



Volunteer Engagement Program

IMPACT REPORT 2024



Volunteer
Engagement
Program
TEAM OCH

Programme
de mobilisation
des bénévoles
ÉQUIPE LCO



Ottawa
Community
Housing

Logement
communautaire
d'Ottawa



Message from our CEO



Volunteerism is where compassion meets action.

The Volunteer Engagement Program (VEP) at Ottawa Community Housing (OCH) is a testament to the power of volunteerism. Residents contribute to their communities daily by hosting events, cooking meals for their neighbours, and performing many other acts of kindness. These small acts have a ripple effect, spreading positivity and community spirit across the city.

The program's reach and impact have been significantly enhanced by the generous support of our Corporate Volunteer partners. Thousands of donated hours each year go towards completing projects that benefit OCH tenants and contribute to beautification efforts that truly make a house feel like a home.

Volunteers paint hallways and common areas, build outdoor amenities like benches and garden boxes – and complete landscaping. Here is what one tenant had to say about the impact of volunteering on her community.



A huge thank you to all volunteers, both corporate and tenants. We all need to work together to make our homes clean, safe, welcoming and happy places to live and enjoy. Home is so much more than just a place to lay your head at night.



Our dedicated staff, including Property Managers, Maintenance Workers, and Grounds and Community Beautification Team team, ensure the smooth running of the Volunteer Engagement Program, providing opportunities for everyone to contribute to our community.

We also engage employees from all departments to work with partner organizations that serve our residents. It's a chance for everyone to see how we work every day to make a difference.

Volunteers are drawn to opportunities where they can make a significant impact. As an organization, we aim to instill this value and demonstrate how even the smallest changes can have ripple effects, transforming our communities one project at a time. Every act of kindness, no matter how small, contributes to this transformation.

— Stéphane Giguère, CEO Ottawa Community Housing

Who We Are

The Volunteer Engagement Program connects Ottawa Community Housing (OCH) residents with the broader community through meaningful volunteer opportunities across OCH neighbourhoods.

We engage volunteers year-round in neighbourhood-focused projects that enhance the look and feel of communities, often supporting capital or property management priorities when possible.

Capital repair expenses such as structural repairs and retrofits are a priority in OCH's Strategic Plan – to ensure we are maintaining and preserving homes for current and future tenants. Volunteers play a huge part in being able to implement community improvement projects that help tenants to feel pride in their communities.

Why It Matters

A beautiful and welcoming community makes a big difference in the lives of our tenants. They make a building a home. Improvements to common areas, such as new furniture in the lounge or a sectional bench in the courtyard, can have far-reaching benefits beyond just the physical infrastructure.

Since 2011, we have focused on these major event types:



Painting

A fresh coat of paint in a community lounge, hallways or lobby can make a big difference in brightening up a space.

125 painting events



Landscaping

Revitalizing and creating more green space increases residents satisfaction with their community - from planting tiny forests to community gardens.

77 outdoor spaces revitalized



Building

From benches to pergolas, building events are focused on creating spaces for residents to make connections and engage with their neighbours.

92 outdoor amenities built



Special Events

We bring our skill sets and resources to partner with other nonprofits.

48 partner initiatives supported



We've had people coming in from other communities... to see what our garden boxes look like and how it works. You feel like you can host people and welcome them... and feel very proud about your neighborhood

— Barbara, tenant from 1909 Russell



What Makes Up the Volunteer Engagement Program?

1 Corporate Volunteerism

Corporate groups and partners participate in the program for a chance to learn something new and make a meaningful difference in their community alongside their teams.

Our VEP currently has **40 corporate groups** who volunteer with us on a regular basis.



2 Employee Engagement

Many OCH teams see the Employee Engagement Program (EEP) as an opportunity for team building and cross-department collaboration. It's a great way for OCH staff to meet OCH residents and community partners and spend time in the communities we serve.

In 2024, the VEP team hosted a record-breaking **25 EEP** events.

3 Providing Work Experience

We work with colleges and universities in Ottawa to support students looking to gain work experience and give them a paid placement working with our corporation. We also work closely with agencies funded by Immigration and Refugee Citizenship Canada to support newcomers to Canada in securing unpaid work placements at OCH. VEP oversees matching, onboarding and provides references post placement.

