

Ontario Program

The MCC Ontario program team has had an exciting season of transitions and growth—from adding some fantastic talent to our team to launching a new educational initiative. We are blessed to watch our programs in Ontario expand and flourish, and it’s all thanks to the generous support of people like you.



MCC photo/Shoua Vang

Indigenous Neighbours

In Northern Indigenous communities, 2023 brought the worst fire season ever. Many were forced to flee in the blink of an eye, leaving everything behind. Fires can be unpredictable, and families who leave often don’t know when they will be returning or what they will be returning to. MCC’s Indigenous Neighbours program supported communities, like Fort Albany First Nation as they returned home, with shipments of food to ensure that no stomach went hungry. Indigenous Neighbours also provided community partners with 300 gardening kits and potato seeds as part of an ongoing food sovereignty project.

Part of the critical work of the Indigenous Neighbours team is to facilitate opportunities for learning and reconciliation. They do this through Blanket Exercises, workshops, exhibits and the Niska Artisan Project. The Niska Artisan Project supports 17 Indigenous artists, fostering opportunities to share culture and build relationships through art sales. We are also thrilled that 77 people took part in advocating for justice for Indigenous Peoples.

The MCC offices in Ontario and the national Canadian office received an invitation to attend a gathering of 40 Survivors of the Mennonite-run residential school in Northern Ontario. Together, they shared stories and took steps toward healing

and reconciliation. This powerful gathering was the first of its kind, and MCC was honoured to contribute funding and stand in attendance.



MCC photo/Ken Ogasawara

Material Resources

The Material Resources program ensures that comforters, canned meat and kits of hygiene, relief and school supplies reach people in vulnerable situations around the world. Two shipments of supplies were sent from the New Hamburg warehouse to meet the needs of people in Ukraine and Zambia. As crisis and conflict escalate, the need for kits increases. We are grateful to have grown our staff capacity to help meet these needs, and to have such a wonderful community of churches and volunteer groups that supported us with packing events! One of these incredible volunteers is Doris Kramer. Doris celebrated her 100th birthday in July 2023, and she continues to make comforters for MCC through her church, St. Jacobs Mennonite Church!

We are overjoyed to announce that we are well underway in building a new meat cannery at the New Hamburg warehouse. In the past, the mobile meat cannery has

travelled to Ontario from the United States, but stricter border regulations post-pandemic have made it increasingly difficult for the cannery and crew to travel. The cannery has been unable to cross into Canada since 2019. While production has dropped, with increased disasters and escalating food costs, requests for canned meat are at an all-time high. The new cannery project has hired a contract build lead, created a volunteer build task force, worked with an engineering design team and begun to source equipment. One of the larger purchases needed was a seam sealer, which is used to seal the lids on the cans prior to cooking. A used machine was sourced out of Montreal with an auto feed which will make the process quick and safe for our volunteers. After some paint and adjustment, the seam sealer will look and work like new!

The permit process is now underway, and the goal is to have the cannery in operation by late spring or early summer 2024. We eagerly await the opportunity to be able to better meet the needs of our neighbours around the world!



MCC photo/Ken Ogasawara

Walking with People in Poverty

The Raw Carrot Soup enterprise provides opportunities to individuals who may face barriers to employment. We are thrilled to say that sales have increased in 2023, and the team is excited to add some new products like granola and pancake mix to their lineup. Staff members continue to gain new skills and independence, and find support and community with each other.

One day, John*, a Raw Carrot Soup enterprise staff member was facing a particularly challenging day managing his mental wellness. He found himself overwhelmed by his thoughts and was unable to continue what he was doing. At many jobs, this type of struggle would only isolate someone more, but at Raw Carrot, staff and volunteers gather around in times of crisis. When John returned after a 10-minute mental health break, coworkers reminded him that Raw Carrot is a safe place to feel and share. What followed was

a beautiful and compassionate conversation of how others struggle with intrusive thoughts too. At the end of the day, John reflected: "Today I learned that we have more in common than I thought."

Despite the challenges he faces, John isn't alone. He has an incredibly supportive and caring work environment. He has a community that understands him. And he has people like you, who cheer him on through your generosity.

