



Ripples

HEART, SOUL AND SERVICE
ACROSS WATERLOO REGION

ANNUAL REPORT
2024/2025

The Heart of Who We Are and Where We Are Going

Vision

A community where no one experiences an end-of-life journey alone.

Mission

We engage our community to inspire, nurture and comfort the human spirit in life, death and bereavement.

Values

Compassion / Leadership / Learning / Inclusion / Engagement / Professionalism / Volunteerism / Client-Centredness

Our Strategic Goals



Centre of Excellence



Compassionate Care



Community Collaboration



Fiscal Responsibility



People & Culture

Our Staff

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A Reflection from the Executive Director and the Board Chair

2024-25 has been a year of learning for Hospice of Waterloo Region. Through an exploration process regarding a potential unification, which did not move forward, we came to a deeper understanding of ourselves, our unique strengths, and our hopes for the future. There were opportunities to look at our history to see where we have come from, times when we were able to look at the impact we are making for people in our community today, and many discussions about the possibilities for our future.

What we came to know is that Hospice Waterloo Region has always been an organization that is grounded in community. From our earliest days 32 years ago, when community volunteers were recruited to help terminally ill clients in their homes, we have worked to deliver an expanding variety of programs and services

to support families on an end of life journey. Today the impact of these programs ripples throughout our Region reaching hundreds of individuals.

And now, in the coming year, we will begin a new Strategic Plan process to build on our learnings and set direction for the next few years. We will continue to enhance our outreach as we expand supports for individuals and strengthen grief and bereavement programs for families. With our focus clearly on responding to the increasing and changing needs of the clients, caregivers, and community, we look forward to a future of continuing to grow to meet those needs.

Sincerely,
Judy Nairn & Linda Brooks



Judy Nairn
Executive Director

Linda Brooks
Board Chair

Handwritten signatures of Judy Nairn and Linda Brooks in black ink.

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Lucille Mitchell, *Founder of Hospice Waterloo Region*



The Atmosphere of the Hospice Residence Makes All the Difference

“It was more than just support,” Cathy Brothers shares. “It was an atmosphere, something deeply calming, loving, and gentle. Everyone there made it possible for us to simply be with him.” After a fall at home and a short hospital stay, Cathy’s husband John, declined quickly. Yet in the midst of that urgency, there was unexpected grace. At hospice, Cathy, along with their two children, Joe and Emilie, were able to be at John’s side constantly. “He was never alone. He knew we were with him,” she says. “Even in his final hours, he responded with little winks or squeezes of the hand. We knew he was still there with us.”

That closeness, both physical and emotional, was made possible by the environment of hospice. “The volunteers, the warm blankets, the food cart with fresh bread pudding... It sounds small, but

those things carried us,” Cathy recalls with a smile. One of the most touching memories involved John’s sense of humour, even near the end. The team’s heartfelt care offered room for stories, silence, connection, laughter and letting go.

One afternoon, the family’s little dog, Elton, was found curled up on the lap of a resident who had no visitors, gently receiving her affection. “He just knew where he was needed,” Cathy says. “That’s the kind of place hospice is, where even the dog feels the love.” That’s what makes Hospice unforgettable, it’s a place where someone can have a good death, where love can shine even brighter.



ACHIEVING OUR STRATEGIC GOALS
Compassionate Care

A Compass in the Current: A New Role That Connects Care in Kitchener-Waterloo

When Ellen Cronin-Irwin stepped into the newly created role of Clinical Palliative Care Coach for the KW4 OHT, she knew her work would be about more than just systems and services—it would be about people. “At its heart,” she shares, “this role is about relationships. It’s about helping providers feel supported in conversations that can be really difficult but also deeply meaningful.”

Acting as educator, guide and connector, Ellen’s role is to strengthen the flow of communication between primary care teams, hospices, and community services. Her goal is to ensure that conversations about palliative care begin earlier, so patients and families feel informed, empowered, and cared for throughout the journey.

Every conversation she supports creates a ripple. Providers feel more confident. Families feel less alone. Options become clearer. Barriers soften.

“We may not be able to change the outcome,” Ellen reflects, “but we can absolutely change the experience.”

