

ANNUAL REPORT

2007-2008

# mainstay HOUSING

Building Futures. Creating Communities.

# Recovery

Building on Strengths and Hopes for a Better Life



## Message from the President

This year marks the completion of my two-year term as President and the full completion of my board term. I am pleased and proud to look back on the work of the board over the past year and over the six years of my tenure.

This year, the board was busy with two goals: an internal review of board function, particularly in a LHIN environment and the continued discussions devoted to defining membership. This second initiative focuses on membership as an expression of “recovery,” the theme of this report.

The board’s goal to understand the ways in which the board works and the ways in which we might improve what we do and how we do it, led us to reflect on whether the right committees are in place and what skills are needed for each to continue to be effective. But more particularly, to ensure our strategic plan continues to align both with the mandate of the Toronto Central LHIN and fulfill our mission. As a result, our new structure includes four key committees: Audit and Risk; Governance; Strategy; and Fundraising.

As part of our five-year Strategic Plan, 2007-2011, we identified member participation as a key goal. Specifically, to recognize and further support tenant members in meaningful participation in their communities and the life of Mainstay. This initiative was led by the Board, with volunteers from the community at large, and a facilitator, who involved our tenants via facilitated roundtable discussions, with questions to probe what membership means to them. We reached out to mental health and social service agencies to hear their insights about the value of membership and roles they might play. We heard from our staff as well.

I want to recognize and thank everyone who provided input and especially all those tenant members who came out to the roundtable discussions. Their enthusiasm, their willingness to tell us what they hoped for helped the Board create a new vision for membership that supports recovery.

As I reflect upon my six-year term on the board, I see that tremendous changes have taken place within the environment in which Mainstay operates. I've been impressed by how effectively Brigitte and her team have continued to be responsive to our tenants within the changing health care environment. Mainstay continues to think and act creatively to find ways in which housing and support can be provided for our tenants and for those who are not our tenants.

One of the Board's creative initiatives and commitment to recovery was the inauguration of the Opportunity Fund last year. The Board started fundraising for this with two strategies – one to provide modest grants each year; the other, to build an endowment fund. Under this Fund four tenants received grants to pursue educational goals last year. Taking courses to improve employment opportunities or for personal growth is out of reach for too many of our tenant members. Poverty is a reality for our tenant members and serious mental illness is a barrier to work. The Opportunity Fund is a creative solution to overcome these barriers and to encourage tenant members to believe in themselves and what they have to offer.

In conclusion, I want to thank board members for their compassion, and for the time they devote to volunteering on the board. Mainstay holds your efforts and gifts in high regard. The board is the underpinning to all of Mainstay's initiatives.

Cindy Maule  
President, Board of Directors





## Message from the Executive Director

This year's annual report theme, "Recovery: Building on Strengths and Hopes for a Better Life," reflects the combined efforts of Board and staff in 2007-2008.

Our staff continued to build on the strengths of our 23 Support Service Agreement partner agencies working from a shared commitment to help our tenants, their clients, succeed in moving from homelessness to home.

We worked tirelessly on a number of collaborations with sister agencies to make a difference. We are pleased the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network recognized the Toronto Mental Health and Supportive Housing Network's effort to deliver a model of co-ordinated access. We are proud of our long-standing active engagement in this Network and in Supportive Housing and Diversity (SHAD), and its creation of a toolkit to support cultural competence.

We are proud of our efforts as a founding member of HomeComing, a coalition of supportive housing providers, psychiatric consumer-survivors, and advocates committed to ensure no one is stopped from living in communities of their choice due to NIMBY.

We launched a new initiative in partnership with the City of Toronto to accommodate Streets to Homes clients living with addictions and mental health issues. Our belief in the capacity of tenants to mentor led us to ensure a position in the program for a Peer Support Worker.

We deepened our commitment to Recovery through extensive training tailored to each of our departments to ensure our staff in Building Services, Tenant and Member Services and Finance and Administration could continue to work effectively through this hope-filled approach.

We continued to rely on our tenant members to identify ideas, concerns and solutions to create and be responsible for programs that increased quality of life in their communities. New Tenant-led and Supportive Housing Worker supported programs include yoga wellness, a walking club and cooking healthy as well as the on-going community development initiatives.

Finally, we are inspired by the volunteer board members who engaged in fundraising and who led an outreach strategy culminating in a new vision about the importance and value of membership.

