAR HOMELESS CONNECT TORONTO SUPPORTERS

What a year 2020 turned out to be! Although no one could have predicted what this year would have looked like, Homeless Connect Toronto (HCT) was able to leverage our connections to provide personal protective equipment (“PPE”) to community agencies and transform our annual one-stop-shop event to multiple pop-up events which were accessible to participants throughout the city. Thank you to all of our supporters and funders who encouraged us to keep going through this past year!

With the support of the Toronto Foundation Vital Ideas and Leadership grant, HCT started the year with a brand new initiative – a series of seven Youth Leadership Workshops and a YouthConnect event. This vibrant line-up of workshops held in partnership with youth agencies across the city included: self-care and wellness, art and transformative justice, fitness and kickboxing, financial literacy, communication skills, and research skills. We are grateful to our partners at YSM Evergreen, Yorktown Family Services, WoodGreen Community Services, SKETCH, Bootcamps for Change, Access Alliance, and the Toronto Public Library for planning and facilitating these workshops with us. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 lockdown starting in March, we were only able to host three of the workshops before having to postpone the remainder of the Leadership Workshops and eventually our much-anticipated inaugural YouthConnect at the MLSE Launchpad. In preparation of our youth programs, HCT also formed a Youth Agency Steering Committee comprised of youth agencies serving precariously housed youth across Toronto, which continued to meet bimonthly throughout 2020 providing a network of resource sharing and adaptations during COVID-19.

In the early days of the COVID-19 lockdown, many drop-in and shelter agencies either shut down or had to reduce capacity, causing a loss of safe indoor spaces available to individuals experiencing homelessness. HCT immediately curated a list of organizations and drop-in supports that remained open to share with participants on our website and through our social media. HCT also directed community members who were able to support these agencies with donations. As the country experienced PPE shortages, HCT donated our stock of PPE normally used for our foot care services to frontline agencies so they could remain open. HCT also spearheaded and coordinated a large network donation from the grassroots group, Mobilizing Masks for Healthcare Workers, to donate PPE and toiletries to 26 community agencies serving homeless individuals in Toronto.



As HCT transitioned our planning because of COVID-19, we realized that many other organizations were facing similar challenges. In May, HCT hosted a virtual webinar for our service provider network on "Adapting service offerings for a post-pandemic normal". We invited presenters from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and Stella's Place to share insights about their experience with their transitioning to virtual programming. The webinar was well attended by 82 workshop participants, including participants from across Canada and the United States, eager to learn best practices to adapt their work to ensure continued services to persons experiencing homelessness.

A big thank you to the Toronto Foundation Better Toronto Coalition Fund and the P&L Odette Foundation for their financial commitment in the midst of the pandemic. With their funding, we were able to re-pivot the organization's services and bring on new part-time staff to support the expansion of our new programming to meet the challenges of the ongoing pandemic.

With additional resources and a dedicated staff, HCT was able to continue to advance the goals of our Strategic Plan and expand our events as we entered our annual busy Fall season, albeit a different version of our large-scale HCT events. Not being able to have our signature large event gave us the opportunity to expand our reach through a number of smaller events across the city using a pop-up community model. We were fortunate to be able to work with our service agency partners to host four in-person pop-up events at four community agencies from October 20 to 23, 2020 – Agincourt Community Services Association, Weston King Neighbourhood Centre, Fred Victor 40 Oaks, and Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre. We even offered an additional week of connecting to supports virtually. In total, 85 different guests accessed 97 unique appointments in the two weeks, through a mix of in-person and virtual supports provided by seventeen service provider partners. In-kind donations of backpacks from High Sierra, toiletry items from Procter & Gamble, socks from Socks 4 Souls Canada, shoes from Running Free Re:Use Program, and 50+ bags of clothing were distributed

directly to individuals impacted by homelessness at these pop-up events.

In December, HCT ran our first Family Christmas Cheer Drive collecting gift parcels for families staying in Toronto shelters. As a result of generous community donors, we were able to surpass our goal of 60 parcels, ultimately distributing gift parcels to benefit 108 families living in two family shelters in Scarborough.

HCT is honoured to provide opportunities for "connecting" throughout a very challenging year. We were able to continue to advance our key vision - to connect individuals impacted by homelessness to supports - through our our new community pop-up events. We also connected service providing partners with one another through the coordination of the PPE distribution, our May webinar, and at our ongoing Youth Agency Steering Committee meetings. While we miss working with the sheer number of volunteers for annual event day, volunteers continue to make an impact by contributing to our Clothing Drive, forming teams and riding at our annual Ride for Refuge fundraiser, and donating parcels through the new Family Christmas Cheer Drive. We are extremely grateful for being able to operate and "connect the dots" for individuals to end homelessness in 2020. The success of our organization is due to the commitment of our community partners, volunteers, and staff.

