



bethlehem
housing and support services

PHYSICALLY
distanced
BUT SOCIALLY
connected

2021 Spring Newsletter

BETHLEHEMHOUSING.CA

COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORKER

CHRISTINA THOMAS



We were happy to welcome a new member to our team of Community Support Workers during service modifications due to COVID-19. Christina grew up in North York, Ontario and originally worked as a Medical Office Assistant. She made a change in her career and decided to switch to the field of Social Services because of her desire to help people.

"I decided to become a Community Support Worker because I love helping people first & foremost! And I feel like it's what I was called to do"

As someone with lived experience with trauma, poverty and a need for affordable housing in her past, she brings first-hand experience with how to navigate the social service system. Christina takes pride in the challenges she has overcome and her success as a single Black female and mother.

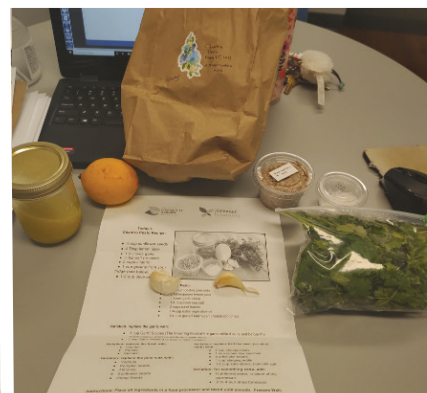
Christina is excited to be working with Bethlehem because the organization aligns with her beliefs and values and desire to work in partnership with the community, provide affordable housing and support the personal growth of individuals and families. Christina's commitment to helping others is also evident in her extensive volunteer work in our community.

Thanks to emergency funding, Bethlehem was able to provide the tools needed for clients to access support virtually, not only our internal support services but also others provided in our community. Christina has taken on a lead role in the development and implementation of virtual workshops and psycho-educational support groups which have been offered in person in the past. She has embraced using technology for group interactions as well as one-to-one support sessions. Christina has witnessed the benefit of reducing barriers to access services virtually for people who can't afford technology devices and access to internet.

Christina has co-ordinated a variety of virtual workshops that promote health and wellness, including cooking classes, art classes, growing herbs, information on addiction and mental health support and opportunities for education/employment. She has also co-facilitated support groups on grief & loss, healthy ways to cope with stress and healthy relationships.

Christina is excited to be coordinating one of our community gardens—at our Genesis Court location. She has done an amazing job in promoting the garden and people are excited to grow their own food!

While COVID-19 has presented many challenges and increased barriers for our tenants/residents to access a wide range of support and services in our community, our staff have risen to the challenge and have been creative in finding ways to help those we serve. Our team has done an amazing job of working to reduce isolation while promoting physical distancing and following public health safety guidelines.

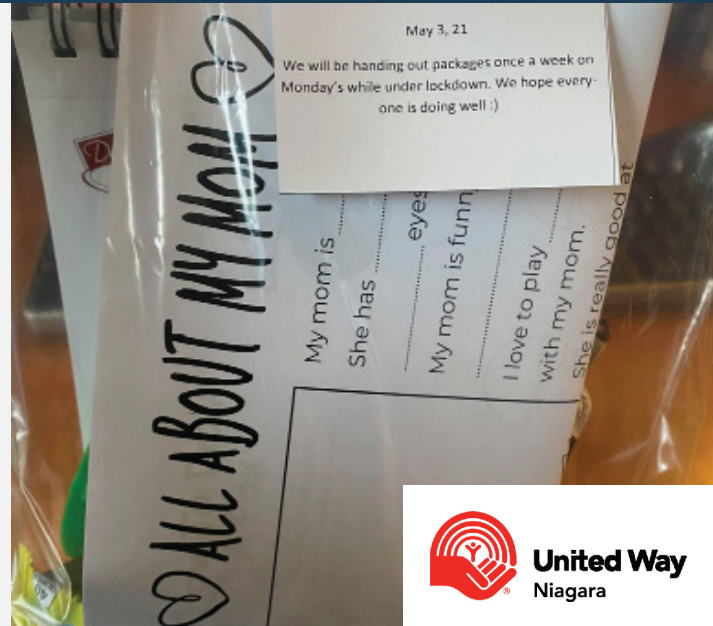


Keeping Connected

All That Kids Can Be

Thanks to United Way Niagara, Our EarlyON staff offer the 'All That Kids Can Be' afterschool program three days a week for children aged 6-12 yrs who live at Bethlehem Place. Children residing in our housing programs may have difficulty connecting with other children to develop meaningful friendships. This program encourages social skills and reduces isolation by facilitating peer to peer connections.

Weekly activities throughout the school year and summer months are planned such as; local trips to the fire department, Heartland Forest, and Happy Rolphys. In our current situation, staff have been handing out packages once a week filled with activities, and snacks for them to have at home.



EarlyON

While not being open in person, our team at EarlyON Bethlehem Place offers a virtual interactive platform that encourages parents and caregivers to participate in the wide variety of activities that we plan for ages 0-6 yrs. Virtual Family and Storytime is available to clients of Bethlehem to join and interact.