Once again, the successes and learning of this year are a tribute to the commitment and insight of Mainstay's board, staff, tenant members and in the community at large, to Building Futures. Creating Communities.

Brigitte Witkowski  
Executive Director





## Our Mission

Mainstay's mission is to promote and support quality affordable and accessible housing primarily for consumer-survivors, as well as people with special needs.

## Our Values

Transparency, mutual respect, access to information, tenant member participation in decisions that affect them, and hope through community development processes embody the elements of recovery. We believe in the capacity of our tenants and members to make the future that matters to them both within and outside of Mainstay. Our values inform day-to-day operational practice.

## Community Development

Community Development is a process by which community needs are identified and addressed within the framework of capacity building and set on a foundation that recognizes both strengths and limitations. From a hope-based approach, our goal is to support communities to achieve their goals within the reality of our mission, our values and our resources.



## The Recovery Journey

The vision of recovery from mental illness emerged in the 1990s when mental health care services began to focus on how people function rather than on how services were managed and delivered.\*

The idea that it is possible to move away from a life defined by mental illness is a courageous and relatively new approach to mental health care. While recovery is the accepted goal of physical rehabilitation, it has not always been a word associated with mental well-being. Yet it is precisely this quality of recovery that gives hope and meaning to those burdened by stigma and the effects of mental health problems.

Recovery is not a linear process. It is a personal process that includes setbacks and disappointments as well as growth and insight. Each individual has his or her own recovery journey because recovery means different things to different people. For some it is the absence of the symptoms of mental illness. For others, it means living with ongoing symptoms while still enjoying the enriching aspects of community.

For this report, in addition to the two supportive housing workers who have volunteered to tell us about how they use recovery principles in their work with tenants, two tenants have generously agreed to share their stories of personal recovery and two other tenants have described how their recovery improved through participation in Mainstay community development initiatives.

\* From BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information, at [www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets/recovery](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets/recovery)

**BUILDING BASED COMMUNITY MEETINGS** ■ Tenant members are invited to building-based community meetings to talk to their Supportive Housing Worker about building or tenancy issues that affect them. It is a vehicle to create programs that support recovery.



## Marc McKenzie

Marc McKenzie's life took a downward turn in his mid-thirties. Before that, he was working in a corporate environment and travelling extensively. But when the life he'd created fell apart, Marc found himself in circumstances he never thought possible. "I'd grown up in a supportive environment and yet, at 35, facing burn-out and the collapse of a longstanding relationship, I became cocaine dependent. It was then that all aspects of my life became unstable."

Marc knows firsthand how debilitating drug use can be. What seems at first an easy solution, to dull pain, becomes the addict's biggest problem and challenge. Finding work and securing housing, the vital supports that none of us can live without, become nearly impossible. Marc found himself homeless for over three years. "The rhythms and routines of a life dominated by drugs doesn't fit with the rest of the world," explains Marc. And life on the streets was exhausting. Marc finally decided to go to a shelter and stayed at Dixon Hall until he moved into his own apartment at Mainstay.

Marc found that gaining affordable housing encouraged and enhanced his recovery journey. "In this secure place, I enjoy steady improvement of my health and further development and fulfillment of myself." For Marc, "being a Mainstay tenant has made my life richer." He credits the direct service workers and the executive and general staff with excellence. "They are approachable, resourceful, genuinely interested, and wise. And they are passionate about what they do, to boot!" It is a winning combination, one that increasingly enhances Marc's life.

For Marc, recovery brings into play many components—a supportive family; yoga; right thinking; respect for his needs, both physically and mentally; and connection to community. He is interested in bringing harm-reduction awareness to the people he comes in contact with in his building and in his work on Mainstay's board. What does Marc hope for most in his recovery journey? "I hope to live a peaceful, passionate existence. The universe would be my oyster. In truth, the universe already is my oyster. And I don't even eat shellfish!"

**COMMUNITY KITCHEN** ■ Tenants take the lead in our Community Kitchen Program at our Learning and Resource Centre once per week, as well as at other Mainstay buildings. This is a skills-building exercise for tenants who choose a menu, go shopping with the Supportive Housing Worker, and cook their own lunch. Tenants learn about budgeting, nutrition and what makes a balanced meal.

