

THE COVID-19 REPORT



THE FIRST WAVE: 2020



WOODGREEN

CHANGING LIVES.
MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

This report presents the status of WoodGreen's programs during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to their normal operation, specifically in terms of each program's facilities, staff, clients, and services. The data collected in this report spans the time period of March – October 2020.

A Message From Our President and CEO

In the span of several months, the coronavirus has upended lives and impacted communities across the world in unprecedented ways. No corner of our society has been left untouched by the effects of the pandemic. The individuals and families WoodGreen serves are already among Toronto's most disadvantaged residents so, for them, the impact of COVID-19 rises exponentially.

With great prowess, our staff leaped into action and worked tirelessly against the restrictions and effects of the pandemic. Many of our programs were able to continue to support our communities in impactful ways. However, there were also lost services, closed facilities, and staff on leave. This report helps tell the story of how WoodGreen's programs managed all of this, which is a story of hard work, tough choices, and an unwavering dedication to our client-centric approach.

If this challenging time has taught us anything, it has taught us how precarious life is, how close so many are to the poverty line, how crucial community service agencies are in keeping people safe and supported at home and out of hospitals, so hospitals can focus on the very ill. It has also underlined how much we need organizations such as WoodGreen to help the most vulnerable among us and to build a more equitable and resilient community.

We are honoured to share this report, which offers our set of findings from the 2020 first wave to all of our stakeholders.

Anne Babcock
President and CEO
WoodGreen Community Services





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Executive Summary

This report searched for the true story of how WoodGreen tackled the unprecedented challenges of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data shows a balanced reality of rampant increases in demands and needs, some unsurmountable limits, and extraordinary moments of perseverance.

Top 3 Words That Describe WoodGreen During the First Wave:

RESILIENT

Non-profits often have a unique method of scraping together what limited resources we have and making incredible things possible for our clients. During the height of the pandemic, this limited resource optimization was extremely apparent and one of the biggest keys to our successes in the last year.

NIMBLE

Several important projects and initiatives were not able to get the traction they needed at WoodGreen due to competing priorities. The pandemic managed to push them to the front of the queue and important progress was made in areas such as improving our technology solutions, increasing our capabilities to offer remote work and services, tackling special projects, and addressing anti-Black racism.

LEARNING

Although learning about our communities and their challenges and about our operations and their potential improvements has always been a part of our work at WoodGreen, we have learned so much more this year. We saw the extreme vulnerability of our food insecure, elderly, and newcomer clients and we tested innovative program designs. We dove into our data to try to understand our clients and our work even better.

Top 10 Issues WoodGreen Faced During the First Wave:

CLIENTS	1	HIGH COMMUNITY FOOD INSECURITY	ISOLATION & POOR MENTAL HEALTH	6	CLIENTS & STAFF
	2	CONSTRAINED IN-PERSON SENIOR CARE	LIMITED ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY	7	
	3	ACCESS & INFORMATION BARRIERS FOR NEWCOMERS	REMOTE WORK & OFFICE SAFETY	8	
	4	LOSS OF CHILDCARE SERVICES	COMMUNITY OUTREACH RESTRAINTS	9	OPERATIONS
SYSTEMS	5	ANTI-BLACK RACISM	RESOURCE & STAFF ALLOCATIONS	10	

