



# BUILDING A BRIDGE FROM STREET TO HOME

LONDON CARES HOMELESS RESPONSE SERVICES



**"I'M WORRIED IT'S TOO LATE FOR  
ANYONE TO HELP ME."**

~ Scott<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Although consent has been provided for all images and quotes used in this document, names of individuals have been changed. Further, quotes should not necessarily be attributed to the individual in the image.

# THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

## HOMELESSNESS IN LONDON

Despite best intentions, there are many Londoners still experiencing chronic homelessness... we won't stop until everyone has a home.

## SCOTT'S EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

In 2008, the recession hit. I was laid off from my job. I had worked in the trades for 20 years at that point. Going home and telling my wife and kids I had been laid off was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. We had a mortgage and bills to pay.

I applied to every job I could find, but no one would hire me. We had to sell our house, our car, and a ton of other stuff. I was a 50-year-old man who couldn't take care of his family. I was embarrassed.


Drinking took the edge off. It helped. But soon, I was drinking all day, every day. My wife begged me to get help. I refused. She eventually left because she didn't want our kids to see their father like that. Without a job, I couldn't pay rent, so I ended up homeless.

I'm staying in shelters now. It's a roof over my head. I carry everything I own with me. I've been robbed more times than I can count. I've walked two hours in the pouring rain to get a meal because I couldn't afford a bus ticket. Being homeless is hard.

My lowest point was when I didn't have any money to buy alcohol, so I drank mouthwash. I remember thinking to myself, how did I get here? I was a regular guy. I had a house, a car, and a family. And now, I'm here.

There are things I miss from my old life – things I never even thought of before – like clean socks, my own bed, or deciding what I want to eat for dinner. You lose your freedom to choose when you become homeless. I know there is help, but I'm worried it's too late for anyone to help me.

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**“WE’RE A RESILIENT, FEISTY GROUP OF  
ADVOCATES WHO BELIEVE HOMELESSNESS  
CAN BE SOLVED.”**

~ The London Cares Team



# WE'RE LONDON CARES. IT'S NICE TO MEET YOU.

## WE EXIST TO SOLVE HOMELESSNESS

**Vision:** A London where everyone has a home and feels connected to community.

**Mission:** We support people who are homeless secure the right housing with the right support until we are no longer needed.

## WE BELIEVE IN:

- 1 Always showing up and never giving up.
- 2 Upholding the dignity and uniqueness of each person.
- 3 Courageously championing equity and social and systemic change.
- 4 Seizing new opportunities and adapting to best respond to changing needs.
- 5 Persistently building connected relationships to create meaningful solutions.
- 6 Collaborating to provide the best response.
- 7 Being accountable for what we say and do.

## OUR WORK IS GROUNDED IN HOUSING FIRST

London Cares Homeless Response Services (London Cares) was the first organization in London to use a Housing First approach to assist individuals experiencing chronic and persistent homelessness to secure and maintain housing.

A Housing First approach shifts the priority to move individuals and families quickly into housing with support, where they can begin

to work on the issues that contributed to their homelessness from the stability and safety of their own home. A Housing First approach assists individuals and families by seeking out the right housing, in the right place, with the right level of support to develop lasting stability.<sup>2</sup>

With 367 permanent housing placements, we know Housing First works.

<sup>2</sup> Homeless Prevention, Neighbourhood, Children, and Fire Services, City of London. (2013). A Homeless Prevention System for London Ontario: A Three Year Implementation Plan. London, ON: City of London. Retrieved from <http://www.london.ca>



**“LONDON CARES SAVED MY LIFE. THEY WERE THE ONLY ONES WHO GAVE A CRAP ABOUT ME.”**

~ Cheryl

# HOW WE'RE SOLVING HOMELESSNESS

## HELPING INDIVIDUALS MOVE TOWARD PERMANENT HOUSING

### HOW WE SERVE LONDONERS

You'll find our Street Outreach Team in London's core areas (Downtown, Old East Village, and SOHO), serving individuals experiencing homelessness 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our work is as varied as the people we meet, focusing on in-the-moment crisis support, harm reduction, and connection to service.

We meet individuals where they are at, whether that's in the depths of their substance use, in the middle of a crisis, or sitting on the sidewalk. We're a tenacious bunch, relentless in our quest to help individuals experiencing homelessness move from the street into their own home.