## Mitchell Mahon

Mitchell Mahon has been a Mainstay tenant for 12 years. He loves sharing his one-bedroom unit with his “happy half-dozen”—his six fantastic felines. Mitch credits his cats with giving him the comfort and companionship that everyone needs to cope with life’s difficulties. “When my father died four years ago, Amber looked at me as if to say, ‘Don’t worry, Dad, it’ll be alright.’”

Before coming to the safety and privacy of his own unit, Mitch lived in shared accommodation, which he found difficult. “Some of my roommates used the place as a drop-in center. And it was hard to keep my cats happy.” A significant contributor to Mitch’s recovery has been having his own place with neighbours he likes just around the corner. “Mike and Sue are my friends and neighbours. They were my welcoming committee when I moved into the building. They brought me a fluffball of a kitty as a welcome gift.”

Mitch has endured painful losses in his life. When he was young, his mother died and, six months later, his grandfather, with whom he was especially close, also died. “The deaths of my mother and grandfather, to use a Second World War metaphor, were my Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” says the intelligent, soft-spoken man. “I think I was clinically depressed from the time I was twelve.”

Mitch agrees that taking your medication is important to help with depression and recovery, but equally crucial is gathering good things into your daily life. “My three main coping techniques are what I refer to as my three F’s,—my faith, my felines, and my friends. I also like to walk, which tires my anger out. And I write, which rejuvenates me.” Mitch converted to Hinduism three years ago and attends a temple five minutes from his place. “The chanting and meditation can help pull me out of a depressive rut.”

Mitch speaks glowingly of his supportive housing worker. “I can talk to her easily. She seems more like a friend.” The kind words offered by this approachable worker give Mitch the encouragement he needs to focus on a goal that is important to him—that of “being the lotus, not the mud.”



**COFFEE GROUPS** ■ Coffee Groups are “good to the last drop” at nineteen Mainstay buildings. They provide an informal setting for tenants to meet each other, offer peer support, discuss current events and learn about resources in the community.



## Carmen Talavera Williams

A quest for adventure spurred Carmen to come to Canada from Central America more than 10 years ago. "I was always an adventurous person," says Carmen, with a twinkle in her eye. "Now, I'm not. Now I don't have the opportunity to have adventures because of my economic situation and the depression that came to me in Canada."

It is her change in status and the stigma of mental illness that most trouble Carmen. Before moving into her Mainstay unit, in the summer of 2006, she had never lived in subsidized housing. "Depression has changed my life in so many ways," she says sadly. "It's a daily struggle to overcome those feelings of loss and regret."

For Carmen recovery is a "big word" that means many things. "Recovery includes the way you eat, the way you sleep, the way you fill your days with activity, attending to your doctor's appointments, interacting with people." Carmen is a talented artist. In Central America she taught art to children. Part of Carmen's recovery journey came in the form of an Opportunity Fund grant through Mainstay which allowed her to take several art courses. "It was the first time I had ever won anything," she recalls. "It was such a big gift. I felt like fifteen again!"

Carmen speaks fondly of the months she spent taking art classes at The Toronto School of Art. "I had a beautiful teacher in life drawing. He inspired me so much. He created a special dynamic in his classes which I appreciated so much." Carmen's love of art is something that gives joy and meaning to her life. "I want to take more courses to build my portfolio." Carmen has a dream of getting a diploma in art so that one day she might be able to teach art once more. So far she's taken eight courses of the twenty needed for a diploma.

Recovery is a lifelong process. Sometimes it feels like there is no movement or progress being made. Carmen reflects on what she hopes for in her journey of recovery. "I hope that I can keep on going. I hope that I will keep painting and find a purpose."

**GARDENING** ■ During the spring and summer months you will find many Mainstay tenants tending to their flowers and vegetables. They've got the trowels, gloves and hoses out at twenty-five different buildings. Tenants shop for supplies, reap the benefits of sunshine and exercise, and in some cases, eat the fruits of their labour. Tenants take pride in beautifying their surroundings and improve the "curb appeal" of their buildings.

## Dale Richardson

Dale came to Mainstay through Reach Services in March 2005. "It surprised me to get the housing so quickly. I was struggling, almost on the street, and Mainstay came through." Since moving into his own place, Dale feels safer and more in control of his surroundings. "Having your own apartment allows you to be more responsible and in charge of your own life." The fact that the rent is within reach has taken a huge weight off Dale's mind.