THE FIRST WAVE

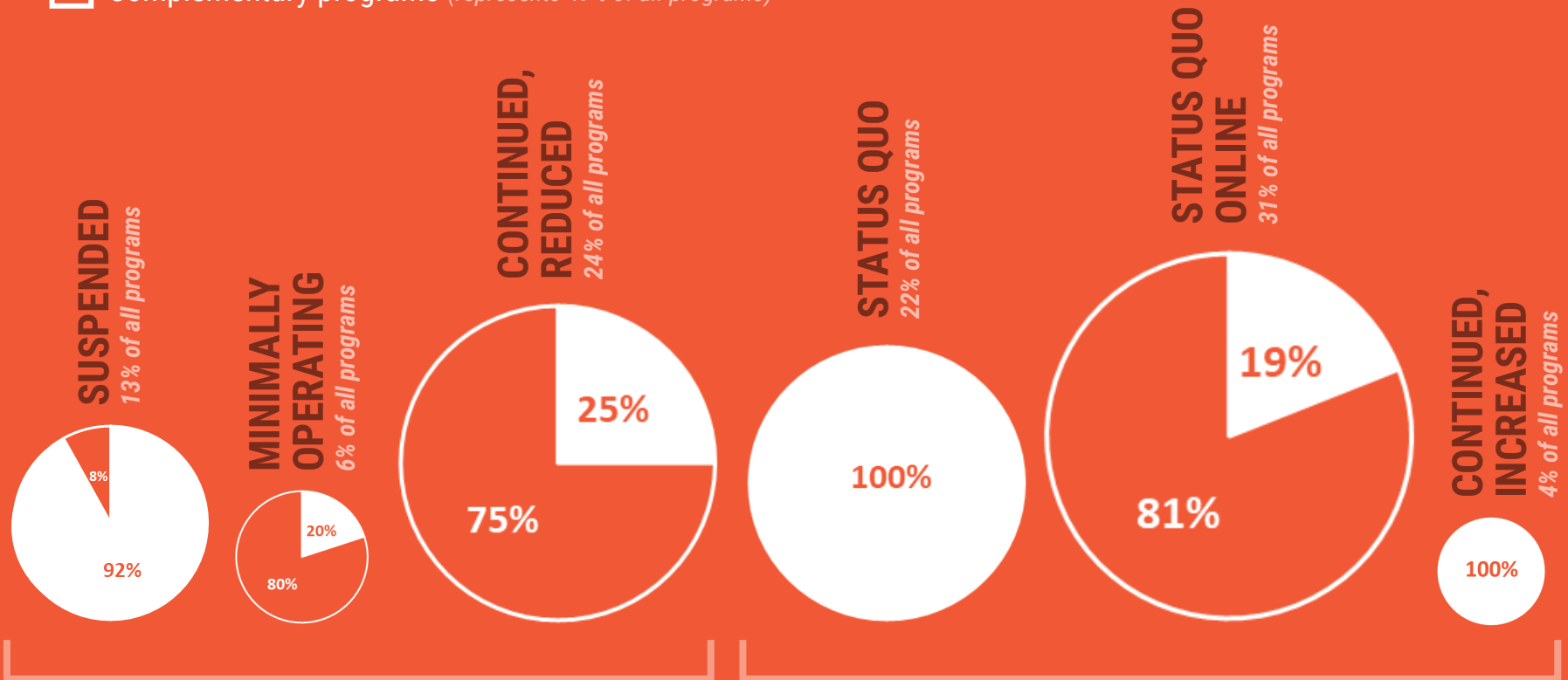
The COVID-19 pandemic affected our city, our country, and our world in many ways over a long period of time. A common global pattern was that an initial wave of the coronavirus washed over communities, and this first wave will be the focus of this COVID-19 Report. In the first wave that started March 17, 2020, we knew little about the virus and were ill-prepared; it was an emergency state and we had to adapt immediately without a lot of information. This is what happened at WoodGreen:



Overview: Program Statuses

This infographic presents our programs by their status and by their level of essentialness to the community. Fortunately, over half of our programs were able to operate at or above status quo and many of those highly operating programs were considered essential.

- Essential programs *(represents 51% of all programs)*
- Complementary programs *(represents 49% of all programs)*



43% OF ALL PROGRAMS WERE SUSPENDED OR OPERATING BELOW STATUS QUO

57% OF ALL PROGRAMS WERE OPERATING AT OR ABOVE STATUS QUO

Overview: Facilities

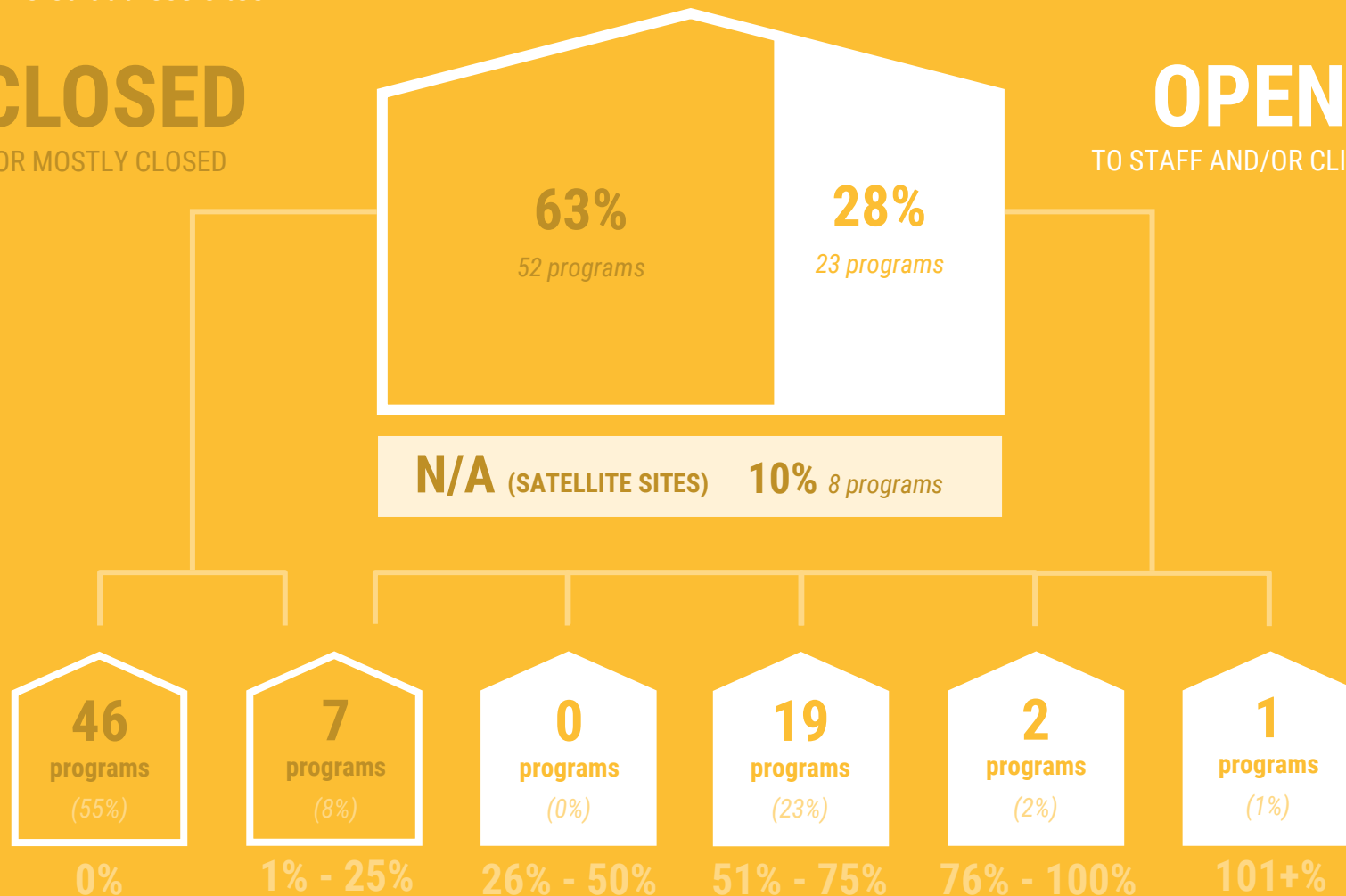
This infographic presents our programs by their facilities' statuses (open or closed) and by their operating capacities (to the nearest percentage quartile). Most of our programs' sites were closed, following Public Health guidelines. However for our open sites, most were operating around 75% capacity meaning that many core services could continue being offered at these sites.