### OUR RESULTS

In the last five years:

- **23,823** points of contact occurred to assist individuals experiencing homelessness
- **7,000+** referrals were made to medical, financial, legal, or other services
- **1,080+** crisis situations were responded to by our team
- **50+** urban campsites were visited and monitored per season

### WHY OUTREACH MATTERS IN LONDON

Individuals experiencing homelessness often get caught in what is known as the "institutional circuit," cycling between jail, hospital, and street. It's costly and harmful to both the individual and the system, has long-term negative consequences, and in most cases, is unnecessary. Diversion, as a result, has become a critical component of our work. We partner with police, emergency services, and business owners to develop appropriate solutions for individuals experiencing homelessness who are in crisis.

Our Street Outreach Team assists individuals experiencing homelessness who are sleeping rough or in urban campsites. We identify, monitor, and engage to ensure the safety of individuals living in these sites and the broader community.

After living on the street for years, individuals often experience a deep sense of shame and stigma because of their situation. Many societal norms, which were once routine, are now forgotten. Going to an office to seek service at a scheduled meeting time, between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., isn't always possible. Our team acts as a bridge, helping individuals enter into systems and navigate the complexity, so they can get the crisis, social, and health services they require.

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## WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

I spent years sleeping on the streets. The London Cares staff would try to connect with me, but I didn't want anything to do with them. I'd cross the street to avoid them or walk in the other direction.

But they're persistent. They tried talking to me about my housing situation, but I wasn't interested in an empty promise of housing. I had years on the street, an addiction, and no money. But they never stopped talking about getting me housing.

Eventually, I talked to them about getting off the street and we started looking for an apartment. When I got the keys, I was so happy. I couldn't stop crying. It wasn't an empty promise like I thought. It was real, and it was all mine.

~ Martha

## ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS TO FIND PERMANENT HOUSING

### HOW WE SERVE LONDONERS

We help individuals who are calling the pavement a bed find their way home. Every individual in our community deserves safe, permanent, and appropriate housing of their choice. We won't stop until it becomes our reality.

We work hard to build relationships with private market landlords and property groups interested in making units available to individuals experiencing homelessness. Once an individual moves into their new home, we're available to landlords and tenants. We work proactively to address concerns and build successful tenancies.

### OUR RESULTS

In the last five years:

- **231** participants have been housed
- **136** participants have been re-housed
- **30+** partnerships with landlords have been created
- **100%** of participants have had a say in where they live

### WHY HOUSING SELECTION MATTERS IN LONDON

It can be difficult to find safe, affordable, appropriate housing in London. Through determined persistence, we've built strong relationships with landlords who make their units available to the individuals we serve.

But our work doesn't stop there. In fact, it's just the beginning. To move into a home, first month's rent and last month's rent are essential, income is a necessity, and basic furniture has to be found. We connect individuals to a system of services that offers solutions to meet these needs.

We're proactive in our work with individuals and landlords, answering questions and resolving any concerns. In this way, we maintain our relationships with landlords and help individuals retain their housing. We're also committed to re-housing and move quickly to find a new place for those who need one.

We operate under the principles of Housing First. We search for private market units where individuals pay a reasonable amount for rent, have both privacy and choice in their housing, and are not required to demonstrate any type of "readiness" before being housed.



### WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

At 28, I found myself sleeping outdoors, in bus shelters, and in empty stairwells. I had been diagnosed with cancer, HIV, and Hepatitis C. I was uncertain about my future and really scared.

Through the London Cares Street Outreach Team, I was connected to a Housing Selection Worker to find an apartment. I knew if I was going to get healthy, I couldn't do it living on the streets. It took three months of persistence, overcoming a ton of barriers, and a real commitment to my goal, but I finally received the keys to my new apartment. After six years of living on the street, I finally had a place of my own.

~ Jonathan

## SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS TO KEEP THEIR HOUSING

### HOW WE SERVE LONDONERS

It's not enough to give someone "four walls." A house has to become a home. We provide intensive case management support to anchor individuals into their new home, neighbourhood, and community.

After years of living on the street, many individuals have multiple, complex needs they want to address. We create connections to formal and informal supports, such as health, community, and social services. We then work alongside individuals to help them confidently navigate these systems to get the services they deserve.

### OUR RESULTS

In the last five years:

- **3,307** in-home focused visits were completed
- **3,737** tenant and landlord mediations were facilitated
- **10,835** referrals connected individuals to community-based supports
- **90%** of individuals have maintained their housing for one year or more

### WHY HOUSING STABILITY MATTERS IN LONDON

We often think the work is done once someone moves into a home. The logic goes something like this: "an individual was homeless, and now they're not, so the problem is solved." However, there's a reality no one talks about. Living on the street comes with its own set of rules, norms, and habits, and it doesn't include waking up in your own apartment, in your own bed, with your own stuff.