OCH regularly assists a yearly average of **10 students** and new Canadians in gaining on the job skills training, and provides experiential learning opportunities to support career growth and future employment.

4 Tenants Volunteering in Communities

The Community Development Team at OCH engages with tenant volunteers across the corporation. Tenant volunteers work hard to build and enhance social cohesion by leveraging a communities' strengths and offering social opportunities to convene and build capacity with the view of improving the well-being of communities. There are 77 active tenant groups across OCH with over 500 tenants engaged, who volunteer their time on a range of initiatives – from food security to hosting social activities and events. For example, OCH is home to 280 raised bed garden boxes, with community garden groups led by our tenant volunteers.

In 2024, tenant volunteers supported more than **2,000 OCH community events** – bringing residents, partners and OCH together to address community goals and opportunities.

Community Capital Fund

Since its launch in 2009, the Community Capital Fund has responded to community requests to support tenant led efforts to build and renovate community assets and fund skills development to support the creation of healthy, engaged neighbourhoods. \$175,416.34 was invested through 49 projects in 2024.



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The Community Capital Fund has been a reliable funding stream for the Community Development team to leverage with tenant volunteers as it aims to support ongoing efforts to build and sustain community-led programming and activities as well as enhance pride of place. By equipping communities and tenant volunteers with physical assets like garden beds, communal seating areas and community kitchen supplies, we help to empower and support the volunteer spirit of OCH communities.

**— Natalie Drouin, Manager, Community Development
at Ottawa Community Housing**

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How We Choose Our Projects:



1

Need Assessment in OCH Communities

The VEP team sends a call-out to the community development team and the property management team to identify projects needed in the community. Various meetings and discussions with all parties are held with tenants to identify their needs. The community development team and the property management team play a crucial role during this phase.

Site Inspection

Site inspections are scheduled with the VE team, property manager, community developer and tenants from the community. The objective of the site inspection is to identify the scope of work and to schedule any site preparation needed before the event.

2



3

Call for Support

Various corporate partnerships are explored by the VE team. A call for action is placed in the community.

Matching Projects with Volunteer Groups

The VE team matches the corporate volunteer groups with the identified projects for the year. The matching process is based on the project priority, preference from the volunteer group, priorities in the community and weather conditions.

4



5

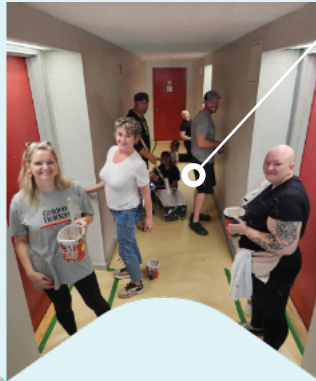
Preparation and Event Day

The VE team works in collaboration with various OCH teams like the maintenance team, landscaping team and asset management to ensure all preparation is done prior to the event. The final step is the day of action, where the corporate volunteer group is onsite in the community to work hand in hand with various staff and tenant leaders.

In 2024...