CLOSED

OR MOSTLY CLOSED

OPEN

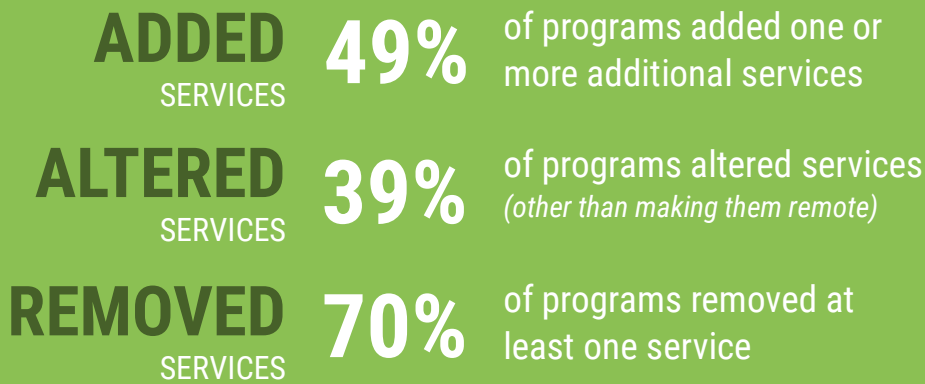
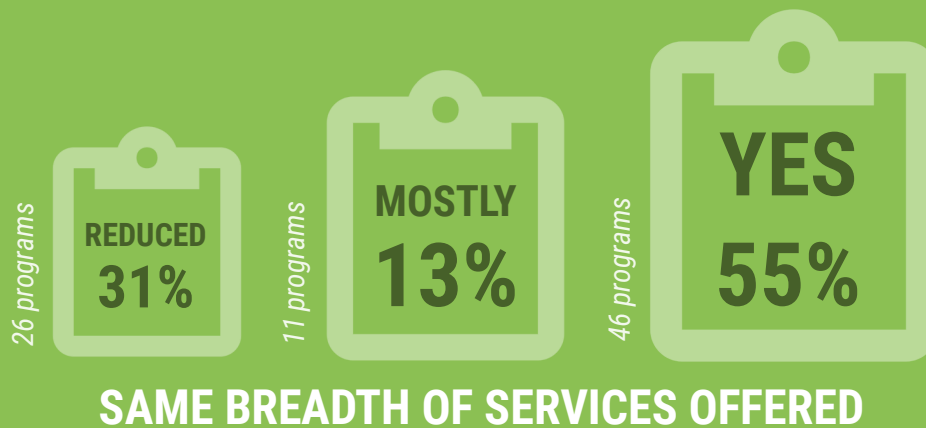
TO STAFF AND/OR CLIENTS



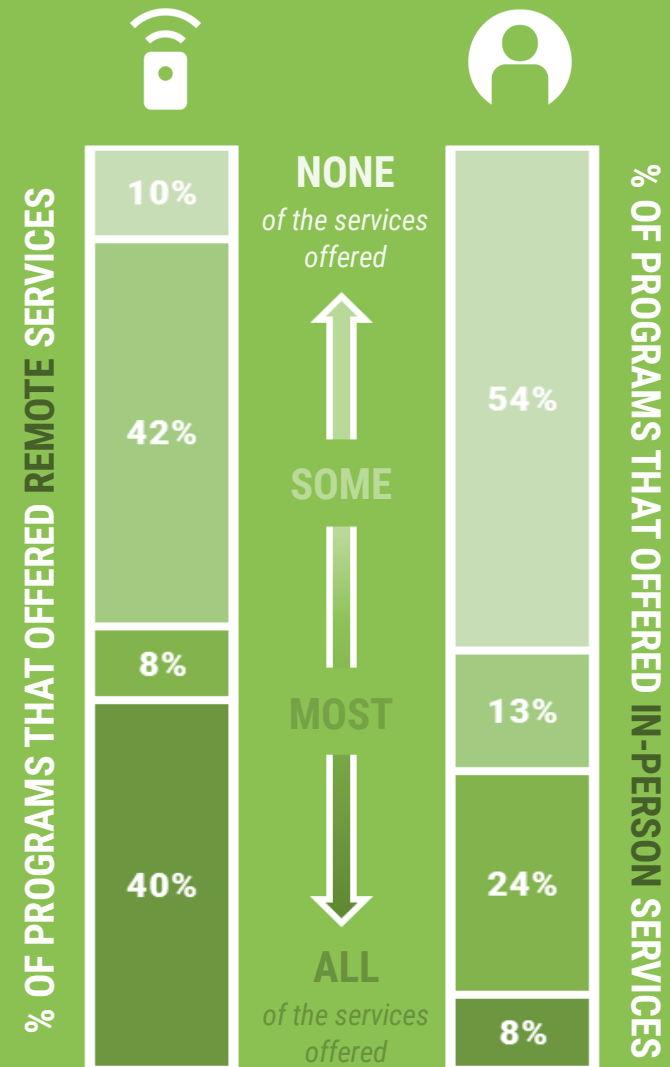
PERCENTAGE OF SITE OPERATING CAPACITY

Overview: Services

This infographic presents our programs by menu of services offered, changed services, and method of service delivery. Although most programs had to remove at least one service, many added additional services and kept the list of services offered relatively the same. Most programs offered no in-person services and few programs offered no remote services.

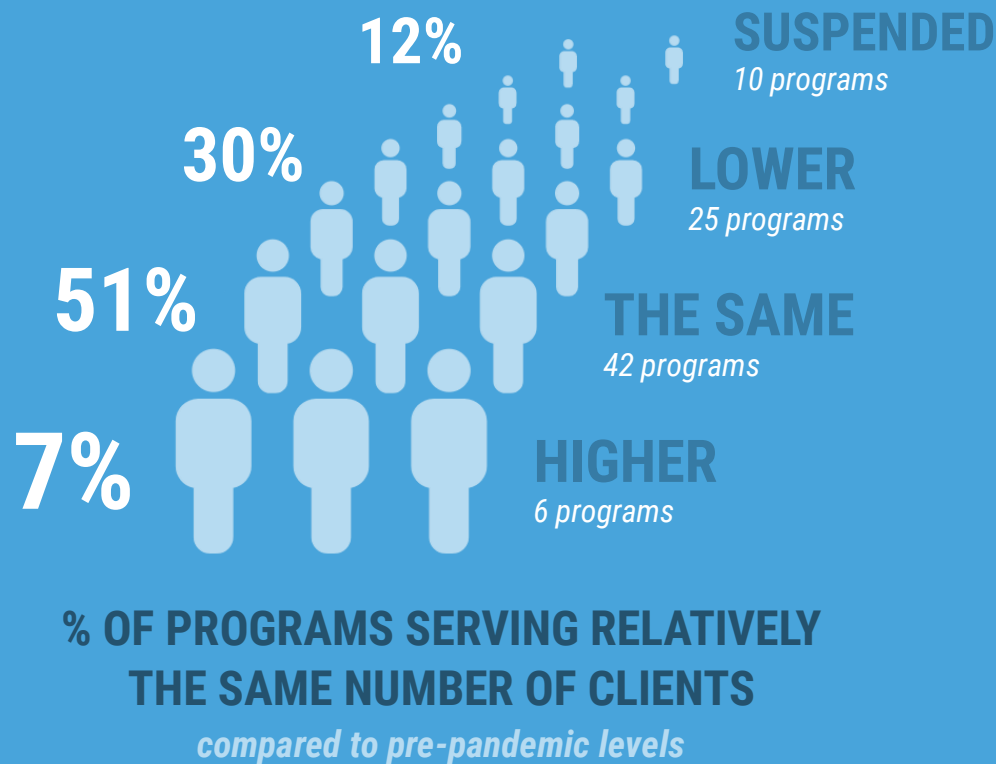


REMOTE / IN-PERSON SERVICES

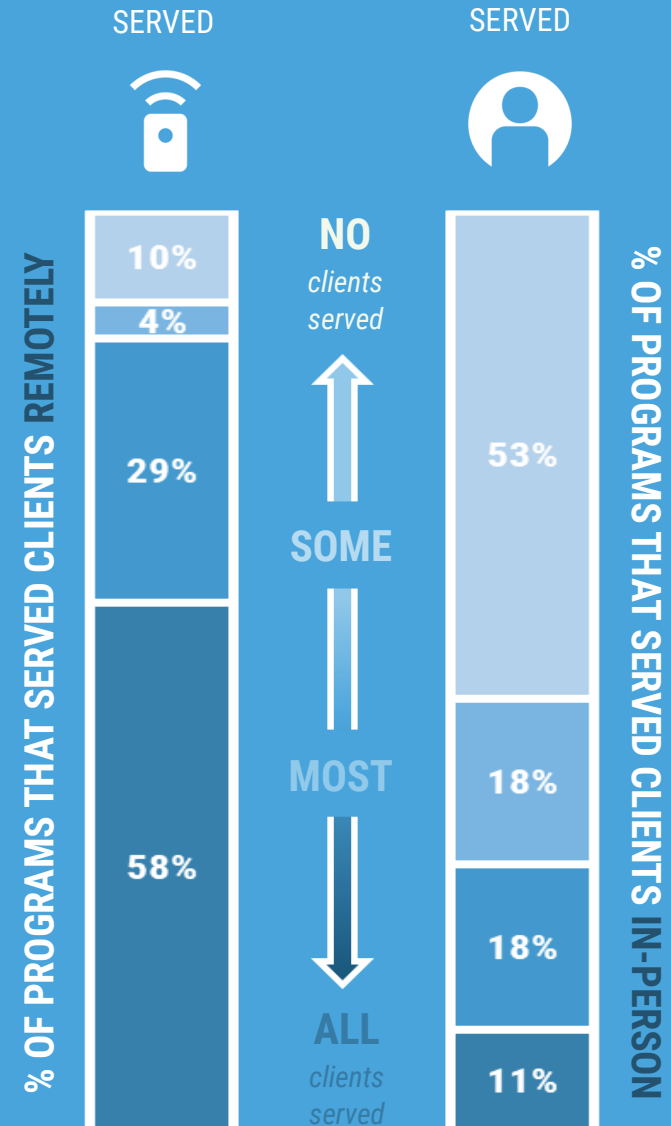


Overview: Clients

This infographic presents our programs by relative client numbers and by the way clients were served. Keeping in touch and engaging with relatively the same number of clients was an impressive feat for half of our programs to accomplish, considering that over half of clients were not served in-person and that 87% of programs served all or most clients remotely.

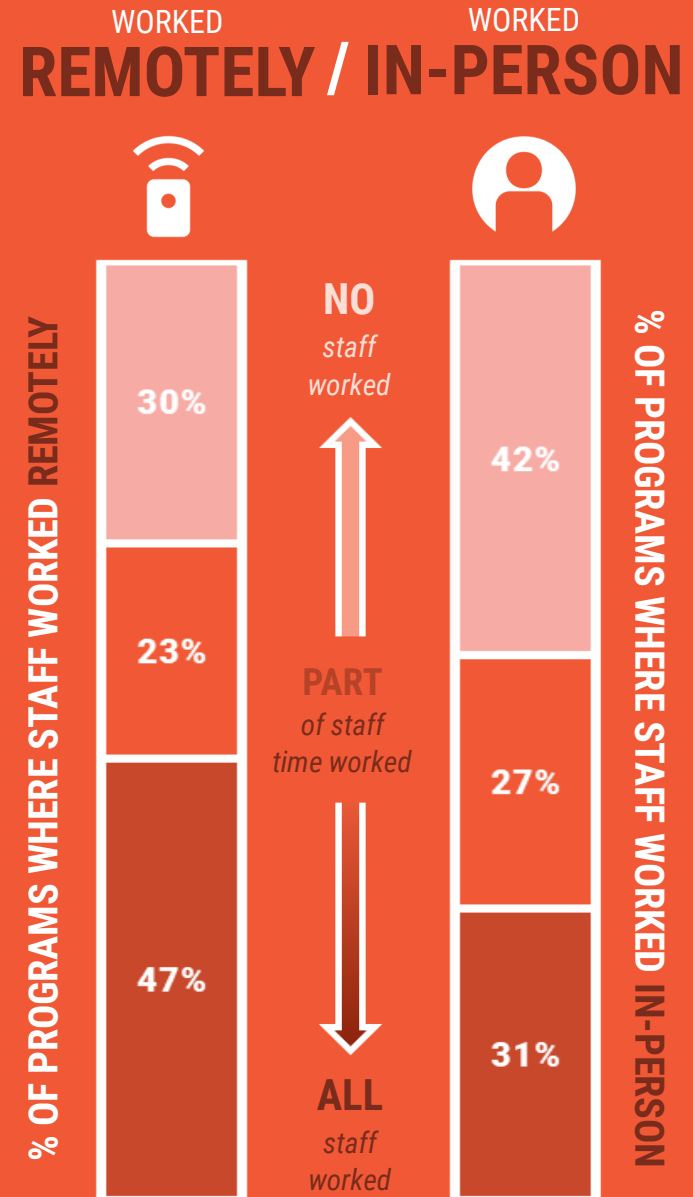


REMOTELY / IN-PERSON



Overview: Staff

This infographic presents our programs by redeployment, paid/unpaid leave, and how staff worked. Our Toronto Seniors Helpline and Meals on Wheels programs utilized the power of our staff from 18 other programs and/or redeployed staff from our partners to meet their increased demand. As essential workers, a good portion of our staff were able to work both in-person and remotely to best suit their and their programs' needs. And 92% of all staff on leave were paid.



Methodology

This report came together through 21 semi-structured interviews with WoodGreen's program Directors, as well as some Vice Presidents, Program Managers, and Foundation staff. Two rounds of interviewing took place (first in April/May and the second in July) to reduce the chances of only capturing the programs' statuses at one snapshot in time. The information from each interview was then copied into a spreadsheet that separated out the data into four categories: facilities, services, staff, and clients. For each question, answers were either left as qualitative responses, grouped into parameters (such as Yes/No, Increased/Decreased, Some/All/None, etc.), or quantified. Those answers that were quantified were either client numbers, staff numbers, or estimations of site capacity to the nearest quartile (i.e. the nearest 25%). This master spreadsheet was then used to create most of the sections of this report by summarizing qualitative responses, calculating statistics, and visualizing the results in graphs and infographics.

The remaining sections were created from additional research and combining some of the information gathered from the original 21 interviews in unique ways. The timeline section was built by amalgamating different time-sensitive events. The three cases studies were created from a series of additional interviews with program or related staff to each of the three programs/units. The *Extraordinary Moments* section resulted from stories told in the original 21 interviews. *WoodGreen's Invisible Heroes* was written based off of information provided by several Directors and from additional, voluntary, and anonymous interviewees from different programs. The *Themes* sections were formed by coding and grouping reoccurring themes throughout the entire research process. The *Client Journey Map* was created from taking a wide sample of program service changes during the pandemic and highlighting these changes in a narrative way. The *PPE* data was pulled from the two apps created to manage PPE inventory and summated. For the *COVID Assessment App* section, the app's raw data from August 17–October 31, 2020 was analyzed in Excel. *Project Onstream* was captured through an interview with its Project Manager. And the *Looking Forward* section was written through discussions with leadership staff and knowledge gained through the original 21 interviews.



Restrictions

Although WoodGreen was able to operate at strong levels during the pandemic, our hands were often tied in situations which had significant impacts on our service delivery. These restrictions were either placed upon us externally or were internal decisions based on ensuring the health and safety of our communities. To understand the full picture of our operations during the pandemic, we must acknowledge these restrictions and the roles that they played in WoodGreen's 2020 programming.

CHILDCARE: Childcare services were completely suspended for months at the beginning of the pandemic. This was a significant restriction that greatly impacted a large portion of our operations.

INCOME TAX CLINIC: Canada Revenue Agency did not approve virtual coaching for self-filing tax online until mid-May. This effectively shut down the Income Tax Clinic and forced staff to cancel thousands of appointments. Although eventually this restriction was lifted and the appointments were slowly rescheduled, it delayed these vital client tax services for many clients for months.

HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS, AND HOMEWARD BOUND: The provincial government disallowed all evictions during the pandemic until further notice, except only in emergency cases. For our programs with housing components, this stopped the flow of clients into these programs. For example, participants who have completed our four-year Homeward Bound program could not be evicted to make way for our newly accepted participants, who were living in precarious housing or shelters while waiting to move.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES: Due to public health restrictions, sports leagues and other recreational activities were not allowed to continue during the pandemic. For some of our programs, these are the core activities to help certain populations (such as newcomer youth) connect with others. The nature of these activities makes it so that moving them online in a meaningful way is not possible, leaving virtually no alternative but to suspend these programs/components of programs. Even online yoga classes for our Counselling and Social Work programs were not possible because of our clients' lack of equipment (yoga mats and the necessary technology like computers with internet access).

PAUSED VOLUNTEER PROGRAM: WoodGreen's resources were restricted due to the reduced number of volunteers supporting the organization during this time. Some of our volunteer positions were paused and this was a choice by WoodGreen given that we were in a state of emergency, monitoring and assessing volunteers' health regularly would have been challenging for the organization, volunteers personally backed away from volunteering, and we had staff available for redeployment to cover some of the work of volunteers.