Routine tasks, such as going grocery shopping, doing laundry, and cooking meals, have to become the "new normal" and it can be a surprisingly challenging transition. Through housing stability, we focus on the whole person. We believe that self-determination and independence inspire individuals, improving their confidence and helping them to keep moving forward.

We support individuals as they set and achieve their goals through intensive in-home support. Initially, goals may be focused on maintaining their home or improving their health. Over time, the focus changes to becoming active members of the community.

The individuals we work with are incredibly resilient. We've been humbled by their strength. But even the strongest individuals can greatly benefit from knowing someone is alongside them on their journey.



### WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

When London Cares helped me get housing five years ago, I had been homeless for a long time. My health was bad, I was using drugs, and I had multiple charges. I was in really bad shape.

A Housing Stability Worker has come to my house every single week since. We'd set goals for me and I would work toward those goals. The goals were small at first – most people probably wouldn't even consider them goals – but they made all the difference for me.

Now, I'm no longer on probation. My credit score has improved and I have a cell phone plan in my own name. I reached out to my family and we've slowly been able to rebuild our relationship. I never thought that would happen, but it did. The thing that I'm most proud of is that I just got a full-time job. I'm going to start in two weeks. I can't wait.

~ Steve





**“WE HOPE YOU’LL JOIN US AS WE WORK TOWARD SOLVING HOMELESSNESS IN OUR COMMUNITY.”**

~ The London Cares Team

## WHERE WE’RE GOING NEXT

### INTERESTED IN WHERE WE’RE GOING NEXT?

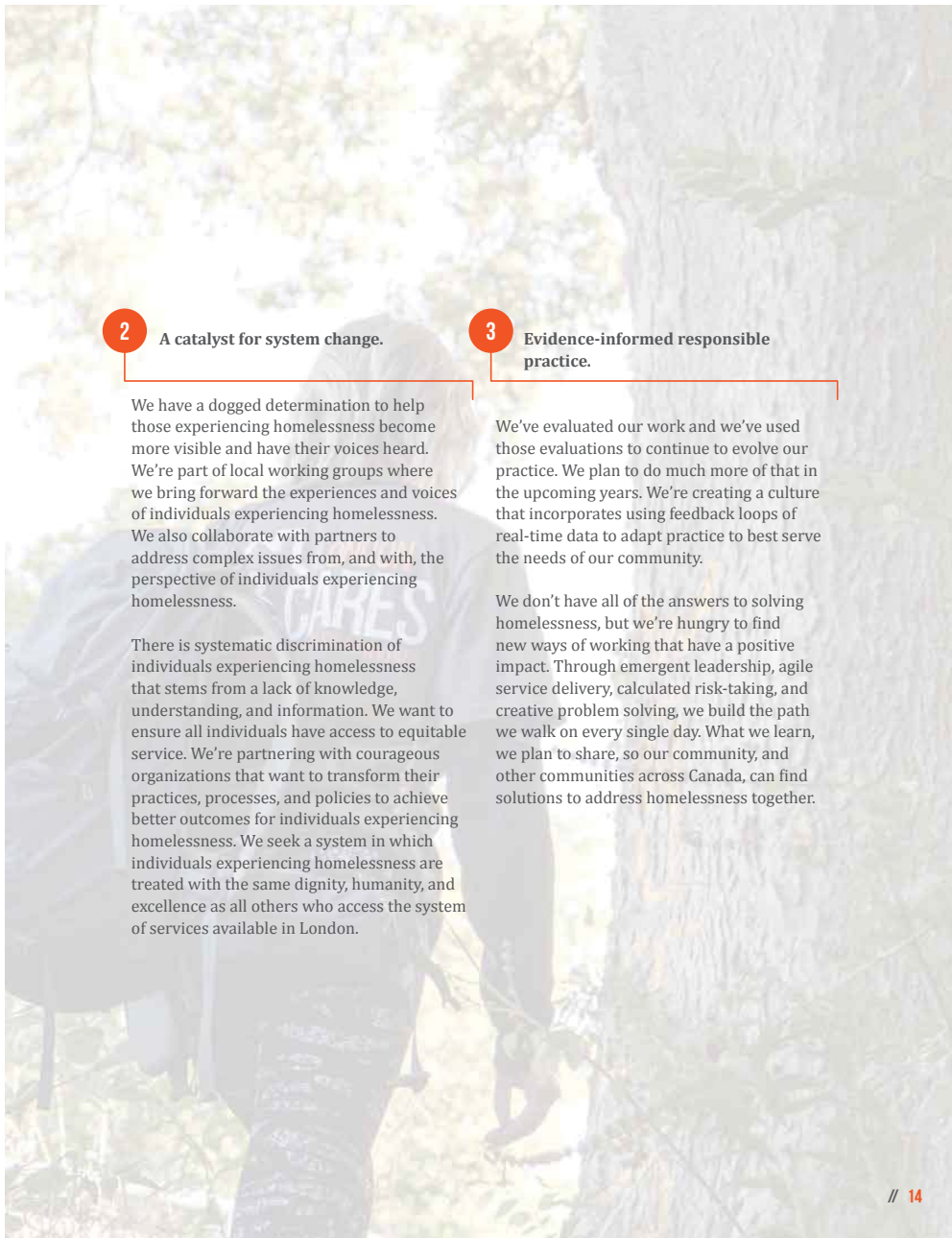
We’re proud of what we’ve accomplished over the last five years. We’ve learned, we’ve grown, and we’ve served. But, we’re just getting started.