As the second youngest in a family of eight children, Dale grew up having lots of people around him. Perhaps this is why he has given himself to several initiatives in his building. Dale takes a leadership role volunteering with the food bank at his building, as he is contact person for the program and on delivery days is, "unloading the truck and cleaning up." He also goes shopping for the community kitchen program. In addition, Dale works in the community rooftop garden. "It's a patio flower garden. Five or six of us work in it." Dale likes to volunteer. "It makes you feel like you're part of the building rather than just being in your own apartment all the time."

Volunteering has given Dale a positive feeling about himself, which, in turn, has encouraged his recovery from loneliness and isolation. When asked how he's changed since becoming a Mainstay tenant, Dale ponders the question for some time before speaking thoughtfully, "I have changed. My perspective has changed. Before I was just renting a room and really struggling. I saw myself in a really negative way. When I moved to Mainstay, I felt more stable. I began to think more positively about myself."

Dale credits his volunteer work with helping him learn patience. "I'm learning not to get angry right away, to listen more. Working with the people in my building is important to me." One hope that Dale has for himself in his recovery journey is what all of us might wish for—"I want to have more control over the things in my life. I want to shape my life. I want to be able to make the life I want."



**FOOD BANK PROGRAMS** ■ Tenants have taken over the management of food banks at eight different Mainstay buildings. Tenants manage delivery, sorting and distribution of the food. This builds organizational skills, conflict mediation, boosts confidence and improves nutrition.



## Kevin Blackwood ⇨ Supportive Housing Worker

In his interactions with tenants, Kevin Blackwood tries his best to dismantle the stigma associated with mental illness. "I look to steer clear of tenants' diagnoses. Recovery is a human experience whether you have mental illness or not. All of us go through our own bouts of recovery, whether it be from injury, illness, trauma, or the loss of a loved one. I try to focus on and value the strengths of a person and the element that each one brings to his or her own recovery."

Kevin emphasizes the importance of even the smallest step forward. Some tenants may not have the confidence to come to monthly tenant meetings, but even if they pop their heads in for a couple minutes, Kevin applauds and encourages that small step. "It's important to have respect for each person's journey, no matter where he or she is at."

It's also important that individuals are made aware that even the slightest change in their way of thinking or understanding can manifest later as significant change. Kevin tells the story of the tenant who wanted nothing to do with computers. This tenant spent the winter rarely leaving his apartment. Over some months, Kevin talked to him about computers whenever the subject came up. Ultimately, that tenant purchased a computer. "It's a big step for him," says Kevin. "A computer can be the gateway to the outside world."

Kevin believes that daily one-to-one communication with tenants is very important to the recovery process. This communication can develop trust and one never knows when a person decides to begin his or her recovery journey. "I like to encourage people to have a voice. They are part of the community. I want to acknowledge their contributions, hoping that will set the stage for change."

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION COMMITTEE** ■ Over the years we have seen the need for an alternative way for tenants to resolve their conflicts with each other. Quite often, even after tenants have attempted to resolve their conflicts on their own or with the help of their Supportive Housing Worker, they find that the issues are still unresolved. A new conflict resolution process was required to give them an

## Ferreshteh Bahmani ⇨ Supportive Housing Worker

Ferreshteh believes that hope plays a vital role in a person's journey toward health. Recovery from illness is especially significant for those living with mental illness. Although those with an illness face diverse challenges, Ferreshteh believes that losing hope is "the biggest issue our tenants face." Hope is not only an outcome of recovery; it motivates and inspires recovery, which, in Ferreshteh's words, is "a lifetime process."

Safe and affordable housing is a core need and a fundamental right for everyone. When individuals who have lived on the street or in a shelter move into their own home, their journey to recovery begins. "Helping tenants to maintain their housing is a part of that recovery," says Ferreshteh. As a Supportive Housing Worker, Ferreshteh "wears three hats" — landlord, community developer, and crisis intervention counsellor—but, in her daily dealings with tenants, she strives to "keep bringing the tenant back to hope."

Another significant recovery component is community. "It is important to bring our tenants back to the community," says Ferreshteh. Community connections are key to any measure of recovery. Encouraging hope by helping a tenant to reconnect with community is crucial. "We try to help tenants get back what they've lost, be it a family relationship or a support agency."

