

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



1 June 2023 to 31 May 2024

Project Genesis is a non-profit community organization located in Côte-des-Neiges (CDN), a culturally diverse neighbourhood of Montreal where many people live below the poverty line. We support neighbourhood residents in tackling the challenges they face in housing, basic income security, and access to healthcare and other government programs. Recognizing the connection between individual hardship and broader social inequities, we also engage in community organizing to address underlying causes.

JC, a refugee and single mother, came to Project Genesis fearing eviction. She had been forced to stop working when her daughter was hospitalized, and she fell behind on her rent. Her landlord put up a posting to rent out her home. Project Genesis Storefront advisors helped her get benefits she was not receiving and successfully negotiated with her landlord for an extension. JC now volunteers at Project Genesis as a gardener.



PHOTO: JC (RIGHT) WITH SOCIAL RIGHTS WORKER FRANCES GORDON

WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear members,

This year was marked by the deepening housing and cost-of-living crises: lowest inoccupancy rates in 20 years; sky-rocketing rents; increase of evictions; swelling unsheltered population. More low-income households are spending most of their income on housing and must choose between rent, food, medication and other essentials. One in 10 Quebec households now rely on food banks. This translates into waiting lists just to access food banks, as we've seen here in Côte-des-Neiges.

Situated in one of the hardest hit neighbourhoods of Montreal, Project Genesis works with people on the frontlines of these realities. It is no exaggeration to say that Project Genesis' efforts to address the immediate, often urgent, needs of community members has been life-saving to many service users. From fighting evictions to helping people access social assistance, pensions, healthcare and other government programs, our Storefront has long been a source of strength and hope for the neighbourhood and beyond.

2023-2024 was a very difficult year for Project Genesis. Even as our neighbourhood plunged into deepening crisis, we faced an internal crisis after most of our staff left. Although we are still in the process of rebuilding, we did pull through. We emerged from 2023-2024 with strengthened capacity to provide frontline services. We have also begun to re-engage in community organizing to confront the growing inequities of wealth and power.

In our 2023-2024 Annual Report, we provide an overview of the work that Project Genesis members, volunteers, and staff accomplished this year, and include stories of resilient community members who have, with Project Genesis' support, achieved small but significant victories in standing up for their rights.

Erik Hamon, President, Board of Directors

“For a single adult, social assistance can be just \$807 per month. With inflation, sky-rocketing rents, who can pay for rent and food on that?”

- Erik Hamon, Côte-des-Neiges Day of Action

Against Poverty, May 2024



PHOTO: SOCIAL RIGHTS WORKER MARGARET VAN NOOTEN, BOARD PRESIDENT ERIK HAMON, & JEAN-SEBASTIEN PATRICE, DIRECTOR OF MULTICAF. MAY 2024



PHOTO: VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF CLEAN UP AFTER A FLOOD

STOREFRONT INDIVIDUAL SERVICES

Community members come to Project Genesis' Storefront seeking support to access their social rights, such as basic income security (accessing social assistance, Old Age Security, family allowance, etc.), decent and affordable housing (fighting eviction, abusive rent increases, unhealthy conditions, etc.), and healthcare. The pandemic trend towards exclusively online or phone-based access to government services has continued. This makes the Storefront's in-person services vital to many people who, for example, can't afford a phone or home Wi-Fi, face language, literacy, hearing, or vision barriers, or otherwise have difficulty navigating the internet and confusing touch-tone phone systems.

The Storefront reception provides basic information and referrals to dozens of people who call or walk in every day. Storefront advisors meet or speak by phone to service users who need more support. Advisors listen, and then offer people the information they need to make choices and act, as well as referrals to other resources, practical support, and individual advocacy. Service users often face numerous, interconnected problems and Project Genesis advisors strive to respond to the full complexity of people's lives.

In 2023-2024, in addition to reception and intake services, five full-time staff, volunteers, a dozen law and social work students, and summer youth employees worked in the Storefront as advisors. Volunteers and students were trained and supervised by staff to ensure that information was accurate and complete.