Here’s a sneak peek of where we’re going: ▶

#### 1 Innovative approaches to solve homelessness.

We believe housing is a human right and the solution to homelessness is housing with support. We use a Housing First approach to assist individuals and families to find and keep permanent housing of their choice. We will continue to identify, champion, and act on the housing needs of Londoners experiencing homelessness. When people are housed, we want them to thrive, transforming their house into a home. We plan to continue to build sustainable programs that meet the needs of those we serve.

Our work on the street gives us a pulse on emerging street trends. We track and monitor these trends, giving us real-time information we can use to inform our practice. Using data in this way ensures we proactively meet the ever-changing needs of those we serve. We will also use this data to help others inform their practices. Complex issues require collaborative solutions. We’re not in this alone.



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**A catalyst for system change.**

We have a dogged determination to help those experiencing homelessness become more visible and have their voices heard. We're part of local working groups where we bring forward the experiences and voices of individuals experiencing homelessness. We also collaborate with partners to address complex issues from, and with, the perspective of individuals experiencing homelessness.

There is systematic discrimination of individuals experiencing homelessness that stems from a lack of knowledge, understanding, and information. We want to ensure all individuals have access to equitable service. We're partnering with courageous organizations that want to transform their practices, processes, and policies to achieve better outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness. We seek a system in which individuals experiencing homelessness are treated with the same dignity, humanity, and excellence as all others who access the system of services available in London.

3

**Evidence-informed responsible practice.**

We've evaluated our work and we've used those evaluations to continue to evolve our practice. We plan to do much more of that in the upcoming years. We're creating a culture that incorporates using feedback loops of real-time data to adapt practice to best serve the needs of our community.

We don't have all of the answers to solving homelessness, but we're hungry to find new ways of working that have a positive impact. Through emergent leadership, agile service delivery, calculated risk-taking, and creative problem solving, we build the path we walk on every single day. What we learn, we plan to share, so our community, and other communities across Canada, can find solutions to address homelessness together.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

London CAREs began as a vision of the City of London, who dedicated the resources to respond to the issue of homelessness. Our early work, which began in 2008, involved a collaboration of 12 different human and social service organizations.

In 2011, we crystallized our mandate to focus on supporting individuals experiencing homelessness to find and maintain housing using a Housing First approach. This work was led by the strong collaborative partnership of:



We want to express our thanks and gratitude for their perseverance and expertise as they have guided, strengthened, and grown what started out as a small program into a flourishing organization. In 2014, London CAREs won the Pillar Nonprofit Network Community Collaboration Award in recognition of our collaborative foundation.

We also want to express our deep appreciation and thanks for the continued vision, dedication, and support of the City of London through the Homeless Prevention Team. Through their leadership, using a system approach, London will move toward solving homelessness.

As we've grown, we've relied on the wisdom, generosity, and dedication of many community partners. A complex issue such as homelessness cannot be solved in isolation. As we move forward with our new name, **London Cares Homeless Response Services**, we will continue to draw on community expertise and ensure collaboration is interwoven into the work we do.



We gratefully acknowledge the support of our funders:

