

Members of London City Council,

I am writing to you today as an active volunteer and employee in the social service sector. For the last 6 years, I have worked as a community case worker, volunteered at the London Foodbank, volunteer with Business Cares, and volunteer with 519Pursuit. At 519pursuit, I joined the first day of their partnership with the London Foodbank where the homeless response to food security during the COVID-19 pandemic was taking off. I was a social service worker student at Fanshawe College and threw myself into volunteer work Monday-Saturday for 6 months before returning to school when the restrictions were lifted. I learned a great deal during this time about how to respond to individuals experiencing homelessness and the massive task it is to tackle it. The biggest component of keeping the efforts moving forward was the human connection and comradery. There is no question the other key component is funds. Moving out of an outreach and donation volunteer role with 519pursuit and into the board member role over the course of time both comradery and funding has never been so clear on the scales. What you find at 519pursuit is infectious- you feel the commitment and spirit of passion at every volunteer meeting and engagement. The community responds to our team in a way that restores my faith in humanity. Tackling homelessness is such a big task, and before I met 519pursuit I felt helpless. After 6 years with 519pursuit, I can't go to a group dinner or birthday party without leaving with a trunk full of donations. Community members feel motivated to contribute because it is within their means and know their donations are going somewhere that truly makes an impact. I hear time and time again, "I want to donate because I know it is immediately going to someone who needs it." Not only does it go to someone who needs it, it goes to someone our team specifically knows, likely by name. It's not just about giving someone a coat, it's about giving them a coat we know will make them feel like themselves. The more the team builds the friendship approach, the trust and confidence grows with it. There has been so much success in connecting our friends on the street with services to help support medical, housing, identification, pet care, etc., supporting the process of existing resources and decreasing the disconnection of individuals on the street further. 519pursuit does so much in their operations on so little. Their community backs them, their volunteers are loyal, their employees work tirelessly to adapt their roles and respond to new challenges. There is no lack of effort in recruiting and training new volunteers to ensure we can continue to operate. No lack of fundraising to try and sustain our work. No lack of promotion to try and engage in the community. 519pursuit does everything they can to help their community, we want to be out there doing what we can, we want to deliver the service and help provide feedback on what we learn. Nobody wants to live in the consequences of a community experiencing homelessness. It is scary, it is shocking, and it is not going anywhere right now. Right now, we need help, we need funding to keep going. We want to collaborate and help our city be safer for all that live here.

Breanne Cannon