



## Resilience Beyond Homelessness:

Joe's Journey to  
Fontbonne Ministries



Three years ago, Joe's life was a scene of suburban stability—a husband of three decades, kids, a home, and a job as a long-haul truck driver. When his marriage ended suddenly, he found himself with nowhere to go.

"It was devastating," Joe admits. "There was tension between us, but I never saw it coming. I left the house with the clothes on my back and slept in my truck. I just kept sleeping in my truck—I didn't even know what a shelter was. Depression consumed me. I couldn't work. Then COVID hit, and work was scarce. It was as if I was a working family guy one day and then homeless the next."

Joe eventually went to a shelter, then to a hotel program for the marginally housed, and eventually to transitional housing for men aged 55 and older. Other residents at the transitional house introduced Joe to Fontbonne Ministries.

"Fontbonne keeps my stomach full, clothes on my back, and my spirits lifted," Joe shares. "The human connection is what I am most grateful for. I am Italian, being social is in my blood. The atmosphere here is terrific—it's like a cozy café. The staff and volunteers are kind-hearted and welcoming, and I have

made many friends. I come for a cup of coffee and lunch, to listen to music on the computer, or sit and chat with people outside in the garden. Not long ago, I was alone on the street; now, I belong to a community. It's a beautiful thing."

**It is because of caring and generous people like you that Joe found the resources and support he needed at the most challenging time of his life.**

Next year, Joe will move into permanent subsidized housing in the area. He suffers from a circulatory condition that blocks blood flow in his legs and diminishes his ability to walk or drive for extended periods. Social workers and others along the way helped him navigate different supports, including the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

As he looks ahead, Joe is optimistic. "I had to give up my driver's license, which was incredibly demoralizing, but I have this bike and my backpack, they get me everywhere I need to go. Fontbonne Ministries has been instrumental in helping me rebuild my life. It's been tough, but I've started healing. I've found peace, and I know I'll be okay." ■



You can help more people like Joe.  
[Visit our website](#) to make a gift today!



[Click here](#) to watch  
this brief expression of  
appreciation from Joe.

# Making Our Corner of the World a Better Place

Fontbonne Ministries was started nearly 25 years ago by The Sisters of St. Joseph. Their vision for Fontbonne was to create a welcoming, inclusive space that responds to the needs of the community. Keeping with the Sisters' ideology to start good work and pass it on to someone else to take forward, in 2022, the administration of Fontbonne Ministries was handed over to the Catholic Health Sponsors of Ontario (CHSO) and a Board of Directors. Sister Kristine reflects on this transition.

Fontbonne Ministries is intertwined with my journey in becoming a Sister of St. Joseph. Before joining Fontbonne as a staff member in 2019, I volunteered at our Mustard Seed location, where I observed how the Sisters interacted with the staff, participants, and volunteers. There was something in their gentle way of honouring each person that drew me to the congregation. I admired how they were strong advocates for social justice. That work continues at Fontbonne today.

The congregation's mission states, "As a community of women, we are sent to serve those in need in simplicity and compassion." This inspired Fontbonne's way of working, "Doing ordinary things with extraordinary care," and is aligned with our values of respect, advocacy, community, compassion, and accountability. The staff and volunteers embody these values—I see them in action every day.

The care and compassion that drives how we work are reflected back at us by our participants, who show the utmost respect to staff and volunteers. This mutuality demonstrates what we are trying to create: an inclusive community where people feel connected, in a space they feel is as much theirs as it is Fontbonne's.

Every day, with every interaction, I try to see each person as a distinct expression of God's love. Being a Sister, I default to the spiritual language, but it doesn't matter what religion you follow or if you believe in God at all—it goes beyond that. It's about genuinely seeing each person as a unique individual who deserves respect, and responding to their needs with compassion. These are not Christian values; they are human values.

The Sisters of St. Joseph founded Fontbonne Ministries. They gathered people around this mission and created a platform where others—staff, volunteers, the community—can continue doing the work that resonates within our hearts. ■



*Sister Kristine in the courtyard garden*



*Sister Kristine with the team*



# Monthly Giving Provides Essentials and Empowers Those We Serve

Stephanie's journey to become a monthly donor to Fontbonne Ministries began when she stumbled upon our Mustard Seed location during the takeaway lunch service. After getting to know us better online, Stephanie decided to take the next step and visit our facility for a quick tour.

"Witnessing firsthand the dedication of staff and the welcoming environment Fontbonne has created, I was profoundly impressed. And the fact that they provide services like a foot care clinic struck a chord with me because I have seen with my dad how important proper foot care is for overall health."

Stephanie's decision to support Fontbonne Ministries through monthly giving showcases a strong commitment to her new neighborhood and community. "I recognize the privilege my family holds and believe in the responsibility of supporting those who may have been displaced or impacted by the changes in the area."

Monthly donors like Stephanie empower Fontbonne to better plan and budget for our programs and initiatives and allow us to focus on our mission and long-term goals. Thank you, Stephanie, for joining us on this meaningful journey of making a difference, one step at a time. ■



*Stephanie, Fontbonne's latest monthly donor*

**Want to Make a Tangible Difference?  
Become a Monthly Donor!**

**\$10** will provide 2 nutritious takeaway lunches. *Double your impact with a \$20 monthly donation!*

**\$25** will provide 1 care kit of essential items (may include shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush, soap, underwear, warm socks).

**\$50** will help cover a chiropodist treatment for someone living with diabetes.

[Visit our website](#) to start your recurring gift today!

## How Serving Lunch Reaffirms Ornella's Hope in Humanity

Ornella's first experience volunteering with Fontbonne Ministries was sorting and displaying clothes for the Clothing Boutique. Now she volunteers with our lunch program that offers both takeaway lunches and a drop-in space to sit, dine, and interact with the other clients. "I love working at the drop-in," Ornella exclaims with enthusiasm. "It's not a sterile place where people eat and leave. It's more like a warm café that invites camaraderie and conversation. Many of our participants are dealing with stressors like spending all day in minus 20-degree weather or blistering heat and they can still stay positive, hopeful, joke, and share stories."

People, regardless of their circumstances, crave companionship. Staff and volunteers do their best to make everyone at the drop-in feel welcome and it is returned to them in the kindness of the exchange. Ornella has witnessed this firsthand, "I am always touched when a participant asks me to take a seat with them so they can ask me how my day is going. How many people don't give them that respect."

"Volunteering at Fontbonne Ministries has become a reminder of the potential for a kinder, more compassionate community. Growing up Catholic, the values of selfless service were instilled in me, but amidst the turmoil of our times, these values have faltered a bit. My time at the drop-in reminds me that despite the challenges the world is facing, there remains hope."

Our hearts are full of gratitude for the hours of precious time and commitment made by our many volunteers. Our services would not be available to those in need without their loyalty and belief in our mission to help build healthy, inclusive, and thriving communities. ■

**We're always looking for new volunteers  
to join our team! Interested in learning more?**

[Visit our website.](#)

# Community Corner With (UNTITLED) by Flaunt Boutique

We simply cannot say THANK YOU enough to all the local businesses and partners who assist in carrying out our mission through their in-kind donations and support. We are very grateful to (UNTITLED) by Flaunt Boutique, an established and beloved salon in Riverside, for becoming a community partner, and to all the stylists who volunteer their time to cut and style our clients' hair. This simple act of kindness restores dignity and brings joy to so many in our community who are struggling.

We spoke to three (UNTITLED) employees about their experience with the haircutting program.



## Georgia Reynolds, Training and Development Lead

From the moment I was introduced to Fontbonne Ministries, it quickly became apparent that our values were aligned and we were primed to build a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship. We worked together for three months to set both organizations up for success and then established a sign-up for our stylists to rotate every month. I am happy to report that almost everyone in the salon agreed to volunteer, and across the board they love doing it. Some of the clients haven't had a professional haircut in many years. The difference the haircutting program makes is palpable. Clients leave lighter and happier than when they came in, and our stylists get a renewed appreciation of what they have to offer—which is so much more than a simple haircut, it's giving the gift of dignity.



## Kimy Tang, Stylist

Last month was my first time cutting hair at Fontbonne. I was surprised by the demographic of the clients: men and women of all ages and backgrounds.

Times are tough now; the power of the dollar is not as strong. Even my clients at the salon are decreasing the frequency of their visits because they can't afford it anymore. Mariana and I saw six Fontbonne clients each in just over two hours and the whole experience from start to finish was amazing. The conversations were different from my regular clientele, it reminded me of being with family. My parents were immigrants in the 1980s and didn't have anything. I remember those roots, I know every little bit helps. I am at a point in my career where I am interested in sharing my craft with those around me. I would definitely do it again.



## Mariana Castro, Stylist

Several of the clients I met had not had their hair cut and styled in a long time. You could tell it was not something they were used to. I loved

seeing how excited they were with the result. Many wanted to do something special to show off their new hairdo. A haircut can change someone's day, it's a nice reset, and it's a simple thing for me to do. More than just the service, I think they really appreciated the human connection. I was surprised and impressed with the "improvised" amenities, how helpful the staff was, and how kind and appreciative the clients were. I am looking forward to going back.

To find out how you can support  
Fontbonne Ministries, contact:

Wendy Bray at [wbray@fontbonneministries.ca](mailto:wbray@fontbonneministries.ca) to learn more.



Fontbonne Ministries

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