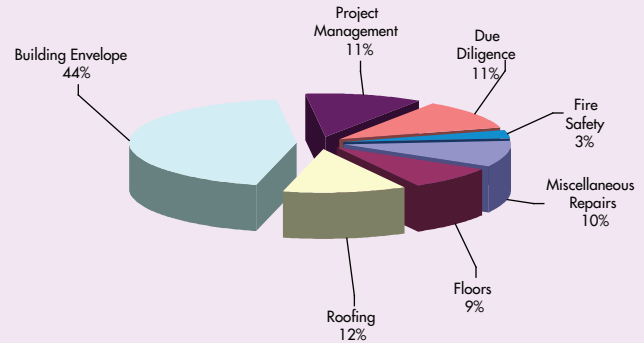


opportunity to meet with an impartial third party mediation team. This team is drawn from the conflict resolution committee. Each mediating team is made up of two supportive housing workers, one tenant and one outside agency representative. This committee markets this eviction prevention tool at Mainstay buildings to ensure tenants know they can access help when they need it.

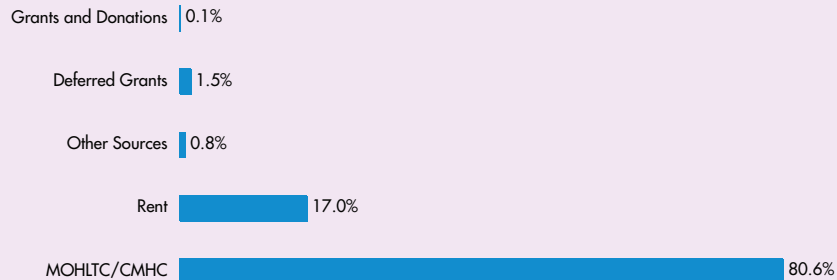
# Financials 2007-2008

Our Capital Works plan is intended to keep our tenants' homes in tip top condition. Our priority has always been the safety and quality of life for our tenants. We constantly test and observe building systems and analyze work orders. Along with building audits we come up with a plan each year on the most cost efficient way to spend our Capital dollars. This year we focused on aging interior building components such as flooring, exhaust systems and bathrooms. Exterior building envelope work focused on roofs.

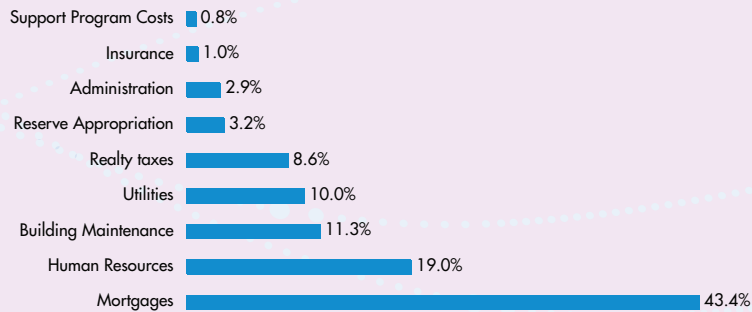
## 2007 - 2008 Capital Works Projects



## Operating Revenues 2007- 08 \$12,702,381



## Operating Expenditures 2007- 08 \$12,547,339



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Sven Byl  
Shabbir Causer, Treasurer  
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Cindy Maule, President  
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## Staff

### Tenant and Member Services:

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Michelle Coombs  
Kimberley Ellsworth  
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Ray Fortune  
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Paul Hale  
Olimpia Lauriston  
George Luzio  
Desmond Marrett  
Alan Pitts  
Teresa Rivas  
Jennifer Windrem

**Executive Director:**  
Brigitte Witkowski

**Executive Assistant:**  
Nancy Sugar

- Jane Edwards and Wayne Bisnath celebrate their 10 year anniversary in 2008.

### Student Placements:

Afroza Begum  
Carrie Chega  
Amanda Esteves  
Andrea Gutowski  
Maria Jin  
Parvin Merchant  
Sylvia Monpetit

**Interviewer/Writer:**  
Monica Kulling

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The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care;  
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation;  
City of Toronto Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative.



George Luzio, Caretaker, is recognized upon his 5 year anniversary at Mainstay by President, Cindy Maule

### Donors:

Thank you to our generous corporate and individual donors.

### In memorium for tenants who passed away in 2007-08:

Farzaneh Behmanesh  
Charles Carr  
Ed Gogula  
Irvan Ince  
Mohammad Keramati  
Hughie Ngo  
Brian Osmond  
Daniel Phaneuf  
Richard Thompson  
James Todd  
Susan Todinovska  
Dan Washuck



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