

# Rising up

The Neighbourhood Group  
Community Services

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Strategic Plan

**2023**

**2028**





# A message from our CEO and Board Chair

**Bill Sinclair**

President and Chief Executive Officer

In Toronto, more people are closer to poverty than they are to riches. This is a truth we recognize. As we embarked on the development of our Strategic Plan 2023-2028, we recognized The Neighbourhood Group Community Services needed to identify and call out poverty as the root cause of all our challenges and the focus of our efforts.

As a result, this Strategic Plan places our new Anti-Poverty Framework front and center. This is a proud declaration of who we are, what we are doing, and why it matters. If we do not call out what is really leading so many people to our doors, then we feed into and perpetuate the stigma and dehumanization that marks so much of the lived experience in our communities.

We see the need in this city increasing every day, and it cannot be alleviated in any meaningful way through incremental change. We must revolutionize our structure, approach and ambitions to maximize impact.

Our organization was created through the amalgamation of Central Neighbourhood House, Neighbourhood Link Support Services, St. Stephen's Community House, and Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services - four community service providers with long and meaningful histories of impact in communities across Toronto. Today, we support over 50,000 low-income people and families in 30 locations. We have more than 800 staff and 600 volunteers and our programs and services address the community's most pressing issues.

Joining forces to create this expanded model wasn't easy, but it was necessary. We now have the bench strength and expertise we need and are prepared to play a larger role in the battle to bring about equity and opportunity for all who live in our communities.

This Strategic Plan, which we have named "Rising Up", is an ambitious vision for how we can contribute to the urgent effort to end poverty in Toronto. Our hard work has led us here: it is time to be bold.

We are extremely proud to be a part of an organization that is dedicated to social justice and the eradication of poverty. We know that TNGCS's strength lies in its agility, staff, leadership and culture - all of which provide a strong foundation as we continue this vital work.

**We support over 50,000 low-income people and families in 30 locations.**

**We have more than 800 staff and 600 volunteers**

**IT IS TIME TO BE BOLD.**

# The Urgency of Now

This five-year Strategic Plan comes at a unique and urgent moment for our organization, our team, our participants, and our city. This work sets a clear course for bold, targeted action and to reinvigorate our approach to working in partnership with those who need us most.

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## Our Mission

Work with people at every stage of their lives, providing access to innovative and effective programs, and collaboratively building and advocating for an equitable, just, and vibrant community.

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## Our Vision

A resilient, inclusive society in which opportunity, empowerment, and social and economic justice create a better quality of life for all.



# A Five-Year Roadmap to Impact

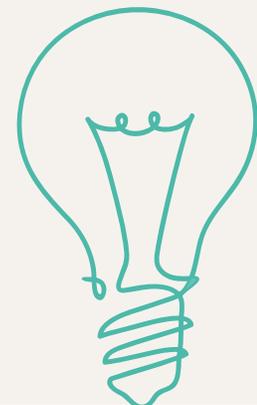
Over the next five years, TNGCS will take on big challenges and demonstrate our organizational strength.

That means charting a course with meaningful and measurable goals. It means getting our own house in order and creating a foundation for shared success. It also means sharing insights and presenting solutions that can bring about meaningful change.



## Strategic Objectives 2023-2028

Tackle The Root Causes Of Poverty  
Lead The Way On Priority Issues  
Maximize Our Organizational Strength  
Raise Our Voice For Change



## OBJECTIVE 1:

### TACKLE THE ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY

Across our services and our locations, we will collaborate with participants to alleviate pressures, remove access barriers, and create opportunities for better lives. Now is the time to dig deeper and identify the emerging and unmet needs of marginalized individuals and communities. We will create pathways out of poverty with services that are strategic, targeted, effective and adaptive.

#### ➤ ACTIONS

- **Solidify our approach as a “no wrong door” organization**

Regardless of where or why an individual first contacts us, we will apply a “whole person” approach, ensuring access to comprehensive support and actively working against the stigma and dehumanization that often accompanies poverty.

- **Go where we are most needed**

With an increased focus on data and demographic insights, we will expand our mobile response services and presence in underserved areas, and address needs that have become more complex over time. This begins, but is not limited to, increased programming to stabilize seniors and people living with disabilities in their communities and in their housing.

