



**Project
Genesis**

Annual Report

June 2024 to May 2025



For 48 years, Project Genesis has been fighting for social justice from its base in Côte-des-Neiges. Counting people from 181 ethnic origins, Côte-des-Neiges is one of the most culturally diverse neighbourhoods in Canada. CDN has a higher rate of poverty and unemployment than the Montreal average. Neighbourhood residents who come to Project Genesis for support very often face multiple exclusions relating to gender, class, racialization, age, disability, immigration status, etc. Project Genesis offers direct support to overcome individual challenges relating to housing and income security. In parallel, we organize community members to work for collective solutions; mobilising against systemic inequalities and unjust social structures and for progressive social change.

Challenges and Hope in 2024-25

Erik Hamon, President of the Board of Directors

Over the past year, our neighbourhood has continued to grapple with astronomical rent increases and lack of social housing. We saw an unprecedented number of evictions: in 2024-25, almost 10% of the work that Project Genesis' individual services staff did in the area of housing aimed at stopping evictions. The surge of anti-immigrant sentiment and policies also hit our neighbourhood hard. Project Genesis saw increasing numbers of people with precarious or undocumented status, many of whom were not only excluded from social programmes but had no work permit. Finally, the digitization of social assistance programmes was fully implemented last year. This has led to longer waiting times, decreased accessibility, and reduced flexibility – another blow for the most vulnerable in our neighbourhood.

This reality makes the work of Project Genesis more vital than ever. Our frontline support and tenant organizing succeeded in keeping many people in Côte-des-Neiges from eviction and unaffordable rent increases. With our support, many migrants with precarious status received social assistance and low-income seniors received pensions. Our mobilisations have helped to keep the development of Blue Bonnets in line with community needs. The community solidarity Project Genesis builds in the neighbourhood is our best hope for confronting and overcoming social problems in the medium- and long-term.

In the face of numerous challenges, 2024-25 was a banner year for Project Genesis. We strengthened capacity in both individual services and community organizing, reduced the waiting list in the Storefront, very successfully relaunched the Housing Rights and Anti-Poverty Committee, and started a new organizing campaign to prevent renovictions. The victories in the Storefront have been daily and our ability to mobilise the neighbourhood to defend their housing and welfare rights grew by leaps and bounds. Despite the difficult times, we gained a lot of ground. This gives us hope.

Storefront Services



Canada Summer Jobs student advisors
Ghaya Daouas and Viktoriya
Sulzhenko in the Storefront, May 2025

In the context of skyrocketing rents and costs of living, the eviction crisis, anti-immigrant policies, and the digitization of social services, Project Genesis continued to support low-income residents of Côte-des-Neiges and beyond to fight eviction and rent increases, improve housing conditions, and access basic revenue such as welfare, pensions, and family benefits. For many, Project Genesis' timely response to critical situations made the difference between precarity and living in dignity. Project Genesis volunteers, law and social work

students, summer youth employees, intake workers and social rights workers provided individualized support to thousands of community members, including offering legal information, accompaniment, and advocacy. Service users gained awareness of their rights and capacity to advocate for themselves.

Throughout the year, Project Genesis' individual services staff regularly collaborated with other community organizations, including those working in other fields, such as immigration and healthcare. Such collaborations – consultations, coordination, referrals - allow Genesis to respond to the full complexity of people's situations.

Housing Rights: Eviction Crisis

Almost 80% of CDN residents are tenants. Already, ten years ago, one in five households in the neighbourhood spent 50% or more of their revenue on rent and more than 10% spent 80% or more of their revenue on rent. With average rent in Quebec having increased by 47% over the past five years, the situation is much worse today. Many in the neighbourhood are precariously housed or facing eviction. The neighbourhood is among the worst affected by the housing crisis.

This year, the neighbourhood faced an eviction crisis. Storefront staff worked on eviction cases every day. Genesis has never seen so many eviction attempts, especially of elderly people, and the trend is increasing. Evictions provide landlords an opportunity to increase rents, deepening the housing crisis. Steep rents and lack of social housing mean that, once evicted, people are only rarely able to find stable, decent housing.

Over the year, the Storefront made 5,426 housing interventions; helping thousands of residents to refuse rent increases, fight evictions both individually and collectively, and force landlords to make repairs.