"A suspicious repossession would be one, for example, where a landlord who has multiple dwellings and for some reason focuses in on an elderly tenant that lives in a very humble three-and-a-half and says 'I must live in your particular dwelling.'" - Margaret van Nooten, 6 January 2024, CTV News

HOUSING

This past year, the Storefront observed increased numbers of people fighting eviction, particularly older, marginalised tenants whose rents were below market value. These service users were at risk of losing homes in which they had lived for years – in some cases, decades - whether under pressure of rent increases, on pretext of renovation, for non-payment of rent, or on outright false pretences such as repossession for a family member who was not really moving in. As a result of such pressures and the difficulty of finding new housing, the Storefront witnessed an increase in the number of service users who were precariously housed and unhoused.

Project Genesis held 12 rent-increase clinics, each attended by around twenty people, to demystify rental laws and provide community members with clear information about their rights as tenants. The confidence and knowledge community members gained from these clinics helped many to refuse a rent increase. In addition to the clinics held at Project Genesis, we organized a clinic at the Mountain Sights Community Centre. This partnership was successful, and we plan to build on this model, holding clinics in other community centres in the coming year.



PHOTO: RENT INCREASE CLINIC

INCOME AND ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES

Applying for welfare benefits has always been difficult. This year, service users had even greater difficulty accessing or maintaining welfare than in past years, largely because of the centralisation of welfare offices. Call centres staffed by agents unable to access specific files have replaced local offices which used to provide in-person meetings. Simply reaching an agent to discuss an individual application has become a challenge.

Elderly service users experienced lengthier waiting periods to receive pensions. The processes of applying remain inaccessible and bureaucratic and are particularly complex in the case of migrants.

The shift towards online services has also made healthcare more inaccessible. Specifically, Project Genesis has seen an increase in the number of people who are eligible for provincial health insurance but have been unable to get or renew RAMQ cards, effectively cutting them off public healthcare.

Making calls to agents, writing letters, gathering documents, filling in forms, accessing online portals, advocating to officials, collaborating with other organizations and institutions, Project Genesis advisors once again provided absolutely vital, frontline support to thousands of community members, helping them access income support, healthcare, and other social programs.

SL came to Project Genesis struggling to pay rent and facing eviction. Her landlord claimed that her child was making too much noise. Her landlord also claimed frequent late payment of rent. Project Genesis helped SL to get family allowance and other public benefits and helped her prepare for the TAL hearing. Realizing that he wouldn't win the case, the landlord pulled out before the TAL hearing. SL remains in her home.

“Over the years I’ve been coming to you, and you always help. Last year was really tough. It was like a war I had to fight. I really appreciate the help from Genesis.”- SL

PHOTO: SL & CHILD
AT PROJECT GENESIS
STOREFRONT



11,850

TOTAL

initial interventions and follow-ups (in-person and by telephone)

4273

HOUSING

initial interventions and follow-ups (in-person and by telephone)

2503

WELFARE AND PENSIONS

initial interventions and follow-ups (in-person and by telephone)

HOME ADVOCACY SERVICES

Project Genesis' Home Advocacy Services (HAS) extends the Storefront's services to people living in our neighbourhood who cannot easily leave their homes and are among the most vulnerable and marginalised members of our community.

HAS supports people to, for example, respond to rent increase notices, renew HLM leases and rent subsidies, and complete their income tax forms (a requirement to qualify for government programs such as the Quebec housing allowance, Guaranteed Income Supplement, disability tax credit, etc.).

HAS also helps break isolation by visiting and connecting people to the CLSC, volunteer visiting programs, etc..

The 2023-2024 year focused on rebuilding our capacity after the difficult pandemic years; including hiring staff to coordinate these services.

