



# Advancing Care through Collaboration

Accessible Healthcare | Empathy-based Care | Cultivating Partnerships

**Annual Report 2025 (Jan. 1 - Dec. 31)**



# Land Acknowledgement

REACH Niagara is committed to ensuring equitable healthcare access for individuals who are marginalized and/or experiencing homelessness. As part of this commitment, we recognize the ongoing impacts of colonization, which have denied Indigenous peoples their rights to self-determination and led to systemic inequities in healthcare, housing, and other areas of life.

As one step in the process of reconciliation, we respectfully acknowledge that we operate on the traditional territories of many Indigenous communities including the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This land has long been a place of gathering, healing, and community for Indigenous peoples and remains home to many First Nations, Metis, and Inuit individuals today.

At REACH Niagara, we are taking concrete actions to support reconciliation. Through our partnerships, we work to ensure that healthcare services are culturally safe, inclusive, and accessible for Indigenous communities in building trust and removing barriers to care.

Reconciliation is not just a statement – it is a commitment woven into our work, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge, traditions, and voices are respected and centered in the pursuit of health equity.



# Message from the REACH Niagara Leadership Team

This year marked significant progress towards our mission of working alongside partners to provide accessible healthcare and reduce barriers for the homeless and marginalized in Niagara.

We've joined collaborative programs such as the HART Hub, removed barriers by hosting pop-up Ontario Disability Support Program clinics where the needs exist, hosted our first Loudest Silent Auction, and received generous donations from organizations and community members across Niagara.

It is the stories of resilience that propel us forward.

Through the mobile health and partnered indoor clinics, we see people who, in some cases, wouldn't otherwise access care.

In the words of a client in our Justice System Transitional Integrative Care and Empowerment (JUSTICE) program, "this program has been so much help that I don't know what I would have done without [my] Intensive Case Manager."

Clients of our Ontario Disability Support Program identified transportation a barrier of accessing this program. As a result, we opened two new clinics in areas where the need exists.

These are just a few of the examples of how REACH Niagara is improving the lives of community members.

But it goes beyond just individual wellbeing. The work that REACH Niagara does, alongside our dedicated partners, helps build equitable communities.

We encourage you to read the stories of struggle turned to hope, innovative ways to deliver care, and first-hand perspectives of that positive impact REACH Niagara continues to have.



**Carolyn Dyer**  
Executive Director



**Dr. Kim Bender**  
Medical Director



**Dr. Karl Stobbe**  
Medical Director - Substance  
Use and Addictions Programming



On behalf of the REACH Niagara Board of Directors, I'd like to express my gratitude to the skilled team of healthcare providers, administrative staff, funders, partners, and community members. Healthcare is a human right. Together, we're working towards making healthcare accessible for those experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable communities in Niagara.

**Frank Ruberto**  
REACH Niagara - Board Chair

# Welcoming new REACH Niagara Team Members



## PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS

Dr. Josiah Coolen  
Dr. Salman Khan  
Dr. Jenn Frendo  
Dr. Alex Nowicki  
Laura Pace, NP  
Dr. Kathy Swayze  
Briar Wiens, NP

Sam Carey  
Jeff Charboneau  
Tara Foster  
Christina Fowler  
Kay Gordon  
Jennifer Hogge  
Teresa Jones  
Siobhan Kenny  
Madison McNeil  
Chelsea Millar  
Keanna Schuster  
Ashley Soucie  
Becky Sutherland  
Rachel Wheeler



## FINANCIAL FOUNDATIONS FOR HEALTH

Financial empowerment through programs such as the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW) plays a critical role in improving health outcomes and strengthening community resilience. By providing income support to individuals and families facing financial hardship, these programs help reduce barriers to essential healthcare, including access to medications, nutritious food, stable housing, transportation, and preventative care.

When people have the financial resources to meet their basic needs, they are better positioned to manage chronic conditions, seek medical treatment early, and maintain their overall well-being.

Beyond benefiting individuals, financial stability contributes to stronger, healthier communities by reducing strain on healthcare and social service systems, increasing social participation, and fostering greater economic and social resilience.

Investing in programs that support financial security is therefore an important step toward creating more equitable communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Providing primary healthcare and counselling alone is just a temporary fix. To achieve long-term, sustainable results, holistic factors, such as financial wellbeing, must be addressed.

# PATH Program

Through the Program for Addiction Treatment and Healthcare, we helped people facing some of life's most difficult challenges access compassionate addictions medicine and substance use support when they needed it most. By providing gender-responsive case management services, we created pathways to greater safety, dignity, and stability, empowering individuals to rebuild their lives, strengthen their well-being, and move toward a healthier future.

Another important piece of this program is strengthening financial empowerment by removing barriers to access medical benefits and essential supports.

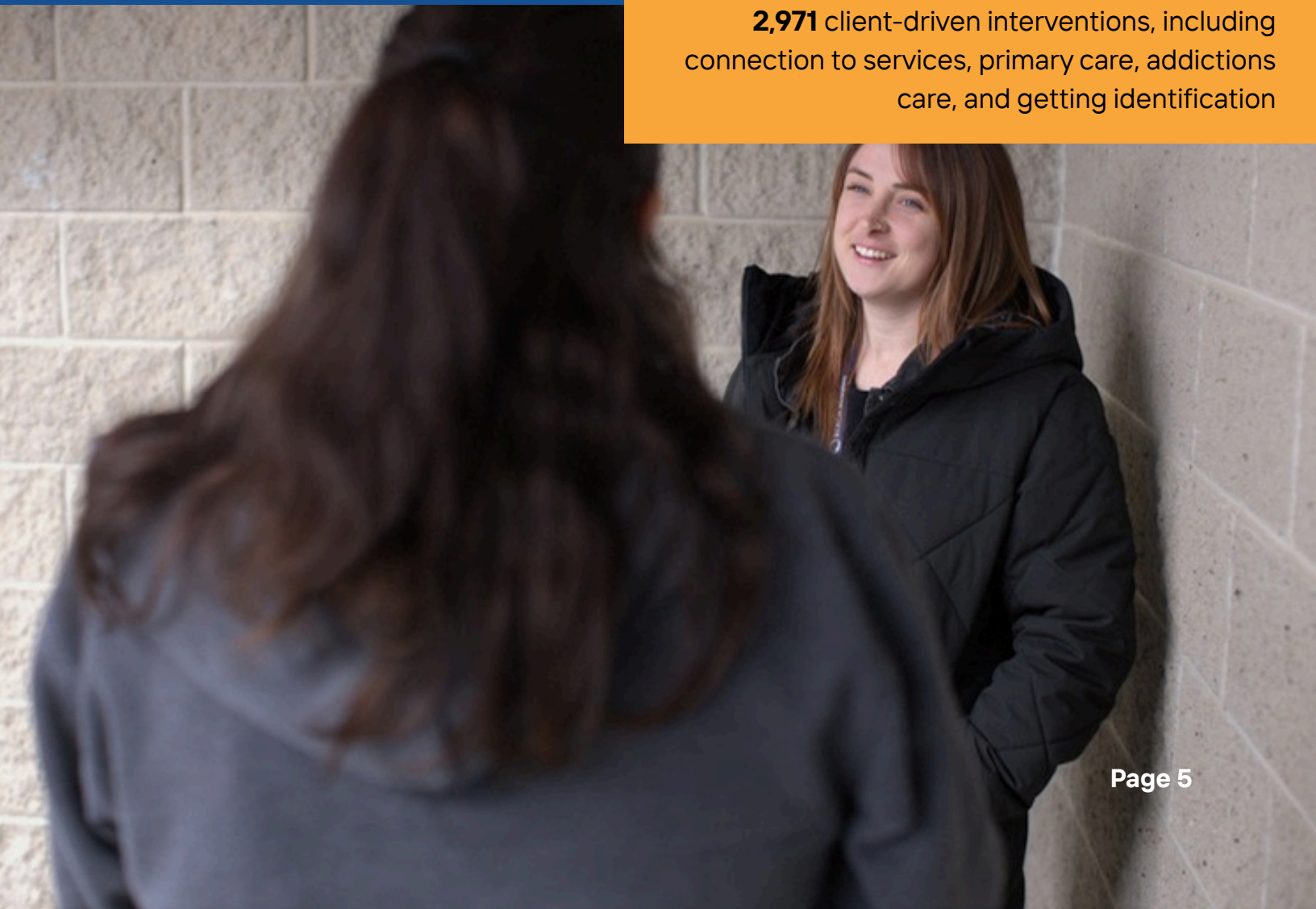
Through an innovative partnership with the Niagara Community Legal Clinic, we were able to improve the lives of community members through Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) appeals.