Project Genesis held 8 rent-increase clinics between January and April, directly impacting 182 households and indirectly reaching neighbours, family members and colleagues of participants. Participants included Côte-des-Neiges residents at higher risk of eviction (elderly, people living in poverty, people with low literacy or low fluency in English and French, etc.). The clinics demystified rental laws and provided community members with tools to defend their tenant rights. Especially during the main rent increase season (January to March), Project Genesis staff provided individualized follow up after the clinics.

Genesis organized an offsite rent increase clinic in collaboration with three other community organizations, Ometz, Cummings Centre, and Kehilla Montreal. We also held a workshop for staff of these organizations to share our housing rights expertise with other groups in the neighbourhood.

The Storefront in Figures

Total: 10,652 initial interventions & follow-ups

Housing: 5,426 initial interventions & follow-ups

Welfare & Pensions: 2,476 initial interventions & follow-ups



Individual Services staff Arlene Field, Nora Moidu, and Margaret van Nooten at work in the Storefront.

“... many of the people [Project Genesis serves] rely on a modest income to support their family, and struggle each month to pay rent ... Margaret Van Nooten ... has noticed a shift toward more aggressive landlords ... She said many of her clients face pressure from big property owners, armed with lawyers, to accept a rent increase or leave. “They can just be ruthless,” she said. – **Confusion, anger and 5 minutes to avoid eviction:** A day at Quebec's jammed rental tribunal, CBC, 26 November 2024



Although LF has lived in her home a few blocks away from Project Genesis for over twenty years, she had had no cause to use our services. Almost 70 years of age, she provides a stable home to her son, who has health challenges, and she plays an active role in her community.

“Project Genesis is a great help to the community. They put their goals into action, and they help people realize that they can make a great change.” - LF

Last year, she anxiously approached us with an application her landlord had made to the housing tribunal seeking to evict her on the grounds

that she was allowing access to the building by individuals who caused disturbances. The application also sought \$1500 for unspecified damages. LF was puzzled and worried by the allegations. The application was signed by one of Montreal’s most notorious “renovictors” – landlords who target tenants paying lower rents, using a range of tactics to pressure them to leave. Only three families remained in the 11-unit building.

A volunteer advisor helped LF write a letter to the landlord to ask for the audio recordings and photos that he claimed to possess. Contact was made with the son’s nurse and social worker; legal representation was discussed and arranged. To prepare for the hearing, a meeting between the nurse, a Project Genesis staff person, the lawyer, LF and her son was held at Project Genesis. For six months, while awaiting her hearing, LF remained concerned, although no proof of damage or disturbance had been provided by the landlord.

We all shared in LF’s relief when she learnt that the landlord’s representative had –at the last minute – informed the lawyer that ‘a mistake’ had led to his filing for LF’s eviction, and that the case would be cancelled.

Income Security: Impact of Anti-Immigrant Policies and Digitization

This past year, Genesis witnessed the devastating impact of **anti-immigrant policies** at both the Federal and Quebec levels on the income security of our neighbourhood. A greater number of service users had immigration statuses which made them ineligible for regular social assistance. In some cases, they were still eligible for discretionary (Article 49) social assistance. Discretionary social assistance is not only difficult to obtain but has to be renewed every three to six months. Genesis put in more discretionary applications than ever this year and observed a shift towards tougher requirements. Other service users were ineligible for both regular and discretionary social assistance. In the worst cases, service users were also ineligible for a work permit, meaning they had no source of income at all.

The **digitization** of welfare is now fully implemented. Digitization - the shift from in-person and on-paper to online - has centralized, de-personalized, and reduced accessibility of social assistance. It has not made the system more efficient for applicants: the average wait time for a social assistance application reached two months during the past year.



AB declares that he learnt through his difficulties as a homeless person not to judge people living on the street, as he has an idea of what they might be facing.

At almost 50 years of age, it was not the first time AB did not have a place to call home. As a child, he and his family fled the racial persecution they faced in Mauritania. Not all of them survived. After some time in a refugee camp, AB made his way on his own as a teenager to the United States. Not having regularized his status there, he fled to Canada in 2018. For six years, he was settled in: applying for refugee status, working, renting his own apartment, and stopping by the local park after work, buying treats for the children and bottles of water for the adults.

His situation began to crumble when his refugee claim was rejected, his work permit renewal delayed, and he was forced to give up his job and his apartment.