166

income tax interventions

42

housing interventions

112

calls

86

follow up actions

46

home visits

A HAS user was dependent on a third party to order groceries on-line for her. She was often dissatisfied with the food she received, but felt she had no choice. With the help of HAS, she is now able to place her own orders by telephone and experiences increased quality of life and autonomy.



PHOTO: DAY OF ACTION AGAINST POVERTY IN CÔTE-DES-NEIGES

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

From Individual Needs to Collective Action: Working against Poverty and for Housing Rights

Project Genesis' frontline work allows us to identify patterns; for example, track the impact of changes in public policy and administrative processes, and observe new challenges faced by community members. This knowledge directly informs our community organizing and steers our alliances with other organizations.

Our community organizing seeks to end poverty-related hardship in the neighbourhood. We work together to improve the standard of living of people on low income and increase access to decent housing, affirming the right to human dignity.

“We have observed a huge increase in precarious housing which people accepted because they have no other option, especially single individuals who receive social assistance.”

- Margaret van Nooten, 15 September 2023, Le Devoir

JOINING FORCES TO FIGHT BACK

Barclay Renoviction Defence

Tenants in an apartment building on Barclay Avenue were served eviction notices for major renovations. The renovations were not necessary, and Project Genesis found out that the landlord had not even obtained the city permits necessary to carry out major renovations. Tenants began to meet at Project Genesis to learn about their rights, discuss their options, and organize together. Collectively standing their ground, the tenants forced the landlord to back down.

A building in Côte-des-Neiges was bought by a company known for its practice of pressuring long-term tenants to leave so that their homes could be rented out for more. Banding together and supported by Project Genesis, DN and BK stood their ground, resisting harassment tactics such as shutting off their water and electricity. They won!

“I didn’t just do it for myself, I did it for others. If I would have just given in, that would have empowered him to do it again. I have no words to express my thanks to Project Genesis.” - BK

“BK is a warrior and I wouldn’t have made it through without her!” – DN



What is “renoviction”?

Renoviction is a tactic used by landlords to evict tenants from their apartment on the pretext of carrying out renovations. Whether carried out legally or illegally, through harassment and intimidation or through the Tribunal administrative de logement (TAL), the result is the same: tenants lose their homes, and the rent increases for the next tenant.

Bourret Rent-Increase Defence

Tenants in an apartment building on Bourret Avenue received a rent increase notice of over 10%. Four well-attended rent increase workshops at Project Genesis provided the tools they needed to fight back and collectively refuse the abusive increase.

Décarie Eviction Defence

Tenants of a large apartment building on Décarie Boulevard were served with eviction notices based on a fabricated complaint of non-compliance with extermination. With support from Project Genesis, 15 households resisted the abusive eviction and kept their homes.

Linton Fire

Following a fire at a Linton Avenue apartment building, the landlord refused to fulfill his responsibility towards his tenants of paying for emergency housing costs. Project Genesis helped tenants file a complaint at the Tribunal administrative de logement (TAL) against him. The case is ongoing.

In the absence of community organizing staff for most of this year, much of our community organizing work was carried out by social rights workers Margaret van Nooten and Arlene Field. Project Genesis greatly appreciates all their contributions.

Following a year without community organizers, Project Genesis hired a new community organizer in spring 2024. She began working with members to relaunch the joint Housing Rights and Anti-Poverty Committee.

The committee is mandated to improve housing conditions and increase access to social housing in Côte-des-Neiges and to fight poverty.

It began meeting regularly again in June 2024.



PHOTO: BOARD PRESIDENT ERIK HAMON, SOCIAL RIGHTS WORKER MARGARET VAN NOOTEN, HOUSING RIGHTS AND ANTI-POVERTY COMMITTEE MEMBER TOAN VINH LA, PAST CO-PRESIDENT ABIOSE CROMANTY, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZER MARIA LAURA CHOBADINDEGUI



BLUE BONNETS

This year, Project Genesis actively participated in the Comité communauté, formed in 2023 to promote the community's demands for the development of the Blue Bonnets (Montreal Hippodrome) site and the needs of Côte-des-Neiges residents. **Project Genesis has been fighting for social housing on this site for more than thirty years.**

The Comité communauté drafted a community development vision, which was used by Project Genesis and other community organizations in the neighbourhood to engage in April 2024 city consultations about the development of the site.

The vision will also serve as the basis for community mobilisation.

Key Demands

- construction of at least 4800 social and community housing units;
- 50% of housing in the Namur-Hippodrome real estate park protected from speculation;
- rent fixed at 25% of household income for at least 60% of the social and community housing units;
- creation of a land trust on the Hippodrome site to permanently protect the land and social, community and affordable housing from speculation; and
- at least 60% of social and community housing must be large apartments of three or more rooms to reflect the needs of families in Côte-des-Neiges.

“The lack of real rent control, the shortage and deterioration of healthcare and social services mean that housing instability in CDN-NDG will increase in the coming years.” - Margaret van Nooten, *“Au déla des chiffres: Les multiples des visages cachées de l’itinérance à CDN-NDG”*, RAPSIM, Fall 2023

ALLIANCES

Project Genesis collaborates with a broad spectrum of community organizations to fight poverty and support housing rights.

Locally, Project Genesis is a member of the Table de quartier CDN, the Comité communauté (Blue Bonnets / Namur-Hippodrome), the Table logement sociale, and the Comité anti-pauvreté CDN.

We also participate in several **Quebec-wide networks**: the Regroupement des comités logement et associations de locataires du Québec (RCLALQ), Front d’action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU), and the Coalition pour l’accessibilité aux services des CLEs (CASC). Additionally, we are members of the Réseau d’aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes (RAPSIM), the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (TCRI), Coalition pour le maintien dans la communauté (COMACO), and the Table régionale des organismes volontaires d’éducation populaire (TROVEP).



PHOTO: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS WORKSHOP WITH THE BANGLADESH SOCIO-CULTURAL FORUM, APRIL 2024



PHOTO: PROJECT GENESIS BANNER

Among the achievements of local collaborations this year:

- In April, Project Genesis and the Bangladesh Socio-Cultural Forum (BSCF) coordinated a “Know your rights” event for Bangladeshi newcomers. Project Genesis shared information about housing rights and income programs such as social assistance.
- In May, with the Comité anti-pauvreté, Project Genesis participated in a “Day of Action against Poverty” in Côte-des-Neiges. The event included media interviews, information booths, and a solidarity dinner. Project Genesis spoke about problems with social assistance programs and demanded improvements.
- Through its active participation in the Comité communauté, Project Genesis helped provide community input to the *Groupe d'accélération pour l'optimisation du projet de l'hippodrome (GALOPH)*, which brings together business, community, and government partners to propel the development of the Blue Bonnets site.

HOUSING RIGHTS AND ANTI-POVERTY COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS

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Mohamed Benkiran	Debra Fogel	An Pham
Hakima Bouasria	Suzanne Haverimona	Nalawattagee Pinto
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THANK YOU

Project Genesis extends its heartfelt gratitude to both new donors and those who have supported us consistently over the years. These donations have made a profound and tangible difference in the lives of many. We would like to express our thanks to every individual who has contributed through their generous donations or their active involvement to our success in serving the community.

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MINISTÈRE DE LA
SANTÉ





PHOTO: PROJECT GENESIS MEMBERS MARCH WITH ANTI-POVERTY AND HOUSING RIGHTS COMMITTEE BANNERS

OUR MISSION

Project Genesis is a community organization committed to the values of social justice, equality and non-discrimination, and empowerment. With our members, we work towards social change with the goal of improving the quality of life of the disadvantaged. More specifically, our goals are to:

- improve the accessibility of social, government and community services to the disadvantaged (the poor, senior citizens, those with little formal education, new immigrants, etc.);
- provide community organizing services on issues of local concern; and
- promote participation in Project Genesis and other agencies and organizations which provide services to the community.

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