Already, her presence is starting to create meaningful shifts. Providers across Waterloo Region are reaching out, asking questions, and embracing new ways of supporting care—together.

This innovative role is a foundational step toward Hospice Waterloo Region’s vision of becoming a Centre of Excellence in community-based palliative care. By modelling collaboration, advancing education, and championing compassionate communication, Ellen’s work is shaping best practices that ripple out far beyond our walls.

Like a compass in the current, Ellen’s work points toward a more connected, responsive system, one that carries heart, soul, and service.



Ellen Cronin-Irwin, RN, BScN, MEd
Clinical Palliative Care Coach



ACHIEVING OUR STRATEGIC GOALS
Centre of Excellence

The Stay Room Experience Inspires Empathy Through Gamification

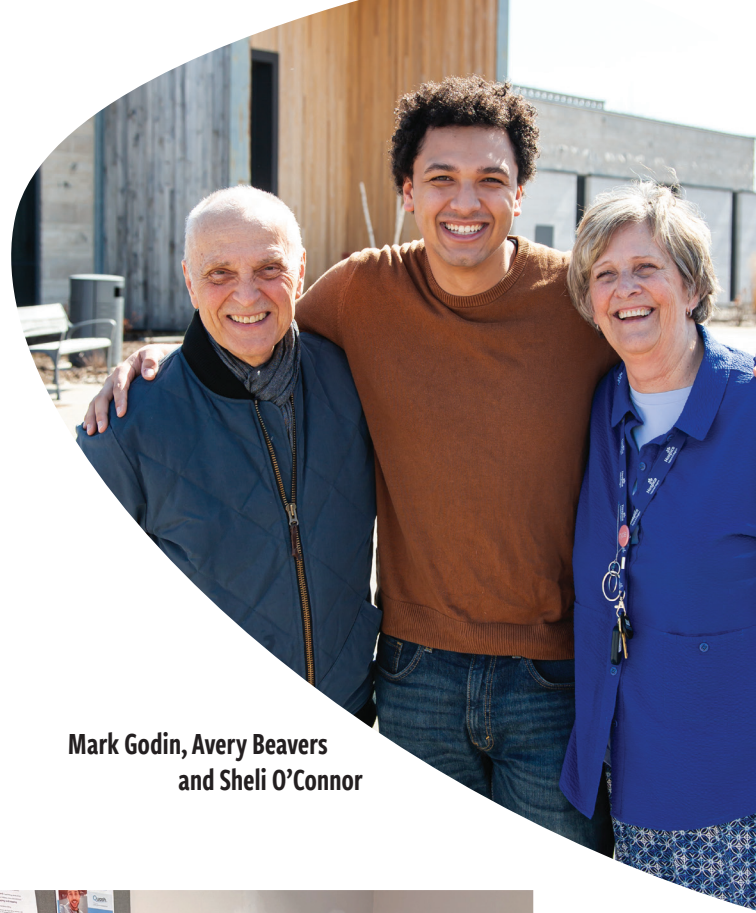
At Hospice Waterloo Region, we believe the ripple effects of compassion can begin in the most unexpected ways—even through a game.

The Stay Room is an immersive, escape-room-inspired experience developed in Canada by Sheli O'Connor, Community Engagement Project Lead, and Mark Godin, a dedicated Hospice Waterloo volunteer, in partnership with Avery Beavers from the University of Waterloo. Sheli and her team brought the experience to life in partnership with the University of Navarra, Spain, where the original concept was created. It invites participants to explore themes of end-of-life, caregiving, and human connection through gamified, experiential learning.

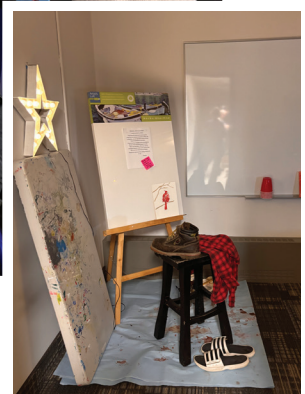
Designed as a “serious game,” The Stay Room uses interactive experiences and problem-solving to gently guide participants into deeper conversations about empathy, mortality, and what it means to stay—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—with someone in need.

“The goal isn’t to solve the puzzles quickly,” Sheli explains. “It’s to notice what arises when you’re asked to stay present with someone else’s story.”

We are thrilled to announce a forthcoming Stay Room activation designed specifically for the public, an opportunity for more hearts across Waterloo Region to be touched by this innovative blend of empathy and play.



**Mark Godin, Avery Beavers
and Sheli O'Connor**



ACHIEVING OUR STRATEGIC GOALS
Community Collaboration

Expanding Conversations: “Dying to Know” Reaches New Communities

This year, Hospice Waterloo Region expanded its reach with the “Dying to Know” workshop series, engaging three new communities across our region: the Chinese, Muslim, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Through thoughtful collaboration, each event was carefully designed to reflect the cultural values, lived experiences, and unique concerns of those attending.

Alexandra Allen (she/her), Community Relations Manager, and Sheli O’Connor (she/her), Community Engagement Project Lead, led this initiative with heart and intention. Alexandra shared, “This wasn’t about delivering a standard workshop, it was about listening first, then responding in a way that felt safe, respectful, and relevant.”

Working alongside community champions and organizations like Spectrum and the Red Maple Chinese Senior Association, the workshops created brave spaces for reflection and learning. The Chinese-language session welcomed participants with translated materials, a Mandarin-speaking



Alexandra Allen,
Community Relations Manager

physician, and culturally-sensitive language. The 2SLGBTQIA+ event, held in partnership with Spectrum and the Kitchener Public Library, offered hybrid attendance to ensure accessibility and safety. Both events received heartfelt thanks and overwhelmingly positive feedback.

The collaboration with the Muslim community offered valuable insights into how we can better connect and co-create meaningful experiences in the future, reinforcing that trust-building is a journey, not a destination.



Alexandra at the Kitchener Public Library

Funded by:
Seniors Community Grant Program





Recognizing Years of Service

20 YEARS OF SERVICE

Sue Frid

25 YEARS OF SERVICE

Shirley Losee

30 YEARS OF SERVICE

Lois Schmidt
Lorna Fenton
Tricia Wands

Where Soul Meets Service: A Volunteer's Reflection

A Gift of Kindness

*In halls of solace and whispers low,
Echoes of love and letting go.
I walk the halls a volunteer,
Amidst the loss, the love, the fear.*

*I offer tea, a warming brew,
Or coffee, dark and bitter true.
A simple act, a touch of care,
For those who dwell, their lives laid bare.*

*In rooms of palliative embrace,
Families huddle, their love to trace.
Their hands entwine, their hearts a flutter,
I bring them juice or muffins with butter.*

*These souls so strong, with grace divine,
Enduring life's last moments, they shine.
They meet my eyes, a gentle stare,
And offer thanks, nothing will compare.*

*Such dignity in fading breath,
I hope some day, I will be able at my own death.
Yet, it's not despair, that rules this floor,
But love and life, their memories soar.*

*The gift I give, nothing asked,
Returns to me a love, so vast.
In gratitude, they light the way,
Enhancing lives, though they can't stay.*

*The procession, so dignified and sublime,
Families following on their journey, one last time.
Saying goodbye, in such a meaningful way,
Whilst keeping their thoughts, on this difficult day.*

*As whispers fade and the room stands still,
My heart is heavy, my purpose willed.
In this place, where life's clock slows,
Kindness blooms and gratitude flows.*

— Written by Steven Gajewski, Hospice Waterloo volunteer, in recognition of the meaningful experience volunteering for the Refreshment Cart service in the Cook Family Residence.



ACHIEVING OUR STRATEGIC GOALS
People & Culture

Two long-serving volunteers who made almost 50 years of impact in our community

Ian McGee

This year, a longtime volunteer Ian McGee, passed away. Ian made a lasting impact on the entire HWR community—staff, clients, and fellow volunteers alike.

Ian began volunteering in July 1997 and continued until 2021, stepping back due to health concerns. Over his 24 years of service, he was deeply devoted to the hospice mission.

Ian's primary role was in Volunteer Visiting and spending time with palliative individuals and residents with dementia at Winston Park. He also supported drives, vigils, and special events—often volunteering as a clown, bringing joy and lightness wherever he went. His kindness and sense of humour were hallmarks of his service.

Professionally, Ian was equally committed to education. With multiple degrees in mathematics and physics, he became Associate Dean of the Faculty of Mathematics at the University of Waterloo. In 1991, he received the Distinguished Teacher Award from the Centre for Teaching Excellence, a testament to the respect and admiration he earned from students and colleagues.

Ian's contributions as a volunteer were recognized through numerous honours. He received the Ontario Senior Achievement Award in 2008 and the June Callwood Award for Outstanding Volunteerism in Hospice Palliative Care in 2017.

Many of us will fondly remember Ian's signature "whirly-gig" hat, worn proudly at every hospice event.

He always brought a smile to everyone who crossed his path!

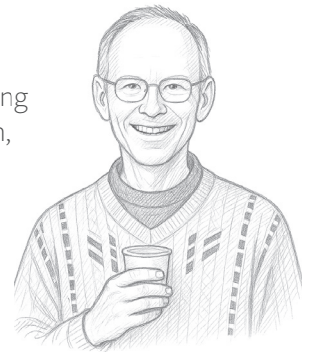


Fred Johnson

While we are sad to share the passing of Hospice Volunteer Fred Johnson, we also want to celebrate Fred's life and his impact on the Hospice community. Fred touched the lives of so many through his 25 years of volunteering at Hospice Waterloo Region. He was part of the Volunteer Visiting program, transportation and gardening teams. Fred was a person who radiated kindness and compassion and met his clients from a place of acceptance. Fred's quiet but grounded nature created a safe space for clients to share their stories, their worries and their wishes as they approached end of life. Those shared moments together became sacred in themselves.

Fred was an avid gardener and creator of beauty. He could regularly be found in the gardens at the former Lawrence Ave hospice location. He was a member of the Orchid Society and a longtime member of the Taoist Tai Chi Society. He also taught Tai Chi in the community.

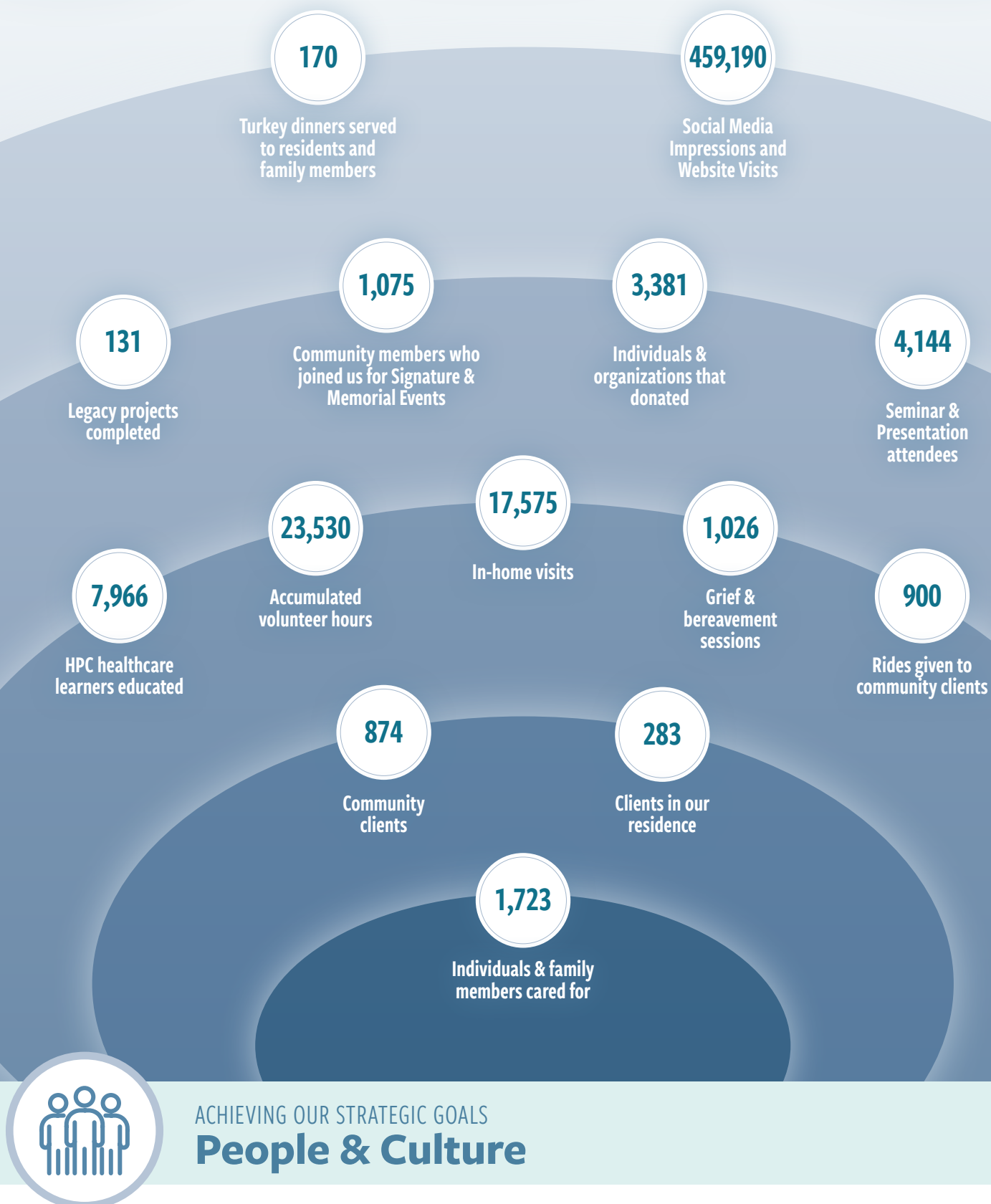
Fred joined Hospice Waterloo Region as a volunteer in May 1998 where he served with dedication until his health forced him to step back. Fred was awarded the June Callwood Award for Outstanding Volunteerism in 2019 in honour and thanks for his incredible volunteer contributions at Hospice.



