



Tents and tarps were set up during the dinner at our recent Celebrating 50 Years Hamilton Gala to bring attention to the reality of growing encampments in Hamilton and other regions in Southern and Southwestern Ontario.

## What kind of city do we want to live in?



By Jeff Neven  
Chief Executive Officer, Indwell

*(Excerpts paraphrased from Jeff Neven's speech at Indwell's 50th Anniversary Gala in Hamilton on June 6, 2024)*

On my East Hamilton street sits a small park. For over a year, up to 20 people have been sheltering there under tarps and tents.

Park infrastructure wasn't built for this: the sole garbage can overflows; a pile of empty propane tanks grows; worn mud paths tell the story of human movement; there are no bathroom facilities.

People are not living; they are surviving. They're existing in parallel to the housed people in my neighbourhood – so close, but so disconnected.

To see this kind of living-rough homelessness would have been shocking just four years ago. Today, this is only one of dozens of encampments in my neighbourhood. Officially, we have more than 1600 people who are homeless in Hamilton.

We feel compassion for the suffering. I'm a Christian and I think about the example of Jesus who went out to encampments. At that time, they were filled with people

with the disease of leprosy. People were forced to live separately, cut off from the rest of society.

But is it compassionate to leave people unsheltered, exposed to the elements, and disconnected from the people around them? Are encampments our new norm? (To read more about our society got here, check out the chart on page 2.)

**There is good news.** Homelessness is not an incurable condition. **Homelessness is solvable.** How do I know?

In the first six months of 2023, we moved 160 people from homelessness into housing. A year later, 96% of those 160 people remain housed. Each one took the label of homeless and discarded it, not to be picked up again.

It brings me back to Jesus. He not only went into encampments, but he connected with people, bringing healing and restoration to individuals and to their community. Formerly ostracized people could move home. Following Jesus' example, we can open more doors together.

(cont'd on pg. 2)

(cont'd from pg. 1)

## In the city I want to live in, people experience three things:

1. **Home:** The only way to end homelessness is with a home. For individuals to be successful in that home, it needs to be affordable, of good quality, and meet the needs of the individual.
2. **Support and healthcare:** We all need strong natural supports like friends, family, and neighbours as well as access to professional healthcare that includes assessments, referrals, treatment, navigation and follow-up.
3. **Belonging:** For us to thrive we need to be part of something — to be known and to belong. We need to be recognized for what we bring, not just for our deficits.

## What can we do – as individuals and as organizations?

1. **Lead the way:** Lead with our commitment to value the God-given dignity of all humans, with a commitment to end homelessness, and with our resources.
2. **Bring others with us:** Help others believe that ending homelessness is possible.
3. **Disrupt the system:** Change the trajectory of the historical timeline. Show what's possible.

## In the city I want to live in, we all experience home.

We have deep and enduring supports — friends, family, professionals — walking alongside us. We experience belonging and contribute to our community. Some will say, “It’s not possible.” Some will create a false dichotomy, tear down the tents and lock up those experiencing homelessness. Others will advocate to leave the tents alone and let people live the way they wish.

**But there is a third way, rooted in dignity, love and hope.** A way that says, “You are valuable. Life can be better. You are worthy of giving love and receiving love.” In the city I want to live in tents are not necessary because everyone has a home.

**Let’s commit to making this vision a reality and get to work creating the city we want to live in.** 🏠

Decade	Events that matter to the people we serve	Indwell’s response/impact
1960s - 70s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Psychiatric units close, and hospitals provide short-term treatment for mental illness</li><li>• Services are available to people with chronic mental illness, including lodging homes, social housing, and support clinics</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1974: Indwell (then The Homestead) begins transitional residence-based rehab program</li></ul>
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Economic and social policy shift; investment in social housing declines across North America</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People access social or subsidized housing after living with Indwell</li></ul>
1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social housing, subsidized construction programs end</li><li>• Ontario social assistance slashed by 21%</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fewer supportive housing options impact Indwell’s transitional model</li></ul>
2000s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2001: Affordable Housing Act replaces social housing; focus shifts to private sector creating affordable units.</li><li>• 2003: Housing allowance for people using ODSP matches market rate in Hamilton</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2006: Indwell builds first new affordable housing building</li><li>• Indwell revises supportive housing model and continues to add new units.</li></ul>
2010s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Large control trial of Housing First methodology affirms supportive housing, but no significant change in policy or funding</li><li>• 2006 – 2016: Increased number of people with psychiatric admission discharged to homelessness</li><li>• Drug crisis grows</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2014: rebranding to Indwell</li><li>• 2016: Indwell becomes a health service provider</li><li>• Tenants moving into Indwell apartments have 90% or better chance of retaining their home</li></ul>
2020-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• COVID-19 pandemic occurs</li><li>• Secondary pandemic of visible homelessness in growing encampments</li><li>• No update of federal homelessness plan post-pandemic; no funding of existing plans</li><li>• No provincial homelessness plan</li><li>• Municipal plans don’t anticipate affordability crisis</li><li>• Chronic homelessness grows among people with mental health disabilities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Indwell opens new programs, including program model for people leaving encampments</li><li>• 2023: people supported in 1,000+ Indwell homes</li><li>• Partnerships created for Indwell to operate municipally owned housing in St. Thomas, Waterloo Region, London, Hamilton</li></ul>



## Voices of Indwell: stories of community



### Renee Game: 22 years of supporting wellness at the Wentworth Program, Hamilton

Renee Game has served with Indwell for 22 years. She first heard about Indwell from her father who served on the Board of Directors. After deciding to apply, she began working at the Wentworth Program in Hamilton right after graduating from Mohawk College.

Throughout her career, Renee has led many changes, including the Wentworth Program's expansion and contributing to the development of Blossom Park Apartments in Woodstock. Reflecting on the past two decades, she notes that Indwell's most significant transformation has been its growth. "We used to have our Christmas gathering with all the staff and tenants in one church hall," she recalls. This would be challenging now, given our 1200+ tenants and 240+ staff members!

Renee describes the Wentworth Program as uniquely community-based, with a family atmosphere. The residents enjoy helping each other in their daily lives. Speaking about her colleagues, she says, "We have a really good supportive staff team that care about each other's wellness. **The best part of working at Indwell is the people.**"

Recently, Renee was promoted to Program Supervisor at the Wentworth Program. Congratulations, Renee!



### James: Prinzen Flats, Hamilton

James has lived with Indwell longer than most tenants, residing at Prinzen Flats since it was called Shamrock Apartments. Indwell took over the Robinson Street building in 2008.

James, whose walls are adorned with photographs from his friend Jack, who until recently also lived at Prinzen Flats, recalls that when Indwell began managing the building, "**There was more communication and concern.**" He appreciated the renovations to his kitchen and the prompt repairs, like fixing leaky faucets.

He's always felt safe at Prinzen Flats and trusts the other tenants. We're thrilled to provide permanent, well-maintained homes where people like James can feel secure and at home.



### Ric: Lakeshore Lofts, Mississauga

Before moving into Lakeshore Lofts in Mississauga, Ric rented a windowless basement furnace room for \$800 a month, with no way to cook. One day, at the Compass Food Bank & Outreach Centre (now our commercial tenant at Lakeshore Lofts), he met a woman applying for affordable housing. Although Ric thought he'd never qualify, she encouraged him, saying, "If you don't try, you'll never find out!" A few months later, after attending an intake meeting, Ric got a call confirming an apartment was waiting for him at Lakeshore Lofts. His response was: "Praise the Lord!" Now, two years later, Ric loves having his own kitchen to cook his favorite meals — fish and vegetables — every day.

"**It's turned out to be a miracle for me.** I never thought I could afford this when I was living in a furnace room. Now I'm paying [much less] for a real apartment. There's a friendly atmosphere. You can go down to the sunroom and talk to people or join in on a card game. It's like living in a village!"



FOR MORE OF RIC'S HOPEFUL STORY,  
SCAN QR CODE OR VISIT  
[YOUTUBE.COM/@INDWELL2873](https://www.youtube.com/@indwell2873)

## 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS:

### Waterloo Region:

Thursday, October 17 – Country Hills Church

### Woodstock:

Friday, November 1 - Maranatha Christian Reformed Church

### London:

Thursday, November 7 - Goodwill Industries Community Hall

## UPCOMING GRAND OPENINGS:

**Cornerstone Suites, Mississauga** - Thursday, September 12

**Magnolia Apartments, Kitchener** - Early 2025

**King William Apartments, Hamilton** - Stay tuned!



Visit [indwell.ca/events](https://indwell.ca/events)  
for registration details  
and updates about  
future Indwell events!

Over 650 tenants, staff members, friends, and supporters joined us at the Celebrating 50 Years Hamilton Gala on June 6 at the Hamilton Convention Centre. We are deeply grateful for the incredible support of so many of you towards our shared mission for hope and homes for all. Together, we look forward to another 50 years of providing supportive, affordable housing.



**Indwell is a Christian charity that, for 50 years, has been providing supportive housing that transforms lives.  
Every door we open together becomes a solution to homelessness.**

Indwell's communities support over 1,200 tenants in regions across Southern and Southwestern Ontario – with several projects currently in development. Indwell empowers tenants through a variety of supports to achieve health and wellness goals, to positively engage with their communities, and to maintain permanent, safe housing. Indwell's programming has proven effective, with 9 out of 10 tenants remaining with Indwell after their first year.

### INDWELL

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Indwell Community Homes



**Canadian Centre for  
Christian Charities**  
ACCREDITED MEMBER

**Charitable Registration Number**  
131295198RR0001