The Circle of Friends program supports people in transition from shelter living to finding more stable housing. In the first six months of our fiscal year, they walked alongside 27 people experiencing poverty and homelessness. MCC program staff are excited to keep finding new ways to connect with the community, and they have recently begun holding an open coffee hour at Supportive Housing of Waterloo.

Walking with People in Poverty also continues their justice work, leveraging their voices to advocate for people with lived experiences of poverty and homelessness. In 2023, staff wrote letters to the Ontario government on issues of social assistance rates, housing encampments and municipal budgets.



Restorative Justice

After serving a three-year sentence, Lily* was released from prison to a new city and new life. She arrived at her first in-person meeting with an MCC facilitator visibly upset. She had just met with her parole officer who told her, "You should be in the fetal position for the remainder of your life and not seen in public." Lily was hopeful for a new start, one of accountability and restoration, but there was no hope in her parole officer's words.

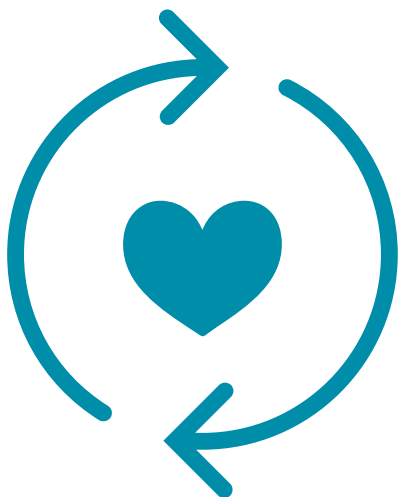
MCC staff reminded Lily that she is a willow tree, bent over

from the wind but now getting ready to stand up strong again. She needed to find herself, find community and find reconciliation. With MCC's support, Lily removed three tattoos that served as constant reminders of her past. Like a willow after a storm, she gathered the strength to stand up and find a job, move into a new apartment and return to some of the things she used to love like playing her harp and riding a bike. Her biggest challenge is the restriction that prohibits her from seeing her small children. They are currently being cared for by Lily's mother who keeps her updated on their accomplishments. We are thrilled to see Lily achieve her goals and flourish while she works toward monitored visitation with her children.

There is hope and redemption for all of us. That is the impact of your generosity.

MCC's Restorative Justice program supports individuals reintegrating into community after being released from prison. Together with MCC staff and volunteers, program participants receive accountability and support as they take responsibility for their actions and walk toward reconciliation. From April to October, staff and volunteers came alongside 92 participants in the Circles of Support and Accountability program, and 21 women in the Faith Community Reintegration program. They also trained 135 people in the Training Active Bystanders program, a program that empowers community members to respond to moments of crisis in a peaceful and de-escalating manner.

Historically, Circles of Support and Accountability has been funded by the Government of Canada. This support ended in March 2023, and the Restorative Justice team has faced increasing challenges in securing stable, ongoing funding. The program is currently being sustained through donor support, but the team is continuing conversations with elected officials, community partners and donors to explore options for future funding.



*Name changed for privacy reasons



Migration and Resettlement

Newcomers arriving in Canada face extremes: renewed opportunity and hope for the start of a new life, and heartbreak and trauma for the home they've left behind. Learning a new language and culture, navigating new cities and systems and finding housing, employment and community are just some of the enormous barriers newcomers face.

MCC's Migration and Resettlement program works with church and community groups to sponsor and support refugees to Canada, advocating for public awareness of refugee issues and protection. MCC helped welcome 64 newcomers and partnered with 130 community groups representing 513 pre-arrival sponsorships from April to October of 2023. The vast majority (62.5%) of these newcomers are from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Currently, one of the biggest challenges for newcomers is securing affordable housing.

At a Low German Networking Conference in May 2023, we were blessed to hear the authentic lived experiences of three Low German-speaking presenters. They shared powerful personal stories about the challenges of advocating to receive an education and breaking cultural norms by choosing to follow a different path than their families and communities. By listening to these stories, those in attendance left with a deeper understanding of some of the challenges newcomers with language barriers, low literacy and little education, cultural and faith differences and poverty may face.

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