Thank you for your service



Ripples of Change: Our Impact in Motion



The Stewardship Behind the Service

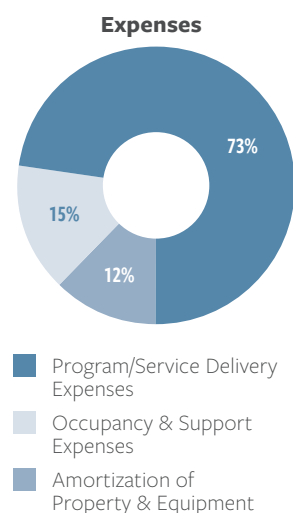
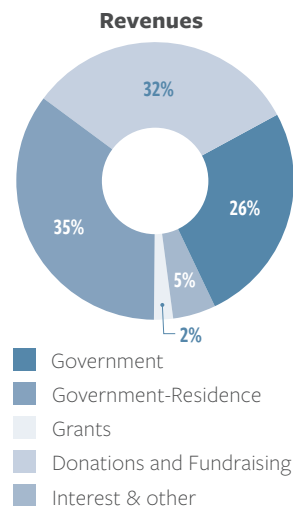
Consolidated Statement of Operations

For the year ending March 31st, 2025	Operating Fund	Capital Fund	2024/25 (\$)
Revenues			
Government	1,265,188		1,265,188
Government-Residence	1,709,107		1,709,107
Grants	104,290		104,290
Donations and Fundraising	1,467,444	90,404	1,557,848
Interest & other	239,988		239,988
	4,786,016	90,404	4,876,420

Expenses			
Program/Service Delivery Expenses	3,932,150		3,932,150
Occupancy & Support Expenses	804,788	427	805,215
Amortization of Property & Equipment		650,284	650,284
	4,736,938	650,711	5,387,649

Net Income for the Year	49,078	-560,307	-511,229
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The financial materials presented are extracted from the Audited Financial Statements. The report of the auditor and the complete statements are available at the Annual General Meeting and thereafter, at the offices of the Executive Director.



ACHIEVING OUR STRATEGIC GOALS
Fiscal Responsibility

Thank you to our generous supporters April 2024 - March 2025

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Sunday, September 21st, 2025

*Lights
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