

2025

ANNUAL REPORT

BRITANNIA WOODS
COMMUNITY
SERVICES



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britanniawoods.com





MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome

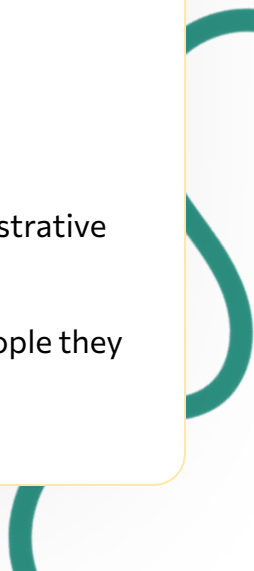
We are pleased to share the 2025 Annual Report for Britannia Woods Community Services (BWCS). This past year was shaped by connection, resilience, and the shared efforts of community members, volunteers, staff, funders, donors, and partners working side by side to strengthen a more inclusive and caring community.

Guided by community priorities and grounded in equity-informed, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed practice, we worked to reduce barriers for children, youth, individuals, and families. In a year shaped by rising costs, food insecurity, and growing wellness needs, we remained focused on what matters most: practical support, welcoming spaces, and opportunities for people to connect, grow, and thrive.

Partnerships that Strengthen Community

In 2025, Britannia Woods became the host organization for the **Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative (OCYI)**, a network of more than 80 organizations working to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families in Ottawa. In this role, we are helping to connect partners, strengthen shared learning, and support more coordinated action across the sector.

Through the **Ontario Trillium Foundation** Youth Opportunities Fund organizational mentorship stream, we continued to support grassroots organizations through administrative guidance, project mentorship, and financial accountability. This helped community-led partners deliver responsive programming shaped by the voices and priorities of the people they serve.





New Pathways, New Possibilities

In 2025, we launched Youth iN Tech – Youth Employment, funded by **Employment and Social Development Canada**, to help Black and racialized youth build pathways into technology through job-readiness coaching, certification-focused training, and paid placements.

We also launched Brilliant Voices, a youth-led creative arts program that uses photography, videography, storytelling, podcasts, interviews, and media as tools for self-expression and community connection. Through photography training, public engagement, and collaborative projects, youth build creative and technical skills while learning, creating, supporting one another, and amplifying diverse community voices.

Growing Our Reach

In 2025, community members accessed our services more than **36,000** times. We supported **4,800+** unique clients across **20+** programs and projects, including **800+** first-time service users. Behind every number is a person or family finding support, connection, and possibility.

We are deeply grateful to the community members, staff, volunteers, partners, funders, and donors who made this work possible in 2025. Your support and belief in this community continue to create opportunities, strengthen belonging, and make lasting impact. In the year ahead, we will continue to deepen partnerships, expand opportunities for children and youth, and strengthen wellness and belonging across our neighbourhoods.

Thank you for being part of the Britannia Woods story.

Sincerely,



Mohamed Sofa,
Executive Director



Tricia Ross,
Chair, Board of Directors



PROGRAM & SERVICES



Community Engagement & Advocacy

Circle of Hopes continues to be a cornerstone of community connection and healing. Through consistent weekly gatherings, residents:



Build trust and meaningful relationships



Share lived experiences in a culturally safe and supportive space



Support one another through social, emotional, and systemic challenges

The program plays a critical role in reducing isolation and strengthening overall community wellness.

Beyond peer support, Circle of Hopes remains a platform for resident-led advocacy. Participants actively engage with housing providers, including Ottawa Community Housing, to:

- 01 | Raise ongoing concerns
- 02 | Share lived realities
- 03 | Advocate for improved living conditions

This work has contributed to stronger dialogue, increased accountability, and more responsive community systems.



Community Events & Belonging



In 2025, BWCS continued to host seasonal, community-wide events that foster connection, pride, and joy across all age groups. These included:



Mother's Day Celebration



Farmers Market



Annual Summer
BBQs (July & August)



Annual Community
Holiday Dinner

These gatherings are more than events, they are spaces of collective care, cultural expression, and community resilience, strengthening a shared sense of belonging across the community.



Student Engagement & Placements

BWCS continues to serve as a strong learning environment for emerging professionals.