39 external corporate volunteers
25 Employee Engagement events

5862 hours of service
delivered by external volunteers



2035 hours of work
completed under Employee
Engagement projects



27 tenants
played leadership
roles at VEP
events



\$428,249
estimated value of all
volunteer work

**46 OCH
communities**
benefitted from the
VEP events

8 New Corporate Partners in 2024



St. John Ambulance



OSEG

Ottawa Sports and Entertainment Group



PAYMENTS
CANADA

ASSOCIATION
MÉDICALE
CANADIENNE



CANADIAN
MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION

banfield

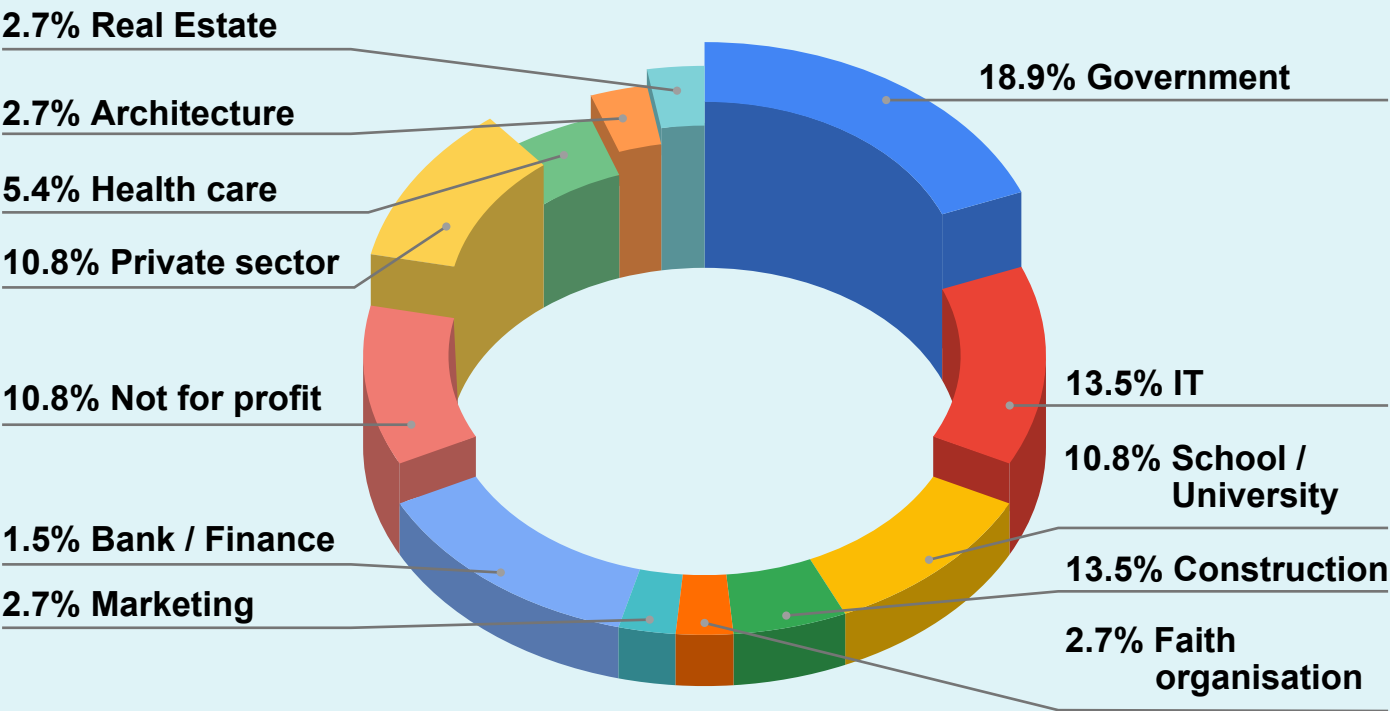


FOTENN
Planning + Design

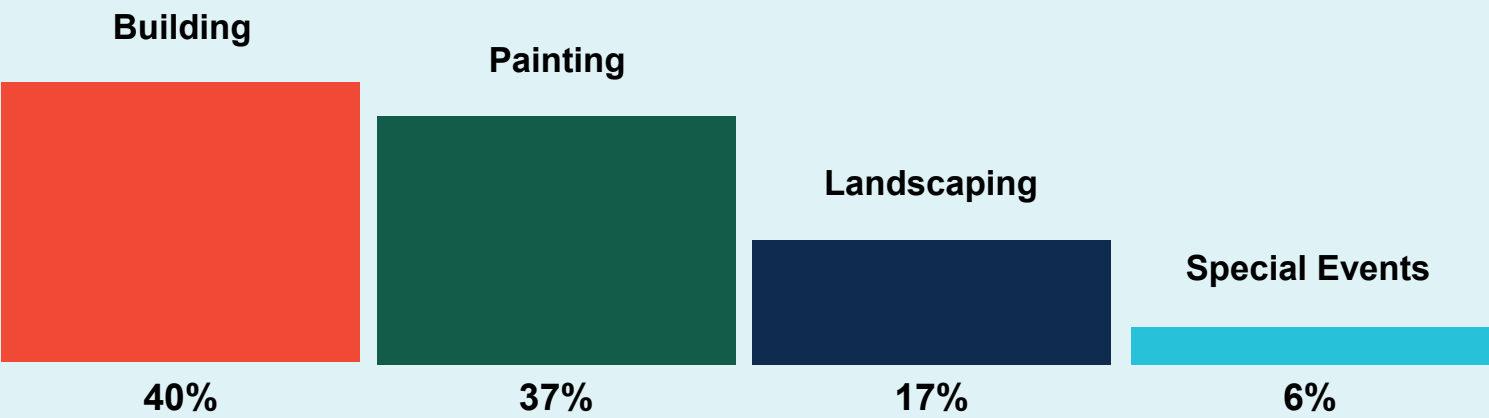


Corporate volunteer groups in 2024

Our corporate volunteer groups are made up of many different industries and sectors contributing their time and expertise.



Events by type of project in 2024



In 2024, we supported these partners through Employee Engagement Events:

- Christie Lake Kids
- Caring & Sharing Exchange
- Ottawa Food Bank
- Ottawa Community Housing Foundation
- Ottawa-Carleton Association for Persons with Development Disabilities (OCAPDD)
- Harmony House → New Partner in 2024
- Centre Pauline- Charron → New Partner in 2024
- Just Food Ottawa → New Partner in 2024
- John Howard Society (Royal Ottawa Forensic Program) → New Partner in 2024

The Volunteer Engagement Program mobilized over **366** OCH staff in **25** different employee engagement events supporting partner agencies.

OCH employees also make the events with corporate groups possible. A special thank you to our Community Development, Property Manager, Maintenance, and Landscaping teams who work closely with us to identify needs and prepare communities to host events.

“

Tenants are eager to continue planting, with a love for bright, colorful flowers that bring life to the community.

“Bright, colorful flowers make me so happy. The brighter the flowers the better for my mood!”

— **Cindy tenant from 540 Thompson**

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Corporate Groups

Building Impact Together



70 volunteers from Home Depot Canada (Team Depot) from six stores across Ottawa (and Montreal!) got to work in the Strathcona Heights community. They built benches, picnic tables, a deck, pergola and cleared overgrowth. The project was inspired by tenants and the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, a valued partner of OCH.

Home Depot supplied all the necessary tools and materials, thanks to their vendors including Stella Jones, Behr, Peak, Paulin, Grover, and Vinyl Trends. A special thank you to OCH's Procurement team, who worked with Home Depot previously and helped make this event possible.



We try to make living easier and nice for the tenants. We are here to provide a beautiful lift up for the community.

— **Tim Landry, Commercial Account Manager for Home Depot**



The newly built benches have created a welcoming space where tenants, visitors, and pedestrians can relax and enjoy. They've been appreciated by both tenants and people passing by, making the community feel more inviting.

"People walking through or visiting family in the community stop to enjoy the space, and you can tell it's being used in a good way." — Sylvie from Wiggins Private.



Despite a downpour, nearly 200 Export Development Canada volunteers got a chance to get to know our Overbrook community and leave a legacy. Thanks to a city-wide, large-scale collaboration between EDC and Volunteer Ottawa called Community Investment Day, **EDC volunteers planted nearly 60 trees in the community** to replace those lost due to

the Derecho Storm and add to the green canopy of the neighbourhood. They also replaced mulch in local playgrounds, cleared overgrowth and spruced up the neighbourhood.



Everyone deserves to live in a place that they can feel proud to live in. And if we can do some small part today to help contribute to that, it's a true privilege.

— **Melissa Salvatore, EDC Employee and former OCH employee**





The Russell Heights community celebrated a big improvement in their outdoor community space - a new outdoor gym featuring seating and recreational games called 1700 Spot.

This gym is the result of a two-year project developed in partnership with Carleton University's Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism. Carleton students collaborated with the Russell Heights Community House to present design ideas for community enhancements, incorporating feedback from residents into the final plan.

The unveiling event highlighted the new outdoor fitness space with a mini-Olympic competition, inviting local children to compete for medals in chin-ups, push-ups, and jump rope challenges.



“

We want to make landmarks people are proud of. We are grateful to have the tenants approve and agree to what we are doing.

— Dr. Menna Agha, Carleton University

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Deloitte.

An incredible team of 60 Deloitte employees volunteered at Regina Towers for their Annual Impact Day, where they painted five entire hallways.

This effort has made a meaningful difference for the tenants living at 2651 Regina, bringing fresh energy to the building. Long-standing corporate partnerships like this are the cornerstone of our Volunteer Engagement Program's success.

“

My main takeaway from volunteering with OCH is the importance of community. The volunteer events organized by OCH bring a sense of belonging and purpose for all those involved – including both the tenants of OCH buildings, and the volunteers. It's amazing to see what can be accomplished when a group comes together to support a common goal.