Between September and December 2025, 67% of clients who were originally denied OSDP had a successful appeal.

## BY THE NUMBERS:

**293** unique people served through this program

**2,971** client-driven interventions, including connection to services, primary care, addictions care, and getting identification





# Expanded Ontario Disability Support Program Clinic

Knowing the importance that financial empowerment plays in health, we operate monthly clinics dedicated to helping clients with Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) applications.

When we heard that one of the biggest barriers for people to access these clinics was transportation, we expanded to bring these services to more areas where the need exists.

We operate pop-up clinics across the Niagara region as a direct action to reduce access barriers.

***"The reality is, I would still be living in the shelter without my case manager from REACH. She helped me go through the ODSP legal process with no problems - very clear direction."***

# Joining the HART Hub



In 2025, we joined the HART Hub, a collaborative program led by Gateway Niagara.

The Hart Hub brings treatment, support, and housing opportunities together for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness - addressing immediate needs while building long-term stability.

*One moment that stands out is working with a client who was initially very hesitant to engage with healthcare services. Over time, through regular outreach and consistent, non-judgmental care, we were able to build trust. What began as brief check-ins gradually led to the client accepting more comprehensive care, including treatment for ongoing health concerns.*

*Seeing that shift, from avoidance to engagement really highlighted the impact of meeting people where they are and respecting their pace. It wasn't just about the medical care; it was about creating a safe space where the person felt seen and supported. That trust opened the door to better health outcomes and stronger connections to other supports.*

*REACH makes a difference by removing as many of those barriers as possible. We provide care that is flexible, non-judgmental, and rooted in harm reduction and dignity. By going to people instead of expecting them to come to us, and by working as a team, we're able to build trust and support people in ways that are meaningful and sustainable.*

- Tara Foster, REACH Niagara Registered Nurse, HART Hub Program

# Growing JSTICE

The goal of the Justice System Transitional Integrative Care and Empowerment (JSTICE) system is simple: Increase positive health and social outcomes of those exiting correctional facilities to minimize the risk of re-incarceration, overdose, or death.



The journey to these positive outcomes is much more complex.

Lack of income, transportation, identification, and housing all pose significant barriers to accessing healthcare and social supports, as well as positive re-integration overall.

JSTICE team members combat these barriers by providing trauma-informed care in the community, with an emphasis on building trust with clients.

We asked clients, "What has been the most helpful part of working with the JSTICE Team?"

- *[My Case Worker] got me back on Ontario Works, connected me to suboxone to stay off drugs, and back in with my family because I'm clean and living in a place, not a tent.*
- *[The team] got my Ontario Disability Support Program package for me, helped me fill it out, and sent it to the physician to finish. They got me an appointment with a therapist.*

***"Thanks for caring about me when I stopped caring about myself; keep doing that for people."***

## **By the Numbers**

**178** clients have completed the program

**84.5%** of JSTICE clients surveyed reported they made progress on their goals within their first 3 months in the program

# Powering Economic Change Through the Mobile Health Clinic

## DID YOU KNOW?

The homeless population is hospitalized at twice the rate and, on average, has twice the length of stay compared to those who have adequate access to basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter.



