

## **Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Greater Toronto Central Council**

Executive Director's Report to the Membership – September 26, 2020

As the fiscal year began on April 1, 2019, things were going very well at the Society in the Greater Toronto Central Council (GTCC). Halfway through the fiscal year, our new governance module was enacted with the first Board elected under the new By-laws at the September 2019 AGM. The inaugural Board embraced the challenge of learning the operations; ensuring staff, Vincentian, resident and Neighbours in Need interests were well considered through committee, task force and Board initiatives. This was no easy task. The Society has been blessed with Boards committed to the care and wellbeing of the organization, however with 1,400 Vincentians and 500 plus residents and staff, it was often a stretch to support all aspects of our outreach. With the new governance model, we were able to cast the net a little wider and welcome additional Vincentians to the leadership table. With a Board overseeing all of the GTCC operations, the Particular Council Presidents were able to come together at monthly meetings and focus their efforts on enacting the 5 Guiding Principles with the Conferences and Vincentians.

During the first half of the 2019 fiscal year we spent considerable time learning new reporting requirements developed by funders meant to streamline statistical and financial accountability. Our new Director of Finance, Liza Gowe, joined the team at the head office in November and immediately embraced the challenges of modernizing outdated systems, implementing efficiencies and updating reporting.

The Society's housing programs, from emergency housing to lifelong care homes, continued to offer exceptional service to persons who turned to the Society in their time of need. Elisa House Director, Laura Kiss, spearheaded a food recovery program developing relationships with Second Harvest and other food rescue organizations. This initiative realized \$45,000 in savings across the programs and reduced the quantity of food purchased from commercial suppliers. In addition to the significant financial savings, the residents benefit from a greater variety of food products, both fresh and prepared. We are hoping to obtain a grant this year to build walk-in refrigerators and freezers in our warehouse. With this additional equipment, we plan to expand this food recovery program with the goal of eliminating most of the cost associated with food purchases.

The Society first provided housing in the 1980s with the establishment of the VincenPaul Community Homes offering supportive housing to men in recovery. Ten of the thirteen homes used for this program are leased from the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), under their scattered housing portfolio. TCHC is now interested in divesting themselves of the scattered houses and has provided the opportunity for the Society to purchase the ten homes we currently lease. The homes are being sold below market rate, recognizing the unique relationship with the service providers and the desire by the City to dedicate housing stock to social service programs. The Board approved the use of bequests and donations to purchase these homes, thereby ensuring the continuation of this vital housing support to persons in recovery. We anticipate the transaction to be completed within the 2020/21 fiscal year.

While momentum was building in our Board and Committee work, efforts were diverted for a short time with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. As staff and residents learned how to cope with the virus-related challenges of working and living in congregate care settings, Vincentians, too, were forced to redouble their efforts to ensure their Neighbours in Need received much-needed assistance. As the impact of the virus unfolded, the Society continued with its operations, with the exception of Court Services and the Stores, deemed non-essential services. With the unwavering commitment by the Special Works management team, the programs remained staffed, the residents were cared for,

and the seemingly endless demand for reporting to funders and Public Health was satisfied. We did suffer a COVID-19 outbreak in Mary's Home Shelter, with 4 staff and 3 residents affected; thankfully none were terribly ill and all recovered within the expected 4-day period. Public Health stated that the Society's Shelter protocols and response were the most exceptional in the City, and absolutely the reason why the outbreak was so quickly contained. There were many days of worry and stress, particularly earlier on, when the "unknowns" loomed large; "what a year that week was" became the common response to the incredible increase in workload. Throughout these difficult months, I have had nothing but praise and gratitude for the amazingly dedicated, skilled, and diligent managers of all our programs, from the warehouse to housing, each one embodies the Vincentian spirit. The commitment to extending the Society's mission to serve all, whether it be in their homes or in our homes, is nothing short of admirable. The Board showed great compassion for the challenges facing our employees and immediately provided financial relief to staff who were working front-line; community members sponsored meals for our residents; and Vincentians offered best wishes and their meaningful prayers.

After a few false starts, all Vincentians who would otherwise have required in-person meetings accepted the challenge of using new technology such as video calling. Just weeks into the pandemic, the Board of Directors, Particular Council Presidents, and Board Committees resumed their work winding up the fiscal year-end by utilizing conference calls and video conferencing meetings. Vincentians continued to work so hard to serve and willingly shared their financial projections to foster our principles of "Sharing" and "Equity of Service". Head office staff moved into a "remote" audit period and programs and services were adjusted as the weeks went on. The stores were able to re-open in May, with staff following the Public Health guidelines. Little did we know when we closed Marygrove Camp and Camp Ozanam for the winter, after a successful 2019, season that they would remain in "lockdown" through the entire season of 2020 due to Provincial orders. The loss of this opportunity for families has been crushing; the Camps Committee made the right recommendation, but it was very tough, nonetheless. We can only hope the children and staff can return to camp next summer for the experience they all deserve.

We are now in what has been termed the "new normal". Shelter occupancy levels have been lowered to implement physical distancing. Masks, gloves, and gowns are a regular part of our workplace equipment. Vincentians continue to adapt their service, reflective of the advice of health professionals. While we adapt our outreach to continue to serve, committees have ramped up their efforts to assist the Board of Directors to deliver encouragement, support, and best practices to Vincentians and our staff teams. The Communications Committee developed a communications protocol which will assist the Board and all committees in their communications to Vincentians, staff, and other stakeholders. A brief summary of the work undertaken by all GTCC Committees follows this report.

Vincentians, in addition to your important Conference work, you are asked to consider how you may share your gifts to increase the effectiveness of the Society. Your gift of self, skill, and time will be welcome on our committees and in the leadership of the Conferences, Particular Councils, and Board of Directors; the more members who serve, the more people we are able to serve. Thank you to all Vincentians have taken on these roles. You have made an immeasurable difference.

We are grateful we have emerged thus far from one of our more challenging years and with our health and spirit intact. Through the inspiration of our founders and the grace of God, we continue to serve those who turn to the Society in their greatest time of need.

Respectfully Submitted, Louise Coutu