Our EarlyOn educators have been working hard to keep families connected, and are excited to start opening up the community garden to grow fresh vegetables to share. Our team at EarlyON ensures its availability to answer any parenting questions and provide resources during this difficult time.



2020-2021 A Year Like No Other...

“Can we uninstall 2020, this version has a virus in it!”

“You will find support and strength by connecting with and through other people.”

“Participate and be present in your community and you will achieve a sense of belonging.”

Staying connected is essential to the wellbeing of our Bethlehem families. These are the messages of encouragement we have always given to our clients as we walk alongside them through their journey. This past year, for the purpose of public health and basic survival, we have had to reverse those messages.

The pandemic has had an incredible impact on us all. It has been even greater for the most vulnerable in our community and it shone a light on mental health issues and the housing and homeless crisis. Although we have gained enhanced family life remaining in our homes, there has been an increase in intra-family violence for many isolated families that have experienced great losses and stress. The demand is higher for a safe haven in our community for families suffering these traumas.

Our Bethlehem team has been challenged like never before. Initially we were scared and exhausted. It was easy to lose hope and brood over the negative side effects and fear the unknown future. We had to fill a brand new building with 127 new families, open a new tenant housing services office and a daycare while we modified ways to deliver services that are essential to our clients. Enhancing maintenance and increasing sanitation of our buildings became necessary measures to keep our tenants and staff safe. We had to re-invent our beloved and popular Empty Bowls fundraising event and turn the soup-making over to you.

But every coin has two sides! With the bad comes the good!

Among the human and economic tragedy, we have found positives. The creative and innovative talent of the Bethlehem team came shining through. With the support of funders such as the United Way Niagara, Ministry of Children Community and Social Services, Niagara Region Homeless Services System program and Ontario Trillium Foundation, we were able to acquire a new wave of technological tools to equip our isolated families and clients with solutions to stay connected to our Support Workers, programs and services. The staff team created online and virtual programs and activities that resulted in a renewed sense of community amongst our client families and the children.

You! Our community of volunteers and supporters, through your kindness, showed you believed in us. You! Kept our event alive and made your own soup that helped us achieve our fundraising goals to cover the many extra unexpected COVID related costs.

But the battle continues to be long and hard again this year. Please keep sending your messages of hope to our Bethlehem families and showing your confidence in our Bethlehem team that work so hard every day to keep clients physically safe but socially connected.

Your support and generosity gave us the strength and hope that kept us going! We thank you for choosing to continue walking alongside us.

Lori Beech
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Tenant Services



In 2018 we received a 3 year Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) Grow grant to help Bethlehem set up a Housing Services office and develop specifically targeted eviction and homeless prevention strategies that support successful tenancies and stabilize housing for low income, homeless and vulnerable members of the Niagara Region community.

During this time we have grown to provide affordable and supportive housing to over 300 families within our four Bethlehem buildings. Each family participated in a pre-housing survey and a post-housing survey after 1 year.

The goal of this project was to demonstrate that providing secure, affordable housing and targeted support to low income and vulnerable families is essential to long term household stability and improves family health, wellbeing and quality of life.



The tenants have reported a significant increase in their quality of life, feeling safe and less vulnerable, and feeling empowered to improve their personal capacity in other areas of their life. Overall we have been successful, with reduced evictions and preventing a return to homelessness. A stable affordable home and supports when needed means vulnerable families have a chance to succeed in a variety of ways. When we successfully house families with affordable solutions, we have an even greater positive social and economic impact on the community.

Thank you OTF for supporting our growth.

HOUSING HERO

Our Housing Heroes are creating a vibrant, caring and inclusive Niagara by using their time, talent or treasure to raise funds and awareness about Affordable Housing. Businesses, Individuals, Families, Sponsors and Groups are making an impact by contributing in unique ways. Do you believe everyone should have access to affordable housing? If you do, you might be a Housing Hero.

We need heroes like you to take the initiative and take action. What can you do? Your options are just about endless. You can donate directly or,... you can go all in and run your own fundraising initiative. This is where your options are endless with even greater impact.

How can you have a greater impact? By being an ambassador and engaging your community of friends, family and colleagues to join you in your fundraising efforts! After all, fundraising is always more fun when you're doing it with your friends! Get inspired today and be part of the solution.



Claire's Birthday Fundraiser

Our Housing Hero Claire Fish didn't ask for birthday presents this year, instead she asked for donations to Bethlehem. Through her passionate belief that everyone deserves a home, Claire inspired several online donations and raised **\$1,340.00!**

A huge **THANK YOU** to Claire and to those who supported her campaign! Claire continues to encourage others to support Bethlehem in creative, and engaging ways.



Niagara Jeep Fest

The Niagara Area Jeep Club will (tentatively) be hosting their 5th Annual Niagara Jeep Fest on Saturday, September 18th, 2021, and Bethlehem Housing will once again be their charity of choice! Further updates will be announced on their website if it needs to be rescheduled again due to COVID-19.

See niagarajeepfest.ca for all information and event updates

You too can become a Housing Hero! Contact us to learn more.

905.641.1660 housinghero.ca BeAHousingHero

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