

Impact Report

2024

June 2021 – May 2024



October 31, 2024

ABOUT THE BRIDGE

The Bridge Youth Resource Centre is a non-profit organization that began informal operations in Leamington, Ontario in 2015, assisting youth 14 to 24 by providing a safe, welcoming space for help with food, housing, jobs, addiction, mental health, and more. The Bridge exists to “bridge the gap” by providing youth with resources and hope for the future. Within the first 5 years of formal operations, The Bridge opened its Resource Centre, a 24/7 supportive housing facility, built 12 homes, and became debt-free while initiating new programming. The organization has successfully received multiple grants and secured a partnership with the County of Essex to support on-going annual funding for the Supportive Housing Program as well as operating costs for the Rapid Housing Initiative grant homes.

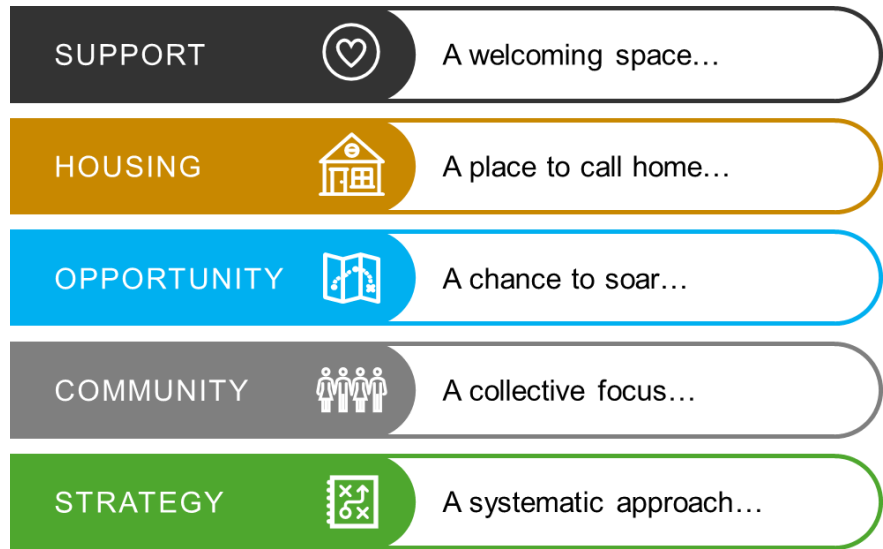
Our work is guided by the following vision, mission and steps to success:



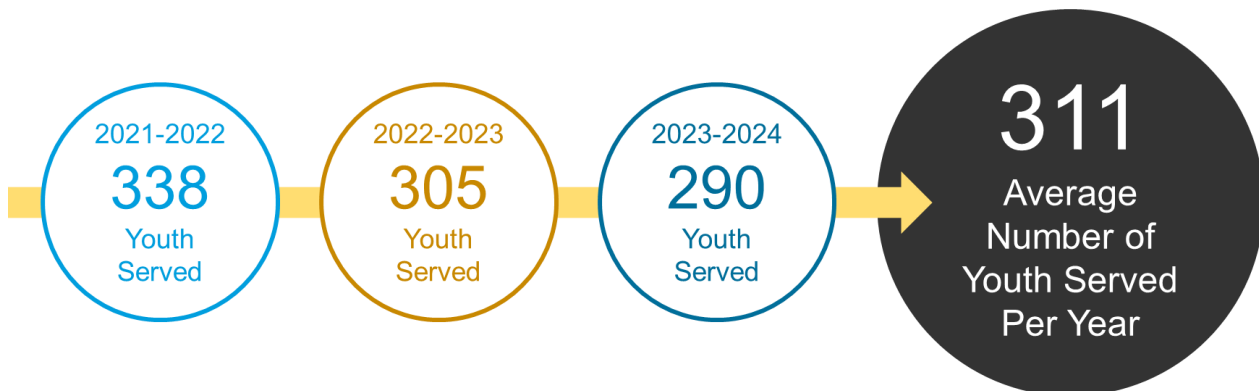
As The Bridge begins a new five-year strategic planning cycle, we are excited to provide this impact report highlighting how the support and effort of staff, partners and the community are continuing to make a difference in the lives of the youth we serve.

Part of The Bridge's success involves a diverse focus that ranges from providing front line supports, housing, and opportunities to excel, to building community engagement and collective action, all supported by sound strategy.

This report provides highlights in each of these areas, and where possible, looks at trends over time from 2021 onwards.



All told, since 2021, an average of 311 youth have come through the doors at The Bridge each year and receive a warm welcome and the supports they need. We are proud of the work we have done and are looking forward to continuing this work into the future!





At The Bridge, we provide a welcoming space. Our Resource Centre offers that welcome for all youth in the community. Here they will find our Drop-in Program and a range of essential services.

Resource Centre

What it is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ This program provides essential services, facilitated activities, and an opportunity to connect with other youth, volunteers and support staff.
What it includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Drop-in Program ✓ Mental health and addiction help ✓ Support for life learning and coping skills ✓ Job and education assistance ✓ Homework area and chapel ✓ Computers and games ✓ Clothing closet, shower, and laundry ✓ A hot meal and nutrition program with 3 days worth of groceries ✓ Nightly activities ✓ A place to share and make your story
Why it is important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Many youth face isolation and marginalization which puts them at risk. The Resource Centre and Drop-In program promotes social inclusion, providing youth with the social connection they need, along with practical life supports.



Over the years, our numbers have grown...

From 2022 to 2023, visits to the Resource Centre almost doubled. The number of visits was only slightly lower in 2024. In all, there have been 10,124 visits to the Resource Centre since 2021, with 100 to 200 youth using the Centre on any given month. Half of the youth visiting the Resource Centre become ongoing users of the Centre.

Between 2021 and 2024
the Resource Centre
received a total of...

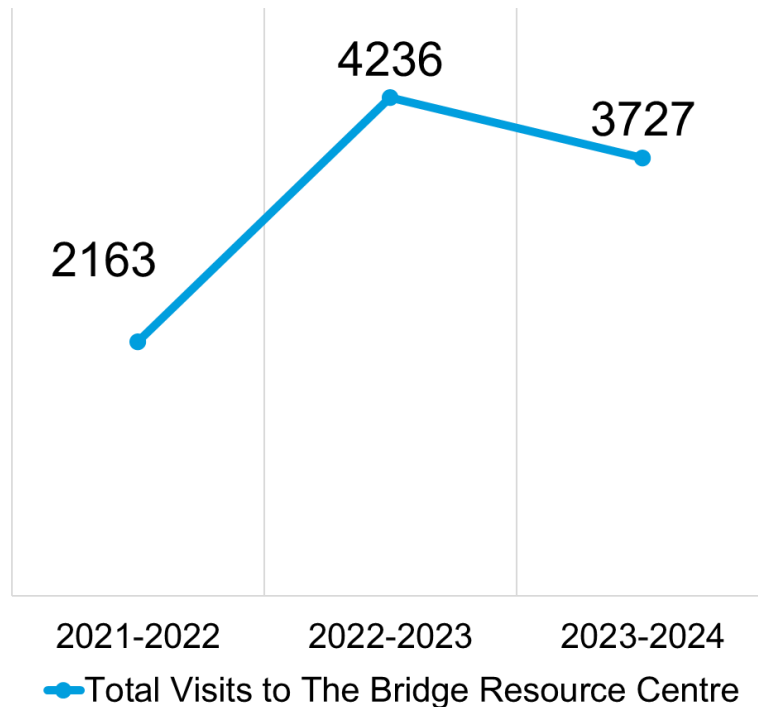
10,124

...visits from clients
seeking services.

In any given month,
between...

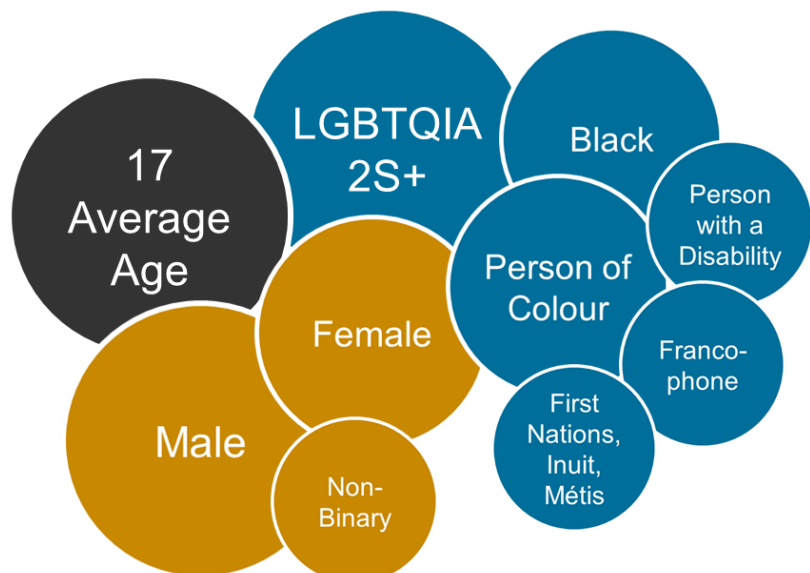
100 and 200

...youth can be found in
the Resource Centre.



...and youth using the Resource Centre are increasingly diverse.

Over the past three years, the average Centre user has been 17 years of age. Users include youth with a range of gender and sexual identities, as well as those who identify as Black, as persons of colour, as First Nations, Inuit or Metis, as Francophone or as someone with a disability.



At the Resource Centre, youth get help with basic needs.

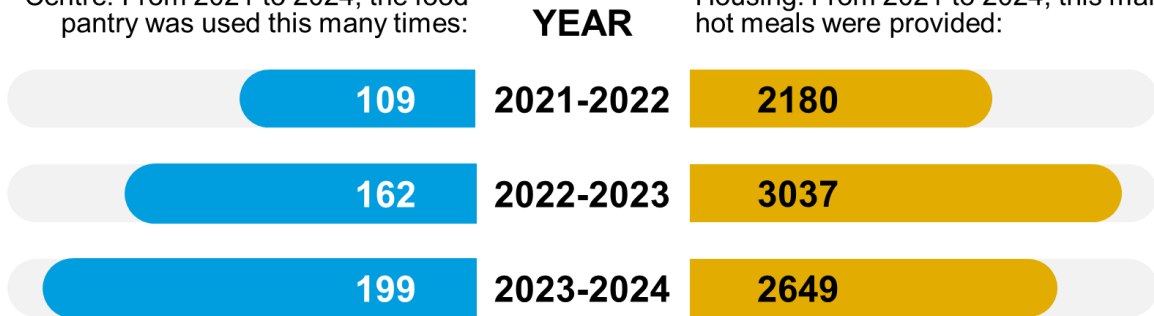
Some youth who come to the Resource Centre are struggling with basic needs. The Bridge provides access to showers, laundry facilities, and a clothing closet, as well as nutrition supports. Use of our food pantry almost doubled from 2022 to 2024 and an average of 2,622 hot meals have been provided annually.

Food Pantry

The Food Pantry offers a range of healthy food options through the Resource Centre. From 2021 to 2024, the food pantry was used this many times:

Hot Meals

Hot meals are provided to youth using the Resource Centre and those in Supportive Housing. From 2021 to 2024, this many hot meals were provided:

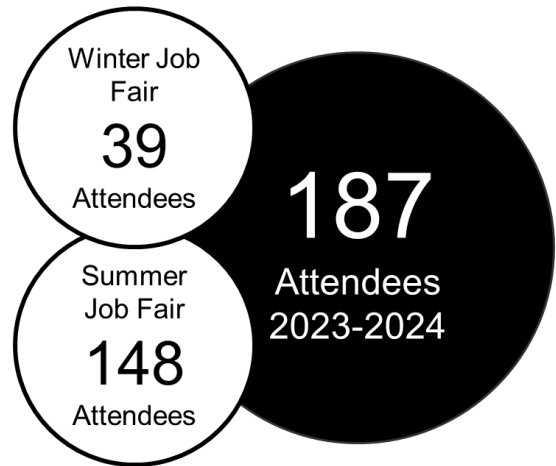


We also partner up to bring employment opportunities to our youth.

Connecting youth to employment is part of the wrap-around approach that The Bridge takes to helping youth achieve their goals and their independence. With the leadership of the South Essex Community Centre (SECC), more youth are being connected to job paths.

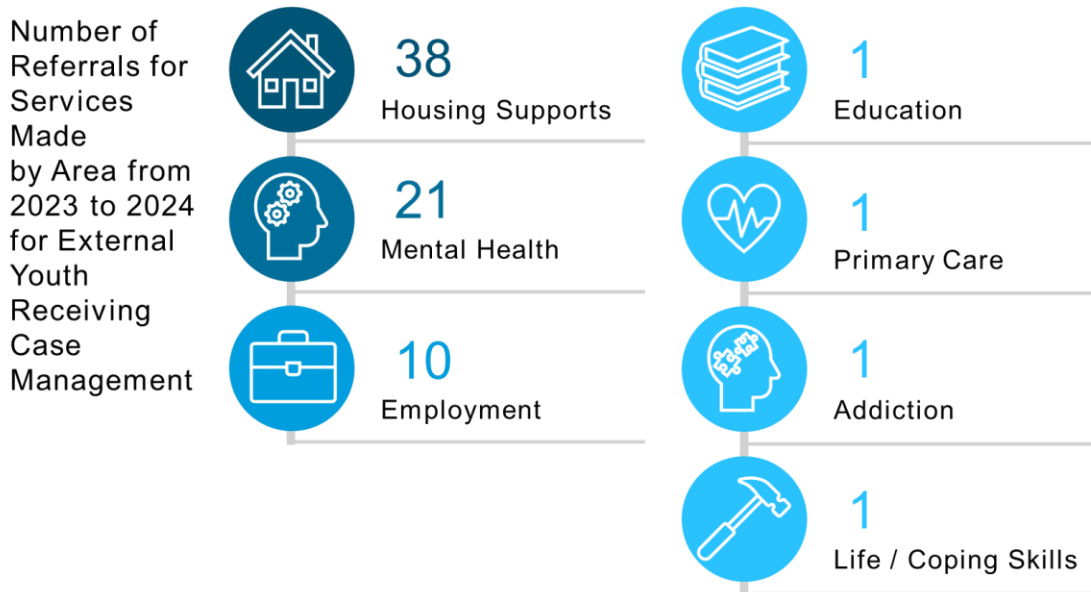
One way The Bridge helps to support youth employment goals in partnership with SECC is through Job Fairs. These have become increasingly popular and well attended. In the past year more than 180 youth attended Job Fairs held in winter and summer.

Job Fairs at the Resource Centre have been incredibly popular...




Youth that need it, also receive “light touch” case management services.

At The Bridge, we also pair youth who need it with trained staff. These workers meet youth where they are at, without judgment, helping them to address their needs and achieve their own goals by providing “light touch” case management and connecting them with a range of supports and services. From 2023 to 2024, the number of youth receiving case management as external clients of The Bridge more than tripled, increasing from 13 to 45. Referrals for housing supports, mental health services, and employment assistance were the most common from 2023 to 2024.



Celebrating success and planning for improvement...

<p>Impact Summary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Over 10,000 visits from clients between 2021 and 2024 from more than 900 unique youth from a range of backgrounds ✓ An average of 2,622 hot meals provided annually ✓ Tripled the number of external youth clients receiving case management and referral 	
<p>How we are improving</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We are continuing to ensure we are meeting the needs of youth by reviewing the timing of the drop-in program. We will determine changes to hours of operation as we move through the year. 	



At The Bridge, we understand that all youth need a place to call home and that “home” is the basis for stability and growth. Our Supportive Housing Program connects youth to safe housing and ultimately a path from supportive housing that best meets their needs. At the same time, our new Semi-independent Housing Program and growing Attainable Housing initiative are extending the opportunity for a stable place to call home beyond supportive housing and into the community.

Supportive Housing

What it is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Supportive Housing Program runs out of the Quiring Family Fresh Start Housing Facility and houses youth 16 to 24 experiencing homelessness or housing instability for up to a year providing wrap around supports. 	
What it includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Safe place to live ✓ Access to resource centre programs ✓ Case management services ✓ Transition support to independent living ✓ Family re-integration support 	
Why it is important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Providing immediate housing and supports reduces the risk of chronic homelessness, while also teaching skills that build the foundation for life after supportive housing based on the unique needs and goals of each youth. 	

The need for youth supportive housing is there and growing.

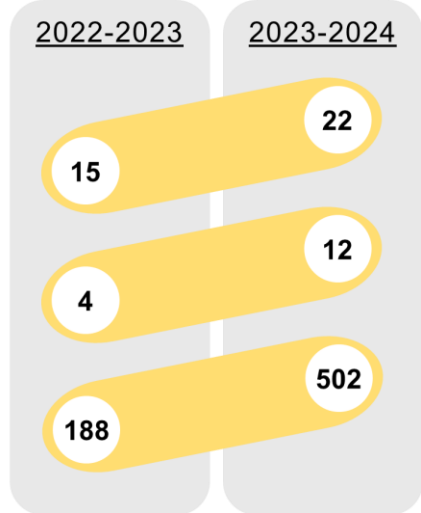
Since the Supportive Housing program opened its doors, need has grown. The number of youth in supportive housing rose from 15 to 22 from 2023 to 2024 while the number on the waiting list tripled.

The average number of days in supportive housing also rose from 2023 to 2024. Overall, however, an average of one third of youth move out of supportive housing within 3 months, another third within 6 months, and the final third within 10 months.

of youth in Supportive Housing

of youth on waitlist for Supportive Housing

Average # of days in Supportive Housing

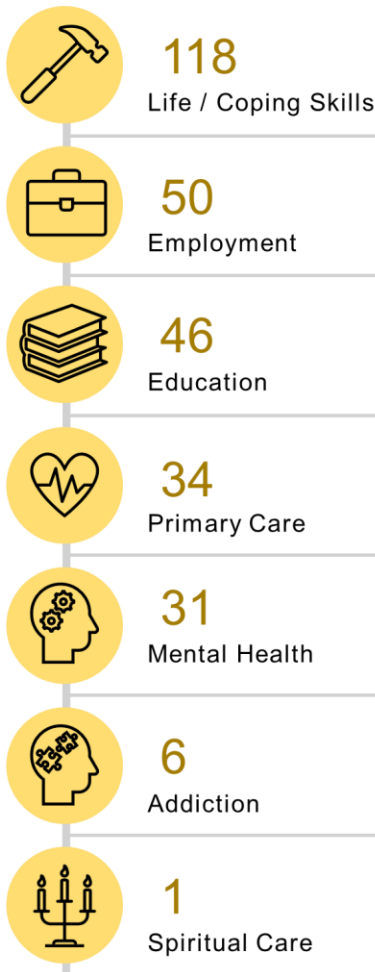


Supportive housing provides referral and wrap around supports to help youth meet their needs and learn the skills they need to live independently.

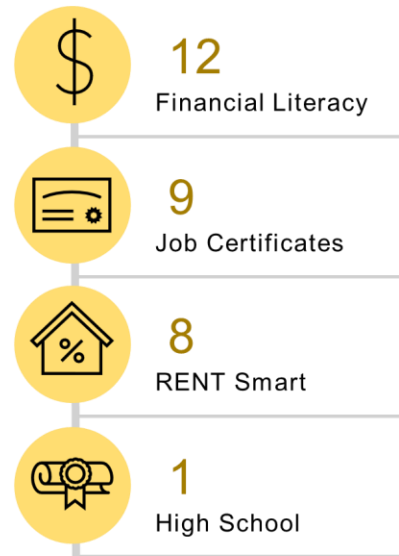
Housing is only one part of what the Supportive Housing Program represents. Youth are also connected with a wide range of referral services to provide additional assistance with life and coping skills, employment, education, primary care, mental health, addiction and spiritual care.

They also receive training and certification opportunities related to financial literacy, job skills, tenant rights, and educational attainment. On average, youth in Supportive Housing learn between 3 and 5 new skills during their time in the program.

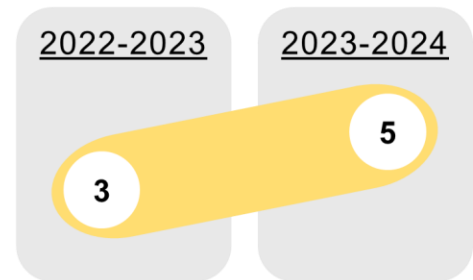
Number of Referrals for Services Made by Area from 2023 to 2024 for Youth in the Supportive Housing Program



Number of Youth in Supportive Housing Completing Training and Certifications from 2023 to 2024



Average # of new skills learned by youth in Supportive Housing

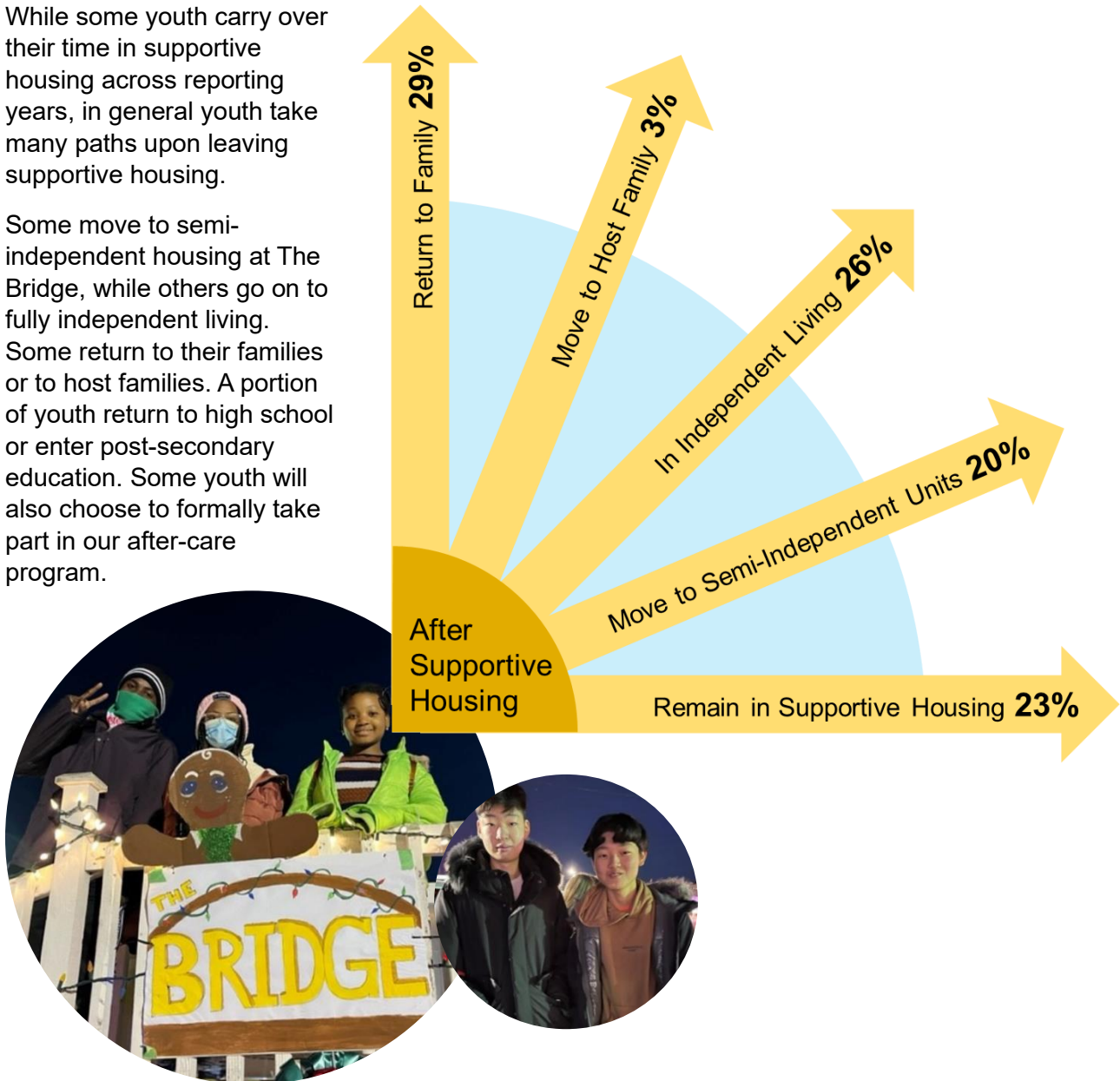


Caring doesn't end with supportive housing.

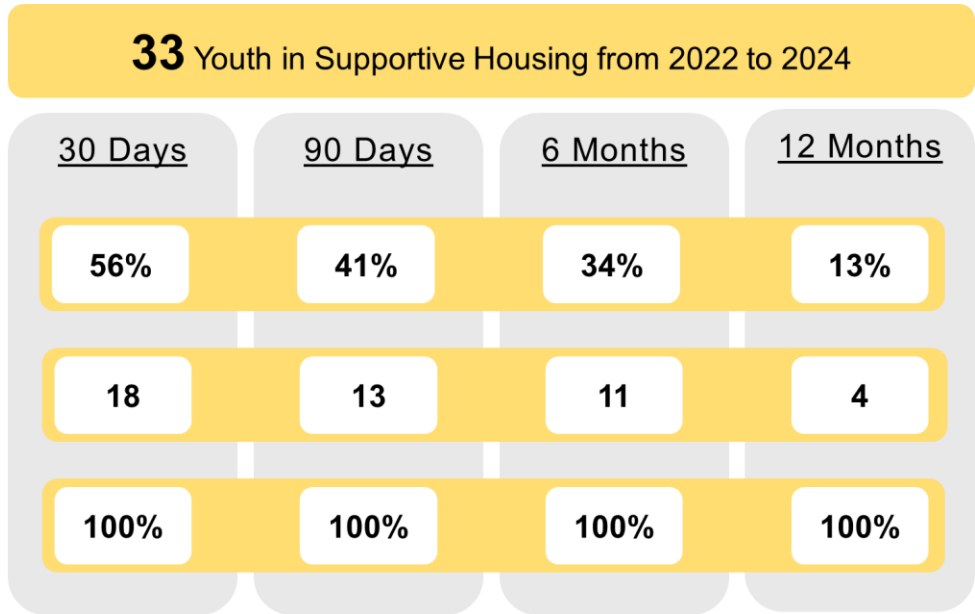
Supportive housing is only the beginning of the journey for many youth. Moving to independence is an important end goal of the Supportive Housing Program. Helping to ensure youth become and remain stably housed and continue to move toward their goals is the focus of the after-care program.

While some youth carry over their time in supportive housing across reporting years, in general youth take many paths upon leaving supportive housing.


Some move to semi-independent housing at The Bridge, while others go on to fully independent living. Some return to their families or to host families. A portion of youth return to high school or enter post-secondary education. Some youth will also choose to formally take part in our after-care program.




Remaining housed after supportive housing is an important marker of success for The Bridge and a goal of the After-care Program. However, follow-up data is difficult to obtain once youth leave supportive housing since not all elect to take part in the After-care Program. For example, from 2022 to 2024, the percentage of youth with follow up data dropped from 56% at 30 day follow-up to 13% at 12 month follow-up. What we do know is that of the 33 youth in the Supportive Housing Program between 2022 and 2024, 100% of those with follow up data were still housed 12 months after leaving the program.



Celebrating success and planning for improvement...

Impact Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Average number of days in supportive housing increased from 2023 to 2024 with youth receiving support throughout ✓ A total of 286 referrals were made to supportive services ✓ Youth in supportive housing completed 30 training and/or certification opportunities and learned an average of 5 new skills ✓ Six months after leaving the supportive housing program, the majority of youth remain housed 	
How we are improving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Partnering with New Beginnings and SAPACCY to provide more intensive after-care supports ✓ Continuing after-care calls to ensure longer-term outcome data guides our planning ✓ Exploring new partnerships to support youth with identified learning disabilities 	

Semi-independent Housing Program

What it is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Pilot program offering affordable housing with light-touch supports and services. 	
What it includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Semi-independent housing close to The Bridge ✓ Access to the Resource Centre and associated services ✓ Support for housing goals and personal development plan 	
Why it is important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Some youth leaving the Supportive Housing Program may require additional supports and continue to be at risk of homelessness and housing insecurity. This program bridges supportive and independent living. 	

Here's what the program is all about.

This is a new and exciting pilot project at The Bridge! Still in its first year, the Semi-Independent Housing program offers a transitional home for those clients who are not yet ready for fully independent living. In addition to housing, they have access to all Resource Centre services, such as the food pantry and hot meals, and other nearby essential services. They also receive support from dedicated case workers who walk alongside residents as they plan, budget, and set timelines to meet their long-term housing goals.

Just as importantly, residents are encouraged and supported to create their own personal development plans to reach their full potential. At present, there are 4 youth in the Semi-Independent Housing Program, and we are eager to provide updates as the program progresses and more data is available.


Program Requirements

- ✓ 18 to 24 years of age
- ✓ Notice of assessment from previous tax year
- ✓ Follow terms of occupancy while in supportive housing program
- ✓ Have and retain a job for at least 3 months
- ✓ Have a clear and defined housing plan
- ✓ Current CHR application
- ✓ Proof of tenant insurance
- ✓ Sem-independent handbook completed

Program Expectations

- ✓ Mandatory weekly case worker meetings in the first months of occupancy, moving to biweekly then monthly
- ✓ Monthly health and safety checks
- ✓ Continue to work and maintain employment
- ✓ Work on housing and personal development goals independently
- ✓ Work alongside housing workers (New Beginnings or SAPACCY) for housing plan following occupancy agreement

Attainable Housing

<p>What it is</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Our growing “Tiny Home Community” initiative provides safe and inclusive community housing adjacent to Bridge property with mid-level and market rate options for both youth in transition and community priority populations. 	
<p>What it includes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 12 tiny homes with up to 50 homes planned ✓ Walking distance to amenities and transportation ✓ Focus on priority populations including seniors, youth, Indigenous peoples and Black Canadians, and women 	
<p>Why it is important</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ There is a local affordable housing crisis with more than one third of renter households in Windsor-Essex living in housing that is not affordable to them as of 2021. Finding creative ways to fill the affordable housing gap is vital. 	

The Bridge is committed to closing the attainable housing gap.

Over the last few years, The Bridge has been moving towards its next strategic plan initiative which includes building a 50-unit tiny home development. This development is located on the current Bridge site and is within walking distance of many local amenities, including the public transportation system, shopping, medical services, schools, banks, parks, and recreation facilities.

This new “Tiny Home Community” initiative not only provides a space for youth to transition once they have been part of the supportive housing facility but is also aimed at helping to close the attainable housing gap in this region, particularly for those most marginalized.

The Attainable Housing Gap

There is a local housing crisis and attainable housing gap. According to the 2021 census, approximately 35% of renter households in Windsor-Essex are spending 30% of their income or more on rent, meaning they are living in housing that is not affordable for them. As well, systemically marginalized groups at greater risk.

...more than a third of the local population cannot afford the average apartment rent.

To fill the current housing gap and account for population growth and changes, Windsor-Essex would need almost 13,000 additional affordable rental housing units by 2028.

Through support and partnership, we have been making good on our commitment.

TINY HOME COMMUNITY TIMELINES



To start the development, The Bridge successfully received the Federal Rapid Housing Initiative grant for \$1.858 million in 2021 and raised over \$2.5 million to support the building of the initial 12 tiny homes, as well as the purchase of an adjacent two-acre property. Municipal zoning approvals were also obtained.

The first 4 homes were completed in late fall of 2022 and the remaining 8 homes were completed in the fall of 2023. The initial tenants were moved in during the winter of 2023 and the remaining tenants later that fall.

The Bridge has successfully managed these tenancies for over a year in alignment with the program goals of including priority population tenants, specifically seniors, youth, Indigenous peoples, Black Canadians, and women. The Bridge continues to see a need for more housing based on the number of applications that were received for these initial homes, which were well beyond the number of homes available for rent.

But we have not done this alone...

Without the support and generosity of a range of donors and funders, this work would not have happened. The Bridge greatly appreciates the enormous community support and ongoing donations. We are currently applying for RHC grant dollars to build 8 units that are pivotal to assisting The Bridge in starting the next phase of its project to build a total of 38 additional homes.



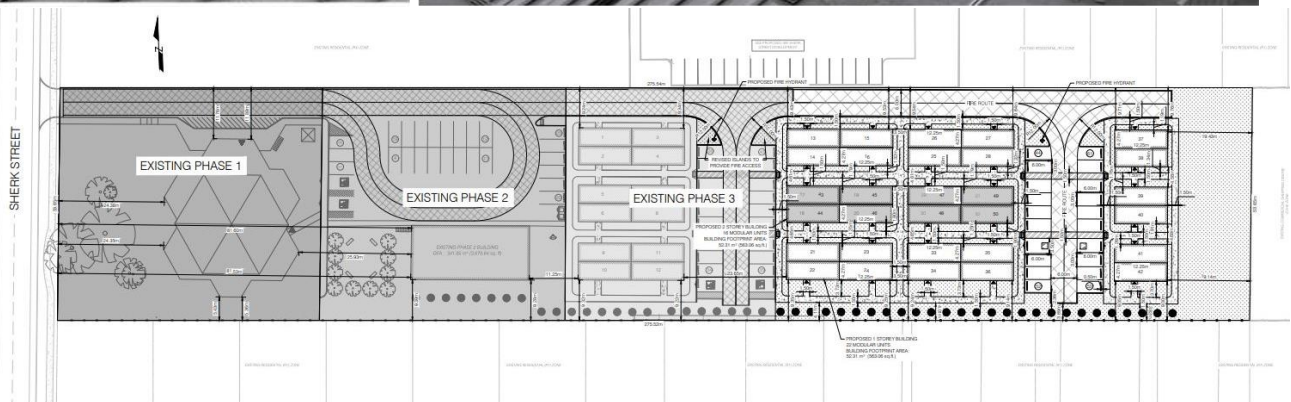
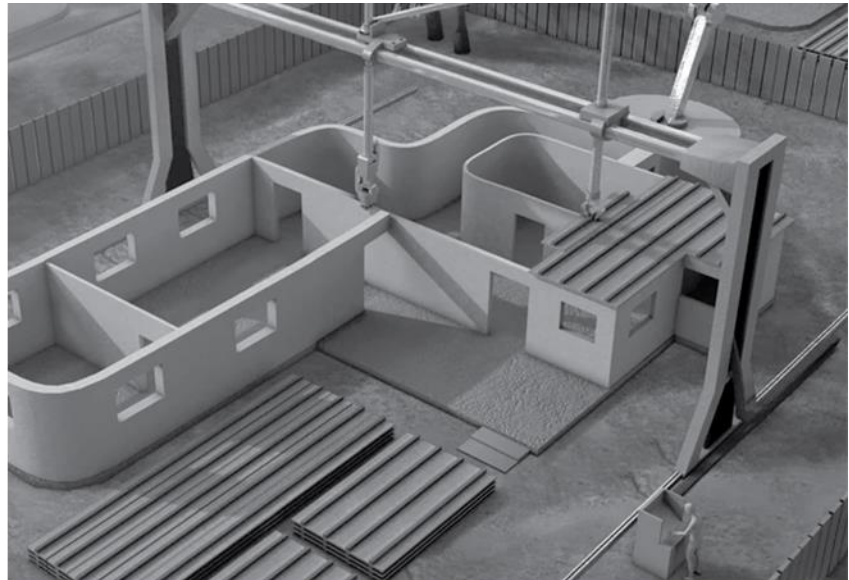
Celebrating success and planning for improvement...

Impact Summary

- ✓ Over \$4,000,000 raised to build initial 12 homes
- ✓ Plans for 38 additional units to address affordable housing gap locally
- ✓ Currently providing a home for 4 youth and 11 community members

How we are improving

- ✓ Layering funding to build next 38 homes
- ✓ The Municipality of Leamington has waived development fees up to \$100,000
- ✓ The County of Essex has provided \$2,000,000
- ✓ Applying to a federal/provincial grant for 8 homes
- ✓ Actively fundraising remaining dollars through a capital campaign or grant dollars as required





At The Bridge, our vision is for every youth to reach their potential. In part, we support that by providing youth with the resources they need. The “Take Your Shot” program offers development and resources that give youth an opportunity to soar!

Take Your Shot

<p>What it is</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Competitive program offering financial support for education or business to 17 to 29-year-olds across Windsor-Essex and Chatham-Kent. 	
<p>What it includes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Professional coaching to support educational or business endeavors and an opportunity to win up to \$20,000 in funding ✓ An opportunity to win up to \$20,000 in scholarship monies 	
<p>Why it is important</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ By supporting education and entrepreneurship, Take Your Shot helps build financial security. For those youth who come to the program through The Bridge, they receive an important opportunity for additional growth and independence. 	

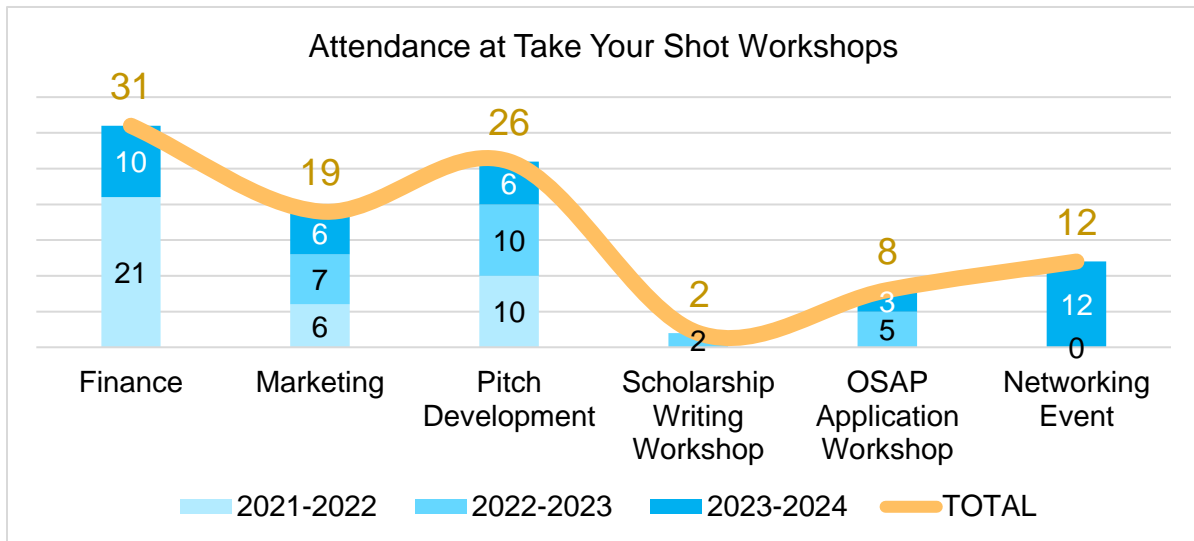
Take Your Shot has given youth the chance to soar since 2021.

In 2021, this competitive program began offering the chance for financial support for education or business to 17 to 29-year-olds in Windsor Essex and Chatham Kent. With opportunities to compete for educational scholarships or business development grants, Take Your Shot has supported 23 youth with more than \$165,00 in educational scholarships and 15 youth with more than \$115,000 in business start up monies for pitch winners from 2021 to 2024.

	<u>2021-2024</u>	<u>2022-2023</u>	<u>2023-2024</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
# of Bursary Winners	6	9	8	23
Amounts Given to Bursary Winners	\$50,000	\$64,500	\$53,000	\$167,500
# of Pitch Winners	5	5	5	15
Amounts Given to Pitch Winners	\$39,000	\$39,000	\$39,000	\$117,000

Take Your Shot participants get more than just money.

In addition to financial supports, Take Your Shot applicants are given the opportunity to develop skills through multiple workshops on topics such as finance, marketing, pitch development, and writing applications for scholarships and OSAP.



Here's how Take Your Shot made a difference for these 2024 winners.



We started our business of AUDONIS a year ago, and although all was well, we were missing a push to really help us get off the ground. The Take your Shot program was a great opportunity. We learned fundamentals about what is needed for a business to run, we got great advice from great coaches, and received a prize sum to really help us get started. Overall, the Take your Shot program was an amazing and fulfilling experience for us to really learn.

I'm thankful to receive this scholarship thanks for everything you do at the Bridge, it makes a big difference in people's lives and impacts them deeply!

2024 Take Your Shot winners



Celebrating success and planning for improvement...

<p>Impact Summary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Educational bursaries for 23 youth totalling \$167,500✓ Business grants provided to 15 youth totalling \$117,000✓ 5 different workshops accessed 86 times building business and educational skills	
<p>How we are improving</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Looking to continue to grow program including a new trade scholarship for next year.	

COMMUNITY



A collective focus...

The Bridge itself would never have come into being without a collective focus, without the community coming together to address a need. Since then, we have grown through collaboration, with our formal partners but also because of the tireless work of our volunteers and the engagement of the community as a whole.

Partnership

What it is	✓ Focus on collaboration for systems change across the care continuum with the help of partners at all levels
What it includes	✓ Partnering with other providers, volunteers and the community as a whole to work together to make a difference in prevention, early intervention, diversion, low barrier access, and aftercare
Why it is important	✓ Evidence-informed best practices are clear that non-profits are stronger in partnership and client outcomes are improved through integrated, multi-sectoral networks that offer coordinated, holistic services and supports



Over the years, our partnerships have grown and changed to meet client needs.

Our partners make it possible to offer the wide range of wrap-around services that position The Bridge as a youth hub.

From 2021 until now, our formal partnerships have grown from 12 to 15, with new partnerships in 2023-2024 broadening access to mental health and addictions supports and providing the ability to branch out into more comprehensive after-care and employment offerings.

As the needs of our youth have shifted over time, so too have the nature of our partnerships. While some have remained consistent, needs in other areas have necessitated new avenues for collaboration. The need for mental health and addiction services in particular has grown and as a result The Bridge has formed additional partnerships that can more clearly link youth to services in this area.

2021-2023	2023-2024
Mental Health and Addiction	
Youth Wellness Hub	
ESHC Mobile Unit	
Maryvale	
	Brentwood Supportive Housing Counsellor
HDGH	
	House of Sophrosyne
John Howard Society	
Life Skills	
John Howard Society	
FSWE	
Youth Probation	
After-Care	
	New Beginnings
	SAPACCY
Education	
LDSS-MAPS	
United Way	
New Beginnings	
WRYM	
Employment	
SECC	
12 Partners	15 Partners

Even with organizational growth, our volunteers remain crucial to operations.

Since June 2021, 46 volunteers have contributed more 8,000 hours of their time to The Bridge. At least twice a year, we formally celebrate those volunteers with recognition events, but we appreciate them every single day.

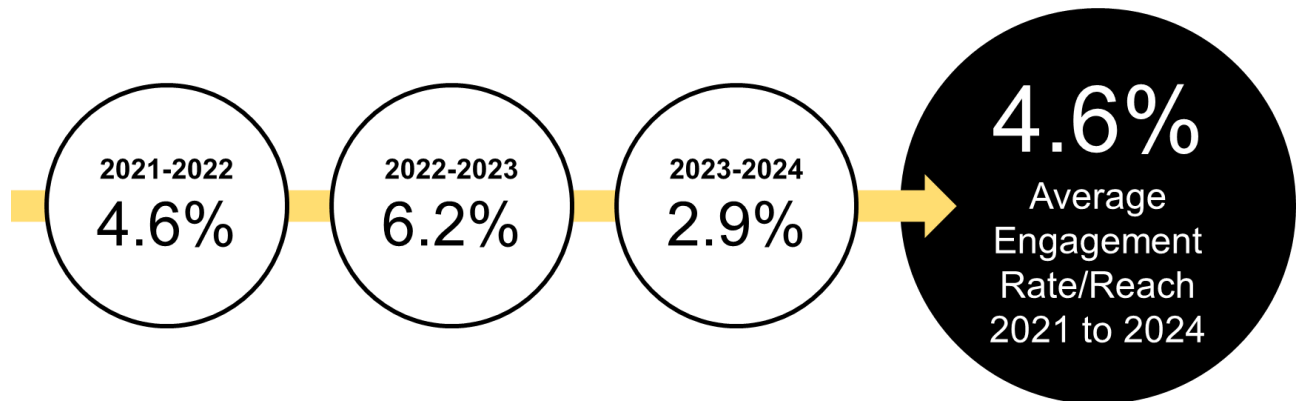
of new volunteers screened

Hours of support provided by volunteers



The broader community is also a partner and kept informed!

Engaging the community means keeping them informed about everything happening at The Bridge. Our social media presence is a huge part of that, and we use our engagement rates to give us a sense of how much the community interacts with our social media content. In particular, engagement rate by reach (ERR) measures the percentage of people who interact with content after seeing it. In general, a good engagement rate is between 1 and 5%.¹



Celebrating success and planning for improvement...

Impact Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ 6 new partnerships in 2023-2024, for a total of 15✓ New partnerships supporting mental health and additions, after-care, and employment✓ 8000 volunteer hours over the past 3 years✓ An average engagement rate per reach of 4.6% from 2021 to 2024	
How we are improving	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ To address the declining engagement rate/reach in 2023-2024, we will be developing a formal communications plan to keep the community aware of all the Bridge is doing✓ To ensure our volunteers feel supported and valued, we are researching best practices for volunteer management and applying them to a volunteer strategy moving forward	

¹ <https://blog.hootsuite.com/calculate-engagement-rate/#:~:text=Engagement%20rate%20by%20reach%20%28ERR%29%3A%20most%20common%20This.post%20%2F%20reach%20of%20that%20post%20%2A%20100>

STRATEGY



A systematic approach...

While 2023 saw a successful end to The Bridge's last strategic plan, 2024 marks the beginning of our next five-year strategic planning cycle. Strategy is at the heart of The Bridge's systematic approach to moving forward with our mission and coming closer to our vision for the community.











2024-2029 Strategic Plan

What it is	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Five-year strategic plan to take The Bridge into the future, building long-term organizational sustainability.	
What it includes	<p>Strategic Pillars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ STRENGTHEN – People and Programs✓ SERVE – Youth and Community Clearly and Effectively✓ SHINE – By Sharing Successful Outcomes and Models	
Why it is important	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ It serves as a road map and guide to help The Bridge achieve their Mission of “bridging the gap by providing you with resources and hope for the future”	

Our new strategic plan was built on a strong base.

The central challenge identified in our last strategic plan was housing instability for Leamington and area youth. With the support of our leadership, staff, board, volunteers, partners and the community as a whole, we are immensely proud of what we have achieved so far.

Central Challenge: To reduce housing instability for Leamington and area youth

	Housing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide independent living facilities Provide transitional living facilities
	Service Provision		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work directly with youth using a case management, client-centred care model Work with existing community services and organizations to provide in house service or external referral
	Planning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish policies and procedures Continue program planning and evaluation Monitor and revise the strategic plan
	Awareness & Public Relations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner to raise awareness and reduce stigma associated with service utilization Work with partners to increase referrals and early intervention Engage social media
	Funding		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore social enterprise opportunities Continue fundraising initiatives Build donor relationships (including faith-based) Pursue Provincial and Federal funding

Looking forward, we are excited for the strategic growth to come.

Our 2024-2029 Strategic Plan is focussed on the central challenge of ensuring long-term organizational stability by working in three strategic areas with the following goals.

GOALS:	The right people, resources and programs to provide service excellence	Dedicated communications strategies to build internal capacity and external awareness and support	Demonstrated and shared program foundations, strategies and outcomes
STRATEGIC PILLARS:	STRENGTHEN PEOPLE AND PROGRAMS	SERVE YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CLEARLY AND EFFECTIVELY	SHINE BY SHARING SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES AND MODELS

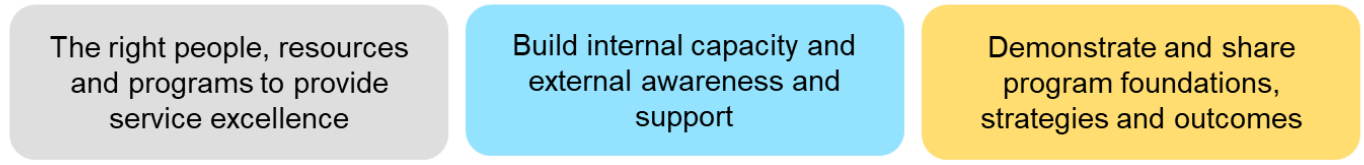
We are excited to take on this new challenge. Our full strategy map appears on the following page.



STRATEGIES:



GOALS:



STRATEGIC PILLARS:



CURRENT CHALLENGE:

LONG-TERM ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

PAST CHALLENGE:

HOUSING STABILITY FOR LEAMINGTON AND AREA YOUTH