## COSTS FOR HOSPITAL CARE

An Emergency Department visit: \$386

Average cost of hospitalization for an unhoused patient: \$16,800

## VS

A single REACH Niagara clinic sees up to 12 patients and costs \$1,500 per week.

In 2025, REACH Niagara prevented 356 Emergency Department visits, resulting in **\$137,417 in base savings**, and likely more if these visits resulted in hospitalizations.

*"Before I started with REACH, I had lost all hope...They have done more for me in the last 8 months than anyone has done for me in the last 41 years."*

# REACHing Out

REACH Niagara was honoured to take part in De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre's 9th Annual October Moon Gala. We were humbled to receive their Community Partnership Award in recognition of our collaborative efforts to support the healthcare needs of Indigenous communities displaced in 2025.

Nights like these reinforce the power of meaningful partnerships within the service provider community. Complex issues require unified, holistic responses. Thank you to De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre for this honour and for your continued service and inspiring work.



We're proud to help educate the next generation of physicians by providing learning opportunities for students from McMaster's Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine.

*This elective with REACH deepened my understanding of socially accountable, community-based care and reinforced the physician's role in advocacy, harm reduction, and addressing social determinants of health. I gained firsthand experience with mobile clinics, safer supply programs, and outreach in encampments, seeing how healthcare extends beyond the clinic to meet patients where they are. Working alongside case workers and social workers,*

*I saw the importance of long-term, relationship-based care in supporting marginalized populations. This experience strengthened my commitment to integrating advocacy into my practice, ensuring that I don't just treat medical conditions but also help address the systemic barriers that shape health outcomes.*

- McMaster Medical Student 2025



# A GOLDEN Journey



Measuring the impact of a social program isn't always a linear process. Sometimes the impact is obscure and less expected, as is the case for Jeff Golden.

An original Block Leader with the Welcoming Streets Initiative (WSI), Jeff earlier in life experienced homelessness and substance use challenges himself. Today, he's a steady presence in downtown St. Catharines, helping de-escalate tense situations, supporting local businesses, and ensuring people living on the streets are treated with dignity and connected to care through WSI.

At the heart of the initiative are Block Leaders like Jeff. This position is staffed by people with lived or living experience. Block Leaders bring credibility, trust, and understanding you can't teach.

The result? Fewer non-emergency calls, stronger relationships downtown, and meaningful connections to healthcare and housing supports.

"The impact of having people with lived experience in a program like WSI is immeasurable," says Carolyn Dyer, Executive Director of REACH Niagara.

For Jeff, the program has meant more than employment. It's provided invaluable work experience, a pathway toward Peer Support Worker certification, and a renewed sense of purpose. Alongside being a Block Leader, he is now working full-time with REACH as a Peer Health Navigator as part of our Mobile Health Team.

Welcoming Streets strengthens the downtown of St. Catharines and for leaders like Jeff.

"Welcoming Streets is more than outreach," Jeff says. "It's proof that when you treat people with dignity and give them a real opportunity, lives change... including your own."

## Since April 2025, the Welcoming Streets Initiative has:

Diverted 228 calls to emergency services

Made more than 1,900 connections to services such as meal programs, harm reduction services, and REACH clinics

Allowed block workers to make more than 6,300 interventions with community members

# THANK YOU

None of this work would be possible without the generosity, trust, and commitment of our donors, funders, partners, and supporters. Your investment in our mission helps ensure that vulnerable community members can access the healthcare, support services, and opportunities they need to improve their lives. Together, we are reducing barriers, strengthening community resilience, and creating pathways to healthier, more equitable futures.

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De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre  
Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre

Gillian's Place  
Niagara Catholic District School Board  
Niagara Community Legal Clinic  
Niagara Medical Group Family Health Team  
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