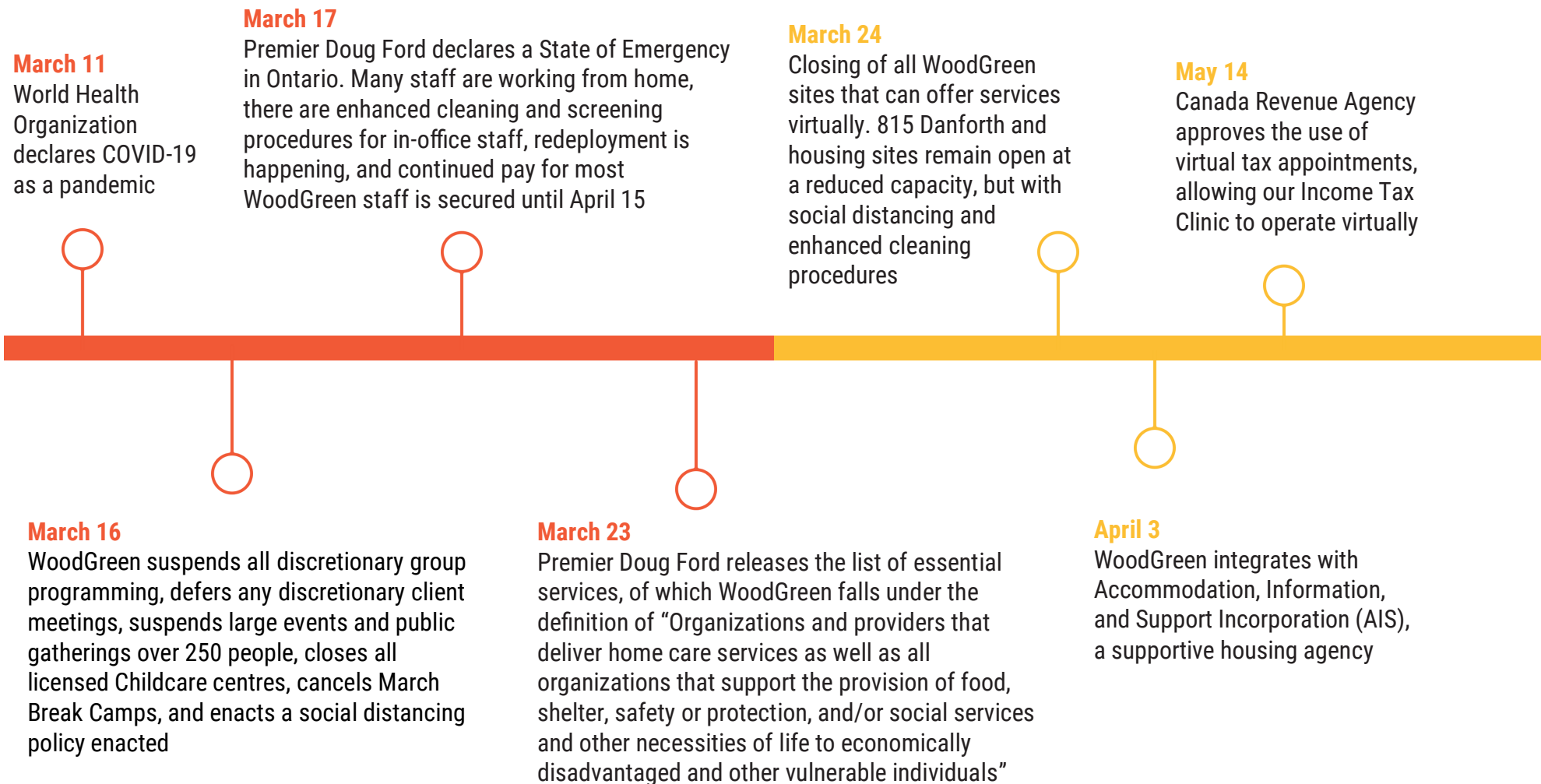
POSTPONED INTERNSHIPS: Many programs at WoodGreen offer an internship component to help propel clients further down their path of economic wellbeing. However, many internship hosts shut down or suspended some activities during the pandemic. This caused this vital program component to be postponed, impacting many programs and disappointing hundreds of clients. Internships started opening up again in July and staff worked hard to make arrangement quickly for clients, but a several month delay still occurred.