AB came to Project Genesis for help applying for welfare, but given his irregular immigration situation, he was repeatedly asked for documents that he did not have, and his benefits were delayed for many months. The janitor of his building tolerated him sleeping under the stairs, but the landlord did not.

AB struggled with profound discouragement, going from organization to organization seeking help. But he was cheered on by others who used the park where he now spent much of his time, and they brought him food. The efforts of the Project Genesis team also encouraged him. Finally, he received his long-awaited benefits, and as winter closed in, he was given a spot in a shelter. Even better, his refugee appeal was accepted, he was granted asylum, and he got the precious work permit he had waited for so long. AB had volunteered as a cook in the shelter. His hard work and cheerful dedication were noticed by a staff member, who recommended him for a full-time job at a large shopping mall.

Now, he has a permanent, key-holding position, an application for permanent residence in process and an apartment. AB is no longer homeless, and he states that Project Genesis is like a family to him.

Home Advocacy Services

Project Genesis' Home Advocacy Services (HAS) programme was created to extend the Storefront's services to people who have difficulty leaving home because of significant mobility problems.

In 2025, HAS organized a home-visit tax clinic in March and April, mostly for elderly service users in Côte-des-Neiges. Low-income seniors must submit taxes on time to avoid being cut off Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), Quebec housing allowance, and rent subsidy programmes. Many HAS service users we visited were very isolated and needed help beyond their taxes.

In Figures

Income tax interventions: 57

Housing interventions: 36

Calls: 135

Follow up actions: 75

Home visits: 30

Often times when I visit to pick up tax slips, individuals will bring up other issues affecting their lives. Given their isolation, it is not often they have access to someone willing to help them.

One individual comes to mind where I returned several times to her apartment to try to help her locate her OAS/GIS tax slip. When she was unable to find it, I followed up several times to try to coach her through navigating the Service Canada phone menu to request a duplicate copy. When she was unable to do that, I asked a case worker to make the phone call with her from her apartment (she needed to be present to give consent). This issue was vital to the service user because had she not filed a tax return, her income supplement would have been cut off or interrupted. For most seniors whose income consists of OAS and GIS, the GIS is the larger amount that allows them to cover their monthly expenses.

The apartment building of another senior I visited was in a truly awful condition. There was very little light in the hallways and the whole building had a nauseating smell. The floors and walls were filthy, there was a dead mouse stuck to a trap in the middle of a hallway, and garbage was lying around. The service user, who has very serious health issues, was very grateful to see me. She had wrapped many items up in plastic and there was a strong smell of vinegar in her apartment because of bedbugs. The bathroom was full of visible mold and rust. She showed me a rent increase notice her landlord had sent her. I assisted her with drafting a refusal response and then took it to the post office as she is generally homebound. She desperately wanted help to relocate. The problem is that most decent apartments cost double her current rent. Project Genesis is continuing to work with her to uphold her right to decent housing.

-Daniel Barza, Individual Services Staff

Community Organizing

From Individual Need to Collective Action

Project Genesis' community organizers, together with the Housing Rights and Anti-Poverty Committee, tackle the causes of the problems faced by service users with the ultimate goal of ending poverty and securing decent housing for all.

With the relaunch of our Housing Rights and Anti-Poverty Committee this year, we were able to deepen our mobilising work through the social housing coalition, FRAPRU, and the tenants' rights coalition, RCLALQ. Locally, we focused our organizing work on a major development of social and community housing on the Blue Bonnets (Hippodrome) site. We also launched a new organizing project to help prevent renovictions with the support of the Cote-des-Neiges/NDG Burrough.

Project Genesis met with other welfare rights groups to mobilise community members against the recent welfare reform. This reform not only fails to raise benefits to keep up with inflation and spiralling rents, it actually cuts back benefits for some recipients and increases penalties.



Housing Rights and Anti-Poverty Committee Back in Force

Project Genesis' Housing Rights and Anti-Poverty Committee began meeting again regularly in June 2024. There are now around 50 active members, the majority service users or past service users of Project Genesis. In 2024-25, the committee met every four to six weeks and participated in more than a dozen mobilisations with FRAPRU, RCLALQ, the Comité anti-pauvreté de CDN, Groupes de Montréal en aide sociale, and other coalitions, demanding social housing, highlighting housing tribunal (TAL) dysfunctionalities, opposing rent increases, and regressive welfare reforms.