— Sydney Davidson, Deloitte

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Employee Engagement Program

Building Impact Together



The Preventative Maintenance Team along with other staff at OCH spent the day in Perth at the Christie Lake Kids Camp. Over the course of the day, the team built two new decks, a new sectional bench, and installed new flooring in the main hall. They also repaired 28 doors, installed 18 new LED lights, and made other various repairs.

Our partners at Christie Lake Kids help children and families living in our communities through after-school programming and unforgettable summer camp experiences. Every year, almost 400 children and youth aged 9 – 15 attend a summer camp session at the organization's campground near Perth.

85% of youth attending Christie Lake Kids Camp live in OCH communities.



One of our team members attended the camp as a former tenant with OCH. He shared his story and appreciation for the camp and how they helped to shape who he is today. It was very heartwarming and provided a real connection to why we do the work we do.

Spending time helping to set future campers up for success and seeing the relief and happiness that our work brought to the camp staff was an amazing feeling. The team continues to talk about it and insists we go every year to build on our progress from the year before.

— Rob Sokolowski, Manager, Building and Preventative Maintenance Programs at OCH



OCH's Tenant Services Leadership team joined forces with The Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre and the John Howard Society of Ottawa to build, fill and repair garden beds at the Lebreton Transitional

Rehabilitation Program (Lebreton House). The Lebreton Transitional Rehabilitation Program provides supportive housing to clients of the ROH to facilitate their transition from the rehabilitation unit to independent living in the community, quite often an OCH community.

The garden beds will be a sustainable food source for program clients. Thanks to a bursary from Just Food Ottawa (another OCH partner!), clients will be empowered to plant and nurture their own seeds in the garden beds.



Thanks to a grant from the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Community Benefits Network Workforce Development Program, 20 youth had the opportunity to learn more about construction trades.

Participants completed an interlock pad under a pergola recently built by youth in the community in the backyard of the Foster Farm Community House.

Over the last two years, several volunteer groups have contributed to enhancing this space. These improvements are thanks to the collaboration of OCH Foundation, the Volunteer Engagement Program, Property Management and our Community Development team.

The Foster Farm Community House provides important services to residents, including food banks, after-school programs, summer camps, and adult programs. With food security needs rising by 45 percent, their work is more important than ever.



The additional space provided by recent improvements has allowed residents to gather in the space, forging connections. Recently, an adult art class could do a woodburning project thanks to the covered space in the backyard provided by the pergola.

— Mary Louise Knight, Coordinator of Foster Farm Community House



Get Involved

Participate in an event with us!

We are always welcoming new corporate volunteer groups to register with us for an event, where we'll provide the support and equipment from start to finish. We can accommodate any group size with any skill level for half or full day events.

Donate to the program

Unable to give your time? You can still make a community project possible! Covering the cost of materials enables us to add more projects to our calendar.

Support the OCH Foundation

The OCH Foundation (OCHF) shares our drive to empower individuals and families living in Ottawa Community Housing, creating strong, inclusive and healthy communities.

OCHF and The Volunteer Engagement Program collaborate on a number of events, such as Pack-A-Sack, and their Annual Charity Golf Tournament.

Spread the word!

Share your experience with the Volunteer Engagement Program. Help spread awareness of the opportunities available to give back. OCH has many opportunities to be involved year-round in our communities.



Connect with us!

Looking ahead to 2025, we are excited to see our program continue to expand. The VEP teams aims to involve more volunteers in new and innovative ways, while being committed to growing our capacity to support a larger network of community partners



volunteer@och.ca









THANK YOU!

At OCH, our mission is to provide “More Than a Home Because We CARE”. The Volunteer Engagement Program strives to embody OCH’s CARE values of Collaboration, Accountability, Respect and Excellence. Every one of our volunteers is helping us to create meaningful and sustainable change, and build stronger connections in our city, one event at a time. Thank you for making OCH your organization of choice to give back to in 2024.

The Volunteer Engagement Program at OCH exists thanks to the dedication and support of our corporate partners, tenants, employees, leadership team and OCH Board of Directors, who give their time and resources to leave a lasting impact in our communities. Every project we were able to achieve this year would not be possible without you.



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THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