Thank you for making it all possible!

Sincerely,

*Melody Li*      *Mwarigha M*

Melody Li  
Executive Director

Mwarigha M  
Chair of the Board



# HCT8 Reflection

As one of the few HCT personnel onsite, due to COVID-19 restrictions, transitioning HCT8 to pop-ups ended up being a great experience for service providers, venue partners, guests, and HCT volunteers.

The HCT event is normally a huge, filling one building with hundreds of guests and volunteers. Recognizing that we could no longer host large events, the format had to be envisioned differently. We could only utilize a few volunteers a time - a couple dozen community members generously donated clothing and much-needed winter gear to our drop-off site, while a devoted few helped sort and package clothing sets to be handed out at the events. Another change this year was the pop-up format of the events hosted at local agencies; each venue coloured by the neighbourhood each agency served.

We were able to provide support guests more comprehensively in the smaller format. One client named Tobin needed assistance with filing his taxes. Only at the end of our time together, did I find out that the client had poor literacy skills, which is why providing in-person support was so helpful to him. That day, Tobin also had the opportunity to receive housing assistance and a backpack.

We also had fantastic donors. For example we got shoe donations from Running Free Canada, which filled up our moving van to the brim with over 600 pairs of shoes. Other highlights were the brightly coloured socks from Socks for Souls Canada, and hundreds of wool hats and floor mats knitted out of milk bags specifically made for individuals sleeping rough made by a great community group, Berea Lutheran Hats and Mats Project from Goderich, ON.

The service providers were a huge part of what made the HCT8 events a success. Having a combination of services at the pop-ups that could be accessed in-person or through on-site computers, allowed for the sharing of personal stories. Matthew, one of our long-time hairdressing service providers, shared with me

about his own experience as a street-involved youth, and how much his mentor helped shape the trajectory of his career and life. As a result, Matthew has a heart to give back and often provides free haircuts to individuals experiencing homelessness... by literally, pulling up a chair, drawing out his scissors and snip-snapping away. Aside from sharing his inspiration, Matthew was able to provide our guests with fresh haircuts allowing them to feel brand new at the pop-ups.

The cool thing about HCT events is the way in which the multiplicity of needs experienced by individuals impacted by homelessness, comes to meet an immediate response to those needs at a one-day event, where the help is there, and ready to set off a chain of events to improve lives on the spot, without having to jump through hoops or climb through red tape. A lot of individuals in Toronto lack necessary resources like clothing to keep warm, nutritious and healthy food, the access to health care and hygiene necessities, and as a result of a combination of these factors, can lead also to social exclusion. At the HCT8's pop-ups, although limited in capacity, guests were able to meet many of their essential needs in the moment, and I am grateful to have been part of that.

- Sarah Katz, Project Coordinator

# HCT8 By The Numbers

After close monitoring of the COVID-19 pandemic, Homeless Connect Toronto (HCT) had to make alternate plans to our annual large-scale Fall event at the Mattamy Athletic Centre (former Maple Leaf Gardens).

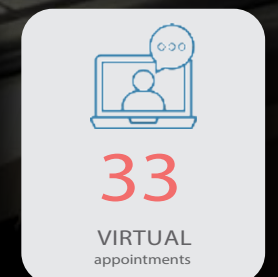
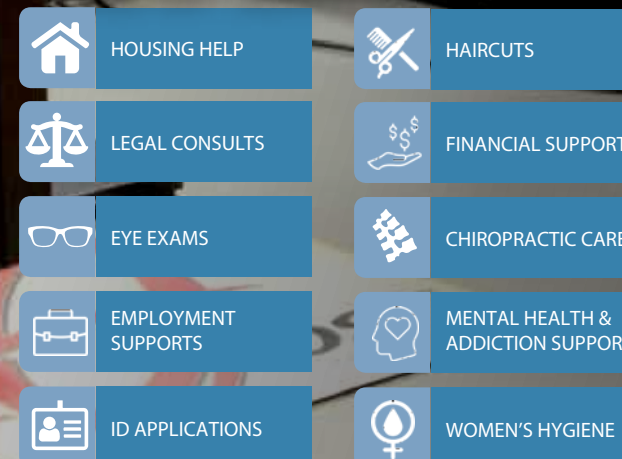
Recognizing that our fall event brings tremendous value; not only to our guests but also to the service providers and the volunteers who generously dedicate their time to our cause, HCT decided scale down on our event in efforts to minimize risk to all who attend by:

- Taking advantage of connecting our guests to virtual services offered in the community
- Running multiple small-scale pop-up events throughout the city versus one large-scale event
- Focusing on delivering services that are in high-demand and difficult for our guests to access

This report highlights what was able to be accomplished with the partnership of community agencies, service provider partners, and donors. We do hope that when the pandemic is more safely managed, HCT anticipates being able to run its annual large one-stop-shop event again.



## TYPES OF SERVICES RECEIVED



# Thank You to Our Service Providers

Thank you to our service providing partners and venue partners for helping us transition to pop-up shops this year. We would not have been able to pivot and continue to connect individuals impacted by homelessness to the services they need without your partnership.

## HCT8 Venues and Service Provider Partners

- Agincourt Community Services Association
- Black Coalition AIDS Prevention
- Brands for Canada
- Canada Revenue Agency - Outreach Program
- Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College
- Concurrent Disorders Support Services
- Dixon Hall Community Services
- Fair Change Community Services
- Fred Victor 40 Oaks CRC
- Justice for Children and Youth
- Matthew Genser Salon
- Red Dot Project
- Running Free Canada ReUse Shoe Program
- Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre
- PAID ID
- Ve'ahavta - Job Skills Academy
- Vision Institute of Canada
- West Toronto Community Legal Clinic
- West Toronto Housing Help
- Weston King Neighbourhood Centre
- WoodGreen Community Services



*This year, HCT raised \$9,850.00 in the Ride for Refuge. We could only do this with the support of dedicated volunteers and supporters, like Carol!*

*Carol recruited and formed a team of eight friends to cycle 25K on behalf of Homeless Connect Toronto on October 3, 2020. She shared with us her motivation for participating and recruiting her friends to join her in making a difference. Thank you to Carol and her team, Pedal Power, for raising \$2,929.69 on our behalf.*

*"Having volunteered as a Guide in two Homeless Connect events, I had seen first-hand the positive impact this organization has had on helping those at risk of homelessness. The experience gave me the opportunity to hear people's stories and witness the change in their body language after getting something as 'simple' as a haircut. I still clearly remember the conversation I had very first guest I guided. We both played the piano and loved playing Chopin, then he asked me why I was doing this. I told him because I wanted to give back. He then asked what everyone here was receiving, that it had to be more than just to give back. I said that for me, it was simply to do more for the community. He started to cry. It really drove home the point that small actions can have big meaning.*

*By mid-2020, it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic would make the event impossible in its typical form. Yet knowing that the year had been a very challenging one for everyone and that the financial uncertainty was a reality for many, especially those at risk of homelessness, I couldn't stand back and do nothing. Action had to be taken. Once I saw the invitation to raise money for the organization via the Ride for Refuge, the answer was clear: organize a small team to ride 25kms to help me make a bigger contribution. The response was fantastic: friends signed up quickly and the generous support from others was swift and plenty. Even the weather on the day of the ride was perfect.*

*I continue to be inspired by how Melody and all contributing members of the organization helps people connect the dots to such vital services."*  
*- Carol Wong-Li*

# Ride for Refuge

Our annual Fall fundraiser transitioned to from walking and cycling to "pick-your-own activity".



# Strategic Plan

2018 - 2022

## GOALS by December 2022

### VISION

HCT is committed to helping individuals to connect the dots to end homelessness in their lives.

### MISSION

Homeless Connect Toronto's mission is to engage the community and create sustainable partnerships to overcome homelessness in Toronto by:

- Increasing access to services by bringing providers to one centralized location
- Empowering guests by providing a space for their voices to be heard
- Fostering collaboration among local social service agencies by providing a comprehensive network of services
- Engaging business organizations to build partnerships with social service agencies
- Raising advocacy and awareness of issues contributing to homelessness through the united efforts of homeless persons, volunteers, social services and businesses

01

### Fundraising for sustainability

Secure the necessary funding to allow HCT to grow and expand the provision of services to at-risk populations

- Obtain necessary funding to sustain and grow HCT services

02

### Stronger partnerships with service providers

Strengthen partnerships with Service Providers and evolve service offerings to keep up with client needs

- Secure Service Providers to provide services for the highest client needs
- Expand HCT event initiatives

03

### Operational growth to meet needs

Evolve the HCT organization to provide expanded services to clients

- Ensure the necessary staff and resources are in place
- Educate and train staff and volunteers on homelessness and client needs
- Strengthen volunteer engagement to ensure necessary support for HCT events

04

### Raising Awareness of HCT

Expand communications to raise awareness of HCT and to raise client awareness of available services

- Raise awareness of HCT among at-risk populations
- Raise client awareness of how to access services (provided by our Service Providers) outside of events
- Raise general awareness of HCT in the GTA

05

### Developing Strong Connections

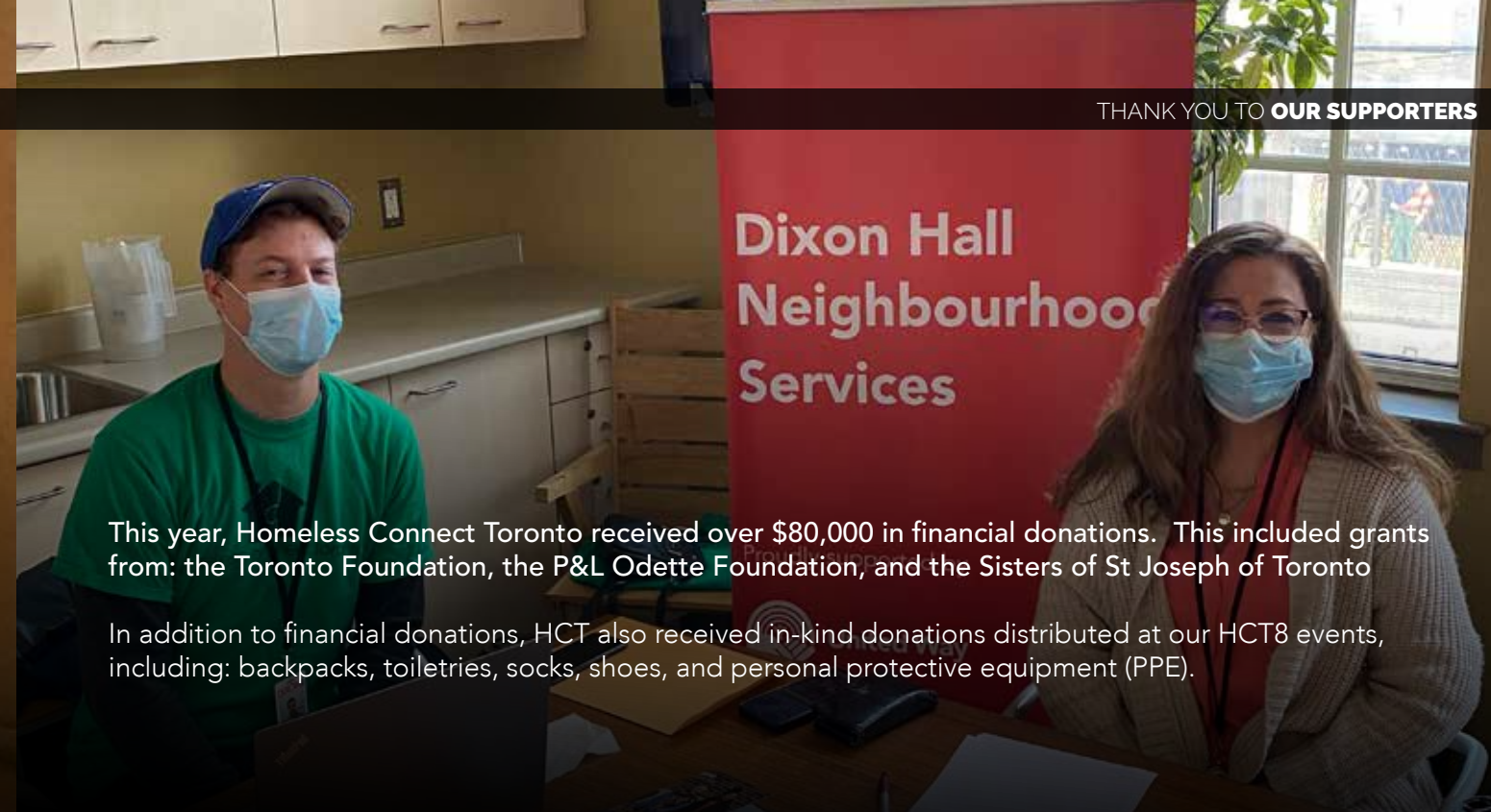
Make strong connections in order to maximize HCT's effectiveness

- Ensure strong relationships with government at all levels
- Identify and reach out to potential Champion(s) at City of Toronto etc.
- Pursue opportunities to match available funding initiatives with HCT's mandate

# Thank You to Our Supporters

As a small charitable organization, we cannot do what we do without our supporters.

Thank you to our in-kind and financial sponsors and donors whose steady commitment has made it possible for Homeless Connect Toronto to continue our work connecting individuals impacted by homelessness and expanding community partnerships to offer supports in local neighbourhoods in Toronto this year.



This year, Homeless Connect Toronto received over \$80,000 in financial donations. This included grants from: the Toronto Foundation, the P&L Odette Foundation, and the Sisters of St Joseph of Toronto

In addition to financial donations, HCT also received in-kind donations distributed at our HCT8 events, including: backpacks, toiletries, socks, shoes, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

## Champions for Change

(\$10,000+)

- High Sierra Canada
- P&L Odette Foundation
- Sisters of St Joseph of Toronto
- Toronto Foundation - Better Toronto Coalition Fund

## Champions for Hope

(\$5,000 - \$9,999)

- Dr. Ericson Viola Dentistry Professional Corporation

## Champions for Compassion

(\$1,000 - \$4,999)

- Andrew Becker
- Esther Chan
- GHW Memorial Fund
- Kevin Burke Family Foundation
- Kitty Wong
- MacFeeters Family Foundation
- Procter & Gamble/Global Medic
- Rebecca Lai
- Running Free Canada

- Salesforce
- Service Canada - Ontario Region
- Tai Ping Li
- Warren Gonsalves

## Champions for Dignity

(<\$1,000)

- Aarsh Trivedi
- Adrian Antonescu
- Adrienne Sulisty
- Alina Zdrzhko
- Allan Davidson
- Allen Quinlan
- Andrew Hui
- Angelo Costantino
- Anita Lovell
- Anna Ferguson
- Anonymous (13)
- Aretha Wharton
- Belinda Ngai
- Benita Chan
- Bhola Family
- Canada Helps COVID-19 Innovation Fund
- Carol Jones
- Charlotte Chan
- Christopher Alcober
- Christopher Lim

- Christopher Wong
- Church in Toronto
- Cosmetic Brands of North America (CBON)
- Dr. A. Krishnamurthy MPC
- Emily Fan
- Frances Okoye
- Free Geek Toronto
- Gary Sarkissian
- IBM
- Jack Gilligan
- Jane Garthson
- Jane Landry
- Jason Yeung
- Jerelena Roper
- Joyce Siu
- Kaisa Moran
- Karlee Angelo
- Katie Koichopolos
- Kenric Leung
- Kevin Steenburg
- Lujain Al-Balkhi
- Lydia Lo-Yan Hwang
- Maham Maham
- Mahdia Zarabi
- Mandy Ip
- Mark Bernier
- Marty Nanasi
- Mary Clites
- Meghan Soave

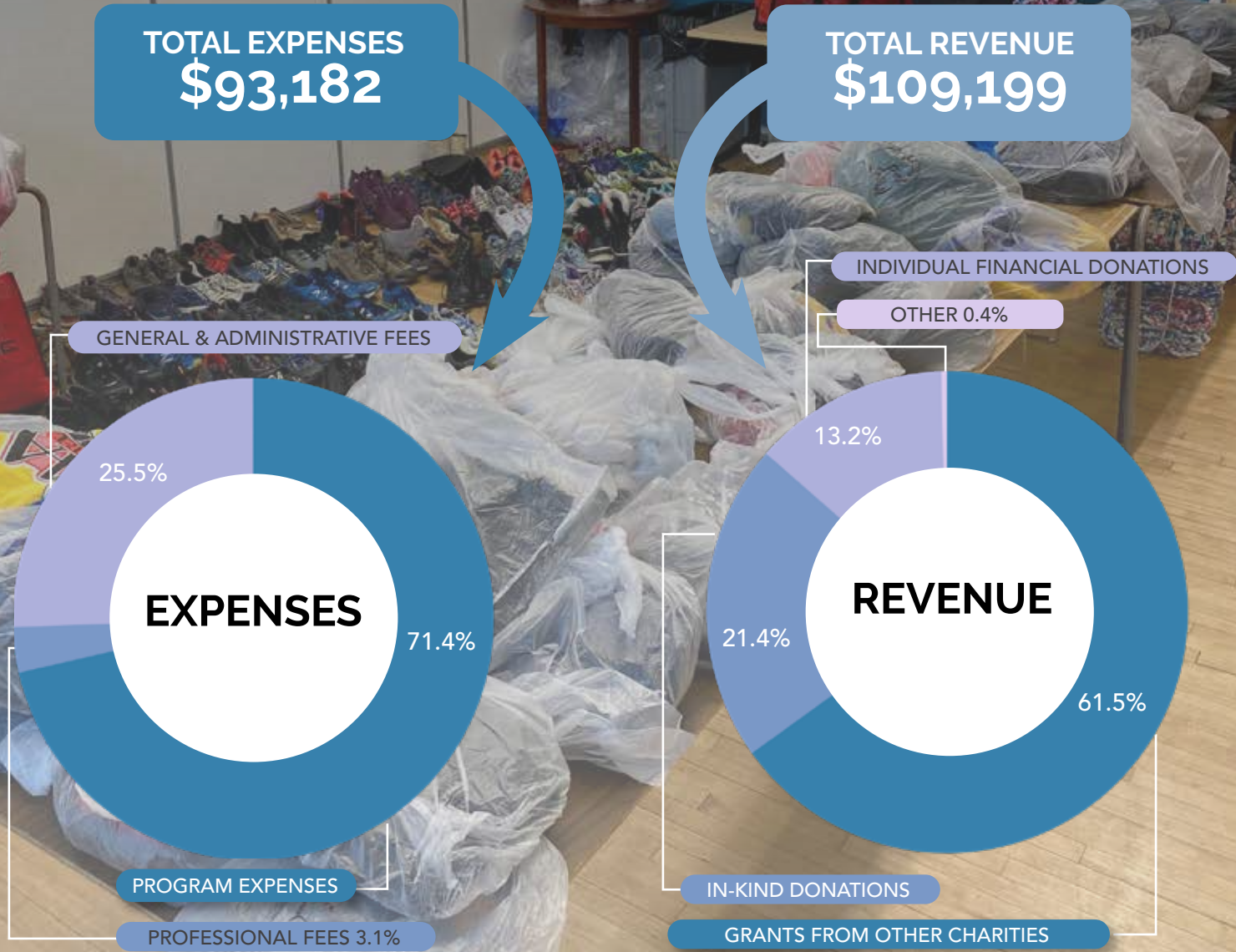
- Mercku
- Monica Khaper
- Nassib Daoud
- Pam Ryan
- Parog Bhola
- Peeranut Visetsuth
- Peter Leong
- Phuong Trang Tran
- Production Walkies
- Royal Bank of Canada
- Rachel Enzel
- Rica Night
- Ryan Cairns
- S. Joy Eliuk
- Saba Kiaei
- Samuel Lau
- Seeleane Fari-Wong
- Shan Janmohamed
- Shenlor Young
- Shuting Li
- Socks for Souls Canada
- The Riches
- Timothy Yeung
- Tina Raso Lynch
- Winnie Kui
- Seeleane Fari-Wong
- Senku Tenshi
- United Way of Greater Toronto
- Van Moosa

# Our Financials

2020

Homeless Connect Toronto is committed to managing its finances with integrity and responsibility. Although it is our first year with two part-time staff, 71.4% of all in-kind and financial donations are used directly to implement HCT programs and events to benefit our guests.

Thank you to the generous supporters and donors who enable us to continue to serve our community. Audited financial statements are available at [hctoronto.org](http://hctoronto.org).



# Our Team

Homeless Connect Toronto 8

## Board of Directors

- Jennifer Ho
- Jeffrey Li
- Nikki Latta
- Mwarigha Shad
- Richard Teicher

## Advisor

- Alexander Zsager

## Our Planning Team

- Sarah Katz (*Project Coordinator*)
- Benjamin Wong
- Bonnie Tang
- Celine Chan
- Elena Wang
- Emily Fan
- Jessica Cheung
- Melody Li
- Rosemary Lai
- Steven Cho
- Terence Ha
- Timothy Yiu
- Zoona Khalid

- Aleksander Igevski (*student*)
- Ilene Hyman (*evaluator*)
- Margaret Nansumba (*researcher*)





Homeless Connect Toronto is a charitable agency in Toronto committed to collaborating with social service agencies, business organizations, volunteers, and the greater community to end homelessness. By facilitating sustainable partnerships, HCT is dedicated to fostering a comprehensive network of services and creating greater access to existing supports and services.

Charitable Registration #83258 8032 RR0001

 [www.hctoronto.org](http://www.hctoronto.org)

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