IN 2025, WE HOSTED:



College and university placement students



High school students completing community involvement hours



PARTICIPANTS GAINED HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE IN:

Youth engagement

Food security programming

Community advocacy

Program delivery

These placements not only support student learning and development but also strengthen BWCS's organizational capacity and contribute to building a future community-focused workforce.

Mental Health & Wellness Program

Our Mental Health Department has shown strategic leadership in the movement for health equity, reclaiming space at traditional tables that have historically excluded the insights of community-embedded practitioners. By operating at the intersection of clinical excellence and community proximity, we provide a unique vantage point on the early markers of systemic unwellness that larger institutions often miss. Our innovative, identity-affirming approach is essential in dismantling the barriers to equitable mental health care.

As the **largest racialized clinical team in the City of Ottawa**, our department manages five specialized programs designed to center the unique wellness needs of racialized and low-income residents. In 2025, our department facilitated over **4,477 wellness supports and services**, cementing our role as a vital pillar in the regional healthcare ecosystem.

By grounding clinical expertise in lived experience and community trust, we transform mental health and wellness services into a vehicle for systemic empowerment. Below, we spotlight two innovative programs driving this mission: the **Black Racialized Individuals Support Channel (BRISC)** and **Youth Engaging Systems (YES)**.



Black Racialized Individuals

Support Channel (BRISC):

The **Black Racialized Individuals Support Channel (BRISC)** is an Accessible Incident Response Model curated to dismantle the structural barriers inherent in traditional mental health care and systems. Launched in June 2020, BRISC bridges the support gaps for Black, racialized, and economically marginalized communities, shifting the focus from **'one-size-fits-all'** services to identity-affirming, culturally specific emotional and mental health care.

SYSTEMIC IMPACT

Initially established as Ottawa's first racialized-focused virtual support line, BRISC has evolved into a robust clinical resource. To date, the program has facilitated over **4,532 therapeutic sessions**, providing a vital lifeline for individuals navigating systemic neglect within conventional healthcare frameworks city-wide.

TRANSFORMATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Our growth is fueled by strategic alignment with institutional leaders who prioritize health equity. We celebrate our foundational collaborations with the **Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition** and the **Ottawa Community Foundation**, whose support has been essential in scaling our reach.

Most significantly, we have secured a more robust partnership with **Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre (PQCHC)**. This collaboration represents a major shift in the local healthcare landscape. This partnership ensures that residents frequently utilizing primary care now have immediate, dignified access to racially and culturally affirming therapeutic support, effectively removing the economic and racialized barriers to mental wellness.

BRISC is no longer just a program, it is a permanent pillar of the regional healthcare system, ensuring that mental health equity is not just a goal, but a realized standard.



Highlight: Youth Engaging Systems (YES)

The **Youth Engaging Systems (YES)** program was established as a direct response to the systemic over-representation of Black youth involved with, or at risk of involvement with, the criminal justice system.

Foundationally, our model centered on restorative justice and culturally grounded advocacy. Our core mission was to provide a dignified alternative to punitive measures, prioritizing community-led rehabilitation that centers the humanity of the young person over the labels of the legal system. This foundation allowed us to build deep trust and act as a vital bridge between justice-involved youth and the supports they need to thrive.

INNOVATIVE EXPANSION: MCCSS-FUNDED INNOVATION

Recognizing the success of our foundational work, the **Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)** provided a strategic investment to deploy a transformative expansion of the YES model. This investment allowed us to pivot from a purely reactive case-management support system to a proactive social capital-building framework.



The YES expansion introduced a sophisticated dual-track approach to youth reintegration:

Pillar 1



Experiential Exposure Interventions

This pillar addresses the 'exposure gap' that often limits the horizons, dreams and goals of marginalized youth. By facilitating intentional access to novel professional, societal, cultural, and educational environments, we empower youth with the social navigation skills and networks required for successful community reintegration.



This is an investment in their aspirations, affirming their right to belong and lead in every space.

Pillar 2



Curriculum-Based Educational Programming

We deployed a high-impact, competency-based curriculum designed to shift the focus from system compliance to personal empowerment. This programming equips youth with **critical life skills, civic literacy, and academic readiness**. By grounding justice-involved/at risk of justice involvement youth in these essential competencies,



We provide them with the tangible tools needed for long-term self-sufficiency and discipline.

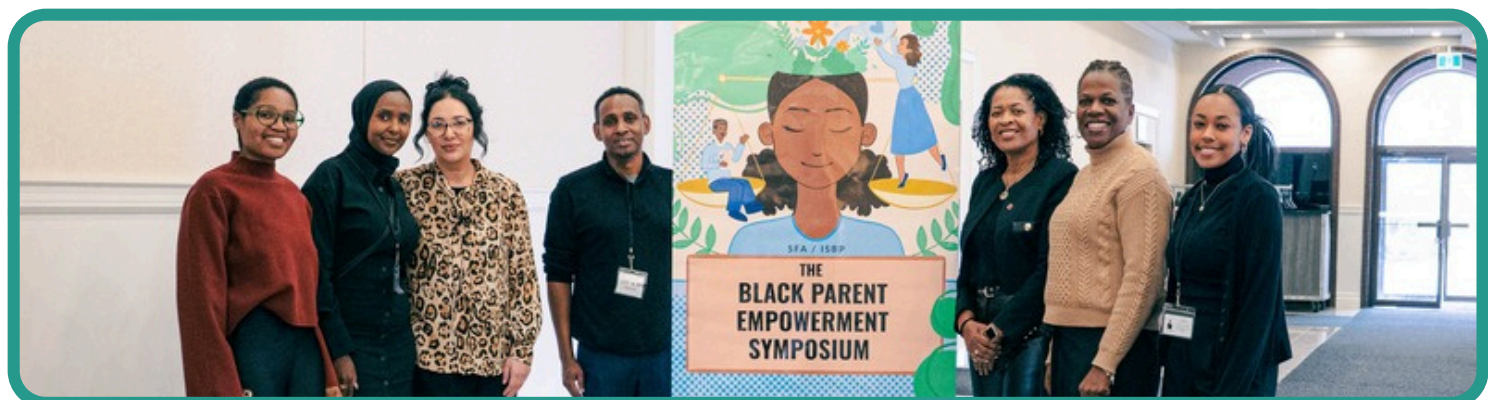
SYSTEMIC IMPACT & FUTURE OUTLOOK



By integrating real-world exposure with structured education, BWCS is setting a new standard for youth justice in Ontario. This pilot expansion serves as a powerful proof-of-concept, demonstrating that when justice-involved / at risk of justice involvement youth are provided with identity-affirming opportunities and rigorous skill-building, they can successfully pivot from Crisis to Contribution.



We are incredibly grateful to the Ministry for recognizing the value of our innovative approach. As we present these results, our goal is to leverage this success into a permanent fixture of our youth justice strategy, ensuring that every young person we serve has the opportunity to redefine their future.



Child and Youth Development

In 2025, BWCS deepened its impact by restructuring youth programming through the Beyond the Bell Hub, creating clear pathways for education, wellness, culture, and employment. Through partnerships, programs like Brilliant Voices equipped youth with creative and career-ready skills. At the same time, community engagement efforts like Circle of Hopes and seasonal events strengthened connection, advocacy, and belonging, while food programs continued to respond to growing needs with dignity and care.

BEYOND THE BELL HUB

In 2025, BWCS significantly restructured its after-school programming to better respond to the evolving needs of children and youth. This led to the launch of the Beyond the Bell Hub, a more intentional and integrated model supporting children and youth aged **6-19**.

The Hub creates clear developmental pathways across the following key areas:



Educational support



Social and emotional wellness



Cultural identity and belonging



Employment readiness

This shift moves programming beyond drop-in activities toward a more outcomes-driven approach, equipping children and youth with the tools, mentorship, and experiences needed to thrive academically, socially, and personally. The integrated model also improves transitions between programs, helping youth stay connected as they progress through each stage.



DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

The Beyond the Bell Hub offers structured programming tailored to specific age groups:

CHILDREN AGES

6-12

Beyond the Bell

AGES

9-14

Sister2Sister Girls'
Program

AGES

13-14

YouthConnect
Junior

AGES

15-18+

YouthConnect
Senior

AGES

13+

Brilliant Voices

YOUTH AGES

14+

Summer Basketball
Program

BRILLIANT VOICES – PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Through strategic partnerships with the City Cultural Development and Initiatives and TELUS, BWCS launched Brilliant Voices, a creative workforce development program designed to equip youth with practical skills in the creative and digital media sector.

Over the year, the program successfully delivered four cohorts, graduating 20 youth who gained hands-on experience in:



Photography



Videography



Digital storytelling



Vox pop and street interviews





Participants were actively engaged in real-world media production opportunities, including participation in City-led events, community events, and sports tournaments, where they conducted vox pop interviews and community storytelling activities. These experiences allowed youth to develop confidence in public engagement, communication, and professional media practice.

In addition to technical training, participants strengthened their storytelling abilities through the creation of meaningful visual content that reflected community voices and lived experiences.

The program culminated in a successful Culture and Heritage event, where youth presented their work through a photography exhibition and media showcase. This event highlighted their creativity, learning journey, and growth over the course of the program.

Participants left the program with enhanced technical skills, increased confidence, professional portfolios, and clearer pathways toward careers in the creative industries.

Food Programs – Meeting Growing Needs with Dignity

Demand for food support continues to rise. In 2025, we saw sustained high usage, serving a total contact of **11,064 individuals**, with **57%** living in unaffordable housing and **58%** unemployed, reflecting the growing impact of rising living costs.

Our food programs serve residents across Lincoln Fields, Richmond Road, Carling Avenue, and surrounding areas, offering:

01

Nutritious food access

02

Referrals and system navigation support

03

A welcoming, community-centered environment

Beyond food security, the program plays a key role in reducing isolation and supporting newcomers.

In 2025, **30 volunteers** supported day-to-day operations, contributing an estimated **\$91,000** in value annually. We also saw increased interest from skilled newcomers volunteering at the food bank as a pathway to gaining experience and entering the workforce

We remain committed to transitioning toward a shopping-style, dignity-centered food access model, which will require expanded space and sustained funding.

Community Garden

Our Community Garden remained a vibrant hub for food, learning, and cultural exchange, expanding opportunities for families to participate while strengthening its role in promoting wellness, sustainability, and community connection.



Spotlight: Youth in Tech

Youth iN Tech

Since launching in March 2025, Britannia Woods Community Services has proudly led Youth iN Tech, an innovative employment and skills development program supporting Black and racialized youth in building pathways into the technology sector, funded by **Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)**.

Funded through the Government of Canada's Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS), the project combines technical IT training delivered by **Toos Technical Solutions** with career coaching and networking opportunities provided by **Chnge Mker Innovation Hub**, alongside our team's employment readiness, mentorship, and wraparound supports to prepare youth for meaningful employment and long-term career success.

As of March 2026, the program had supported **31** youth. Beyond technical skills, the program focuses on confidence building, workplace navigation, communication, and mental health and wellness supports.

Throughout the year, the project also highlighted the realities many youth continue to navigate, including financial barriers, housing instability, limited professional networks, and mental health challenges. In response, BWCS strengthened its holistic and culturally responsive approach to ensure participants received the individualized support needed to succeed.

Youth iN Tech reflects BWCS's ongoing commitment to creating equitable opportunities for Black and racialized youth while strengthening pathways to employment, leadership, and community well-being.



SPOTLIGHT: A Time for Healing

From March 2024 to March 2025, Britannia Woods Community Services led **A Time for Healing**, a community-based action research project focused on mental health, healing, and well-being within Ottawa's Somali community. The initiative explored how experiences of migration, displacement, anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and intergenerational trauma impact individuals, families, and community wellness. The research was conducted in partnership with Dr. Hamdi Mohamed, who served as the project's lead researcher.

Grounded in community ownership and culturally responsive approaches, the project engaged over **60+ community participants** through consultations, focus groups, expert interviews, and healing-centred discussions. Community members shared lived experiences, explored collective healing strategies, and helped shape recommendations for more culturally grounded mental health supports.