- **Lift 10 percent of our participants out of poverty**

In the first year of this Strategic Plan, we will create a framework to measure our impact to meet a target of moving 10% of our service participants out of poverty over the course of the plan.



## OBJECTIVE 2:

### LEAD THE WAY ON PRIORITY ISSUES

There are massive changes occurring in the delivery of childcare, health care, skills development, immigration, and housing. TNGCS will step to the forefront and demonstrate our expertise in these areas, embracing a now-or-never movement to lead foundational programs that can change people's lives.

#### ➤ ACTIONS

- **Achieve \$10/day public childcare**

TNGCS will ensure that \$10/day childcare with subsidy options for lower income families is available across our service locations.

- **Help transform the delivery of healthcare services in four Ontario Health Teams**

Through participation in four Ontario Health Team tables, we will collaborate with participants, community partners and hospitals to provide teamwork solutions and improve community health and wellbeing.

- **Introduce a skills certification program**

We will teach current job skills to our participants – including youth and newcomers – that lead to work and hope. This will include skills and certifications to allow them to work for TNGCS such as Early Childhood Education or Personal Support Work.

- **Double the number of supportive housing units provided by TNGCS.**

We will continue to lead in the provision of supportive housing as the true solution to homelessness.

- **Measure the impact of access to justice**

We will create a model to measure the impact and integration of our legal clinic. This will create insights for policy advocacy and justice solutions in housing, immigration and social assistance.



## OBJECTIVE 3:

### MAXIMIZE OUR ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH

To achieve the full potential of our organization, we will focus on cementing strong business systems. What we do is not easy, and we recognize that many of our team members experience the same challenges as our participants. We will embrace our diverse group of values-driven people and model approaches that create opportunities and learning.

#### ➤ ACTIONS

- **Become sector leaders in “decent work”**

This will include advocacy efforts for increased compensation and set an example in the sector by improving the experiences, development, and mobility for our staff. We will create a comprehensive People Plan to develop clear and equitable pathways for racialized staff to move into leadership roles.

- **Create career pathways for program participants**

Building on TNGCS’s established leadership in hiring participants, we will expand our approach to training, recruitment, and employment, with a goal of filling 20 percent of open positions from among our participants.

- **Improve our playbook**

We will improve internal and external communications, to build team cohesion and ensure the accessible exchange of information. We will modernize internal systems, bolster interdepartmental collaboration, and strengthen policies, processes and tools for data-informed approaches.



## OBJECTIVE 4:

### RAISE OUR VOICE FOR CHANGE

We will work with participants, not-for-profit and community partners to identify solutions and advocate for policy changes at all levels of government. Gathering the voices and experiences of our communities, we will strive to improve education around poverty and injustice with the objective of achieving meaningful policy changes.

#### ➤ ACTIONS

- **Put ourselves on the agenda**

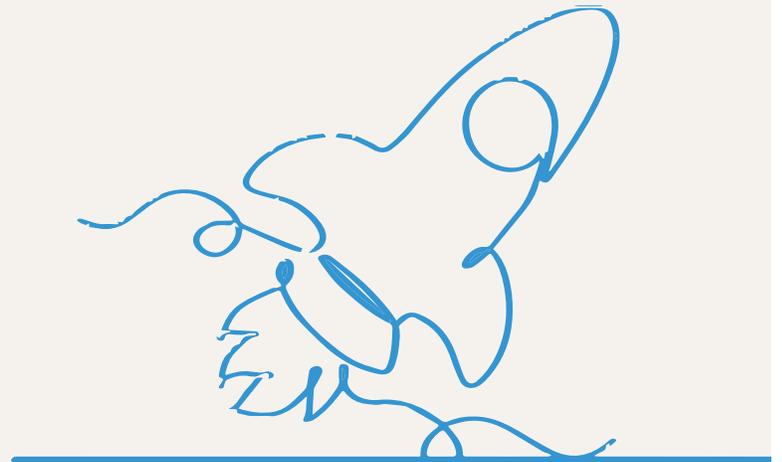
We will grow our visibility outside of our sector – from Business Improvement Areas to resident town halls, to hospital and healthcare tables – creating relationships in areas where we believe our insights can demystify poverty and have a positive impact.

- **Offer solutions to all levels of government**

We will expand our advocacy team and use our influence, insights, and access to advocate for a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive society. We will offer fixes and solutions to government partners, including targeted campaigns that fight poverty.

- **Make news**

Through cultivated relationships and outreach to media, intentional social media campaigns, and the creation of a lived experience source directory for journalists, we will make TNGCS the go-to source on stories related to Toronto poverty, injustice, and service access.



# Our Strategic Objectives are built on the following insights and realities:

- Toronto's population is rapidly changing, and its needs are becoming more and more complex. Our economy and our workforce are in flux, with real impacts on lives and resources. Our population is growing, while our housing supply continues to fall short. Climate change is bringing new threats that will affect the vulnerable most of all. Our population is aging in unprecedented numbers and growing more isolated.
- At the same time, there is a transformational movement happening in the way that governments deliver employment services, childcare and health care, and in the way workforce and educational interventions are imagined.
- All of these challenges and opportunities require dedication to anti-racism, anti-oppression, truth and reconciliation – the necessary deconstruction of systemic barriers that will allow us to build a more just society. Colonialism and racism has led in large part to the creation and exacerbation of the ills we see in our city today. Only through dismantling their structures can we hope to end their effects.
- TNGCS's amalgamation efforts have set us up to respond effectively. Our cumulative strength gives us the size, credibility, responsibility, and passion to have a bigger impact. The time is now.



# No Success Without Social Justice

## **TNGCS's Anti-Poverty Framework**

The Neighbourhood Group Community Services is a community service provider AND a social justice organization.

We understand that the realities of poverty and injustice underlie all of the services we provide as well as the lived experience of our participants and staff. That means our work will not end until poverty is eradicated, and structures of disadvantage are dismantled.

As an organization, we believe that overcoming poverty is impossible without a solid foundation of policy. Accordingly, this Anti-Poverty Framework will inform everything we do.



# What does Anti-Poverty mean to us?

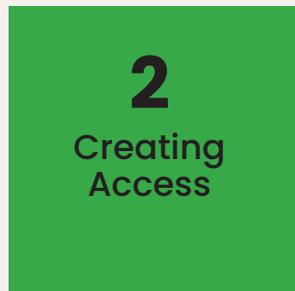
Poverty does not happen out of nowhere but is caused and contributed to by:

- Inequality
- Systemic racism
- Colonialism
- Barriers to access and education
- Cost of shelter
- Over-policing
- Age
- Mental or physical health
- Disability
- Immigration status barriers
- Underemployment and precarious employment

As an Anti-Poverty organization, we commit to:

- Engage participants as problem solvers, leaders, and self-advocates
- Go where we are needed most
- Counter the stigma that can prevent people from accessing services
- Name the drivers of poverty arising from our economic systems
- Walk the walk, and address our own responsibilities as an employer
- Offer solutions to government at every opportunity

## Four ways we fight poverty:





## 1. Responding to Crisis

Poverty creates situations where people need help NOW.

We provide low barrier services and responses to help alleviate the pain and distress poverty can cause while ensuring the dignity of all our participants. These programs are an entry point for support as we strive to address more chronic challenges.



## 2. Creating Access

There are basic entitlements everyone requires to access opportunity: valid ID, education and language skills, rights to income, work permits, justice and other day-to-day realities.

We work to ensure everyone has the foundational tools they need so they can feel a sense of belonging, exercise their rights and access opportunities.



## 3. Lifting people up

Getting out of poverty is hard and staying out is even harder, particularly as the cost of living continues to rise at an accelerated rate.

We work to address the core issues that help people get ahead – from employment services and lowering the barriers to workforce credentials to affordable childcare and affordable housing – while providing individual and family support programs that empower and enable people in their journeys out of poverty.



## 4. Advocacy and Community Building

No one can fight poverty alone.

We work with grassroots community and neighbourhood groups, donors and funders on collective responses to poverty and injustice. We support our participants and our staff to speak up in the right places, tell our stories, and raise our voices to present solutions, system improvements and policy responses to the challenges we see.







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349 Ontario Street | Toronto, ON M5A 2V8 | 416.925.2103 | [www.TNGcommunityTO.org](http://www.TNGcommunityTO.org)

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