With a single community organizer in 2024, we were limited in capacity to achieve our ambitions. A second, part-time community organizer and a student intern joined our organizing team in winter and spring 2025, and we are hiring for another full-time position. New grants from the City of Montreal and the CDN-NDG Arrondissement awarded in spring 2025 will allow Genesis to add an additional full-time community organizing position in the 2025-2026 year.

Blue Bonnets

Project Genesis has been fighting for social housing on the vast Blue Bonnets (Hippodrome) site for more than 35 years. We achieved an important victory in April 2024 when the City of Montreal at last announced plans to develop the site, which included many of our key demands, including making a significant percentage of the 20,000 planned housing units affordable and sheltering them from housing speculation.

In 2024, Project Genesis helped create the Côte-des-Neiges Mobilising Committee, which brings together residents and organizations which have been involved in the Blue Bonnets struggle for years. The committee started organizing actions and popular education events again in 2024-25 including a mobilising event with more than 40 participants who came out to find out what was happening with the Blue Bonnets site and community's demands for development. Afterwards, a workshop on Namur-Hippodrome was launched and presented in several neighbourhood organizations and a school. Project Genesis also participated in a video project about Blue Bonnets with committee members giving personal testimonials and explaining their vision for the future of the site.

In parallel, Project Genesis continued to actively participate in the work of the Comité communauté, created in 2023 to push community demands for development of the Blue Bonnets site. As a member of this committee, Project Genesis participated in developing a social land-trust (fiducie d'utilité sociale) proposal for the site to present to the City for adoption, as additional protection from private market and speculation.

Key Community Demands for Blue Bonnets Development

- construction of at least 4800 social and community housing units;
- 100% of housing in the Hippodrome real estate park off-market and protected from speculation;
- rent fixed at 25% of household income for at least 60% of the social and community housing units;
- creation of a social land-trust on the Hippodrome site to permanently protect the land and social, community and affordable housing from speculation and privatization; 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.



"It gets frustrating. Right now it's empty land. We need to see ground being broken, we need to see buildings being developed. A huge solution is social housing." -Gary Saxe quoted in Global News, 22 May 2025

Tenant Organizing: RenovAction and beyond

Through its Storefront, Project Genesis learns about problems tenants are facing, including renoviction attempts, which enables us to organize collective responses. After learning that certain tenants had received renovation notices in some buildings, for example, we did door-to-door outreach to provide information to other tenants, reaching a total of 164 households in 6 buildings. In the case of an OBNL (organisme à but non lucratif d'habitation – non-profit housing organization) whose tenants faced relocation because of flooding, we organized two meetings to support tenants to defend their rights collectively.

In September 2024, Project Genesis gained access to information about buildings for sale in CDN which opened the door to preventive action against evictions, since tenants of newly sold buildings and buildings up for sale are at higher risk of eviction. We created a flyer and formed an outreach sub-committee of our Housing and Anti Poverty Committee to systematically reach out to buildings for sale to inform tenants of their housing rights. In spring 2025, we received a grant from the CDN-NDG Borough which will allow us to hire a new community organizer to coordinate a dedicated renovAction project.

Our work helped increase tenants' skills and knowledge of their rights; strengthening their confidence and willingness to participate in collective action and sense of attachment to the community.

“If you face homelessness, it’s hard to bounce back ... If you end up being in shelters or on the street ... or even if you squeeze together two families in an apartment, ... there’s a whole spiral of problems. I feel disappointed in the response of the city, of the province, and of Canada. I feel we can do so much better. We are not an impoverished country or province and we are failing people so bad with such terrible consequences.”

–Margaret van Nooten quoted in CityNews, 30 June 2024



Project Genesis remembers John Kinloch

John Kinloch was an anti-poverty activist and community organizer his entire adult life. He spent many years working

with Project Genesis and coordinated Multicaf for over 10 of those years. Devoted to social justice, John was a gentle, kind person who worked to make the world a more just, open, and equitable place. Even after being diagnosed with early onset Parkinson’s Disease, John held onto his independent spirit to the end and will forever be remembered at Genesis as a beloved friend and colleague.



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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.);
- To provide community organizing services on issues of local concern;
- To promote community participation in Project Genesis and other agencies and organizations which provide services to the community.

**4735 chemin de la Côte-Sainte-Catherine
Montreal, Quebec H3W 1M1
(514) 738-2036
www.genese.qc.ca**