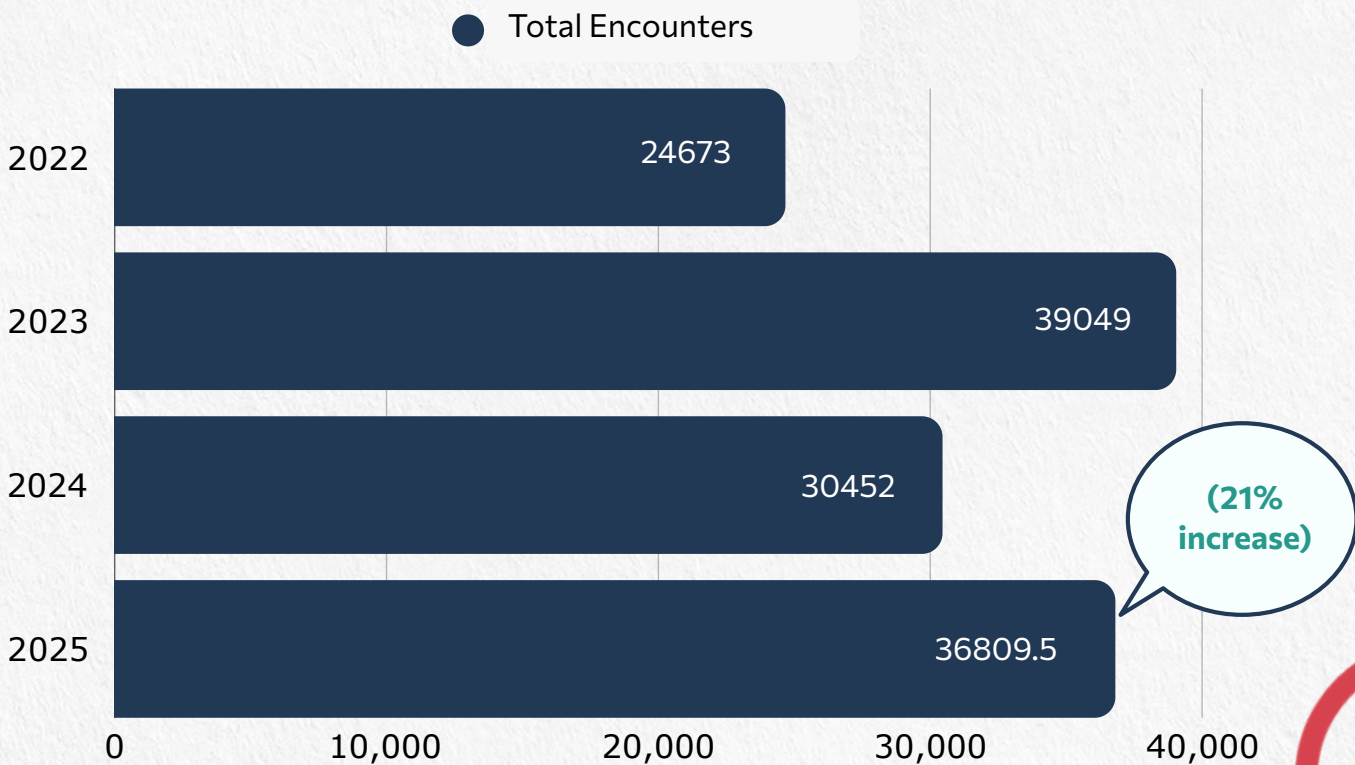
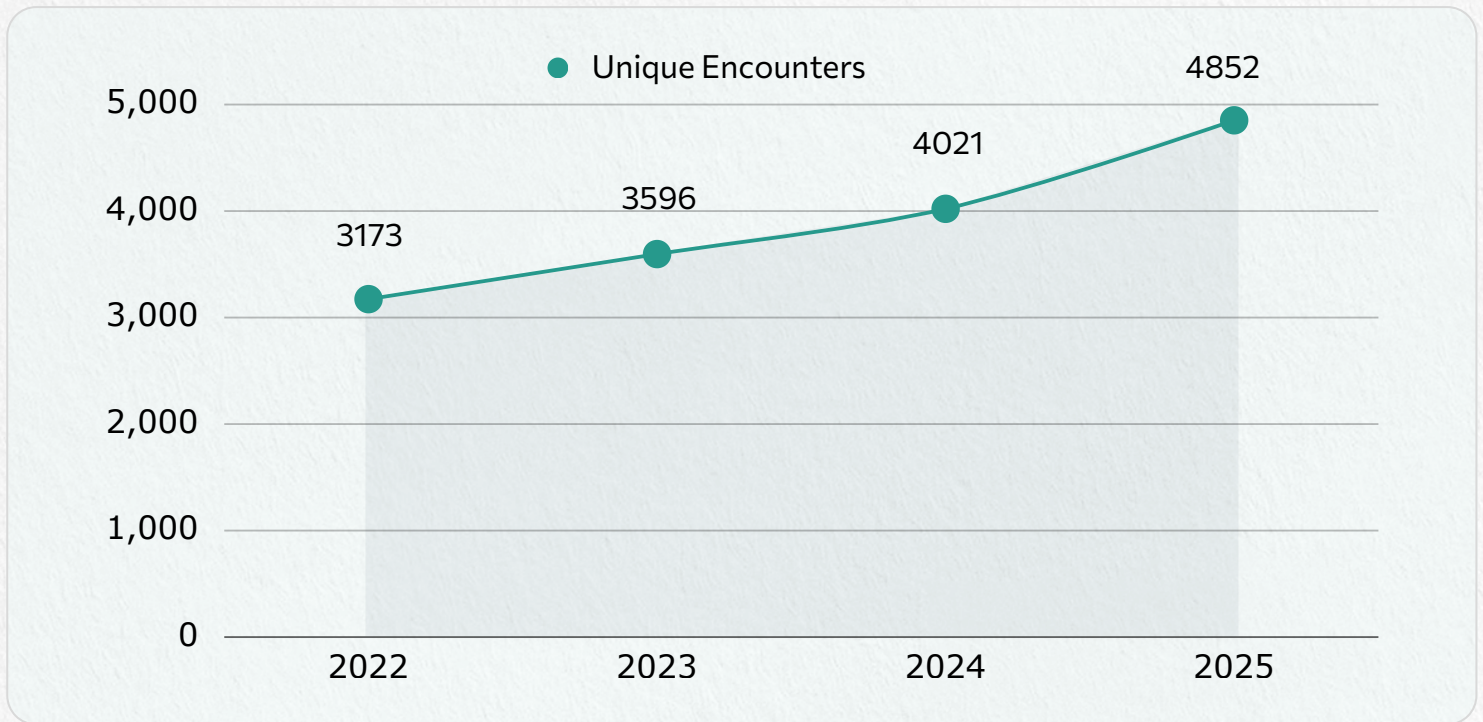
A major milestone of the project was the launch of **LADAN** — a culturally affirming healing space for Somali women focused on storytelling, connection, resilience, and collective care. Sessions incorporated Somali traditions, language, prayer, and intergenerational dialogue to create safe and welcoming spaces for healing and support.

The project reflects BWCS's ongoing commitment to community-led research, culturally rooted wellness, and creating spaces where Black and racialized communities feel seen, heard, and supported.



BWCS Impact & Stats

UNIQUE ENCOUNTERS



Board of Directors



- Tricia Ross | Chair
- Saara Saddiqi | Vice Chair
- Emmanuel Clersaint | Secretary
- Nadir Nur | Treasurer
- Karim Mekki | Director

- Kyle Elliott | Director
- Trisha Banks | Director
- Muriel Nishimwe | Director
- Dana Hassoun | Director

Staff



- Mohamed Sofa, Executive Director
- Diana Belghali, Community Services and Operations Director
- Shannon Black, Clinical Director of Mental Health & Counselling
- Lamar McCormack, Mental Health & Wellness Manager
- Sephora Kabuika, Mental Health & Wellness Manager
- Nelly Naze, People & Strategy Manager
- Cécile Kasongo, Mental Health Coordinator
- Ayan Sultan, Employment Facilitator
- Amina Atillah, Community Child & Youth Coordinator
- Yanet Tsehaye, Systems Support Worker
- Yusuf Santur, Youth Justice Counsellor
- Hodan Osman, Student Family Advocate & Team Lead
- Anisa Musa, Family & Child Worker

- West Estiverne, Youth Employment Specialist
- Kim Sabourin, Food Program Assistant
- Zahra Idrissi, Program Assistant
- Ayah Ebada, Youth Program Assistant & Communications & Branding Worker
- Shiwa Tawakoli, Youth Program Worker & OCYI Coordinator
- Faisa Ali, After School Program Coordinator
- Abenzer Tadesse, Youth Program Assistant- seasonal
- Chrissy Mandy, Youth Program Assistant
- Atika Mouaj, Administrative Assistant
- Noah Ruzindana, Program Assistant
- Beth Tooley, OCYI Manager
- Carla Thur, OCCH Coalition Facilitator
- Jade Odiase, OCCH Child & Youth Network Facilitator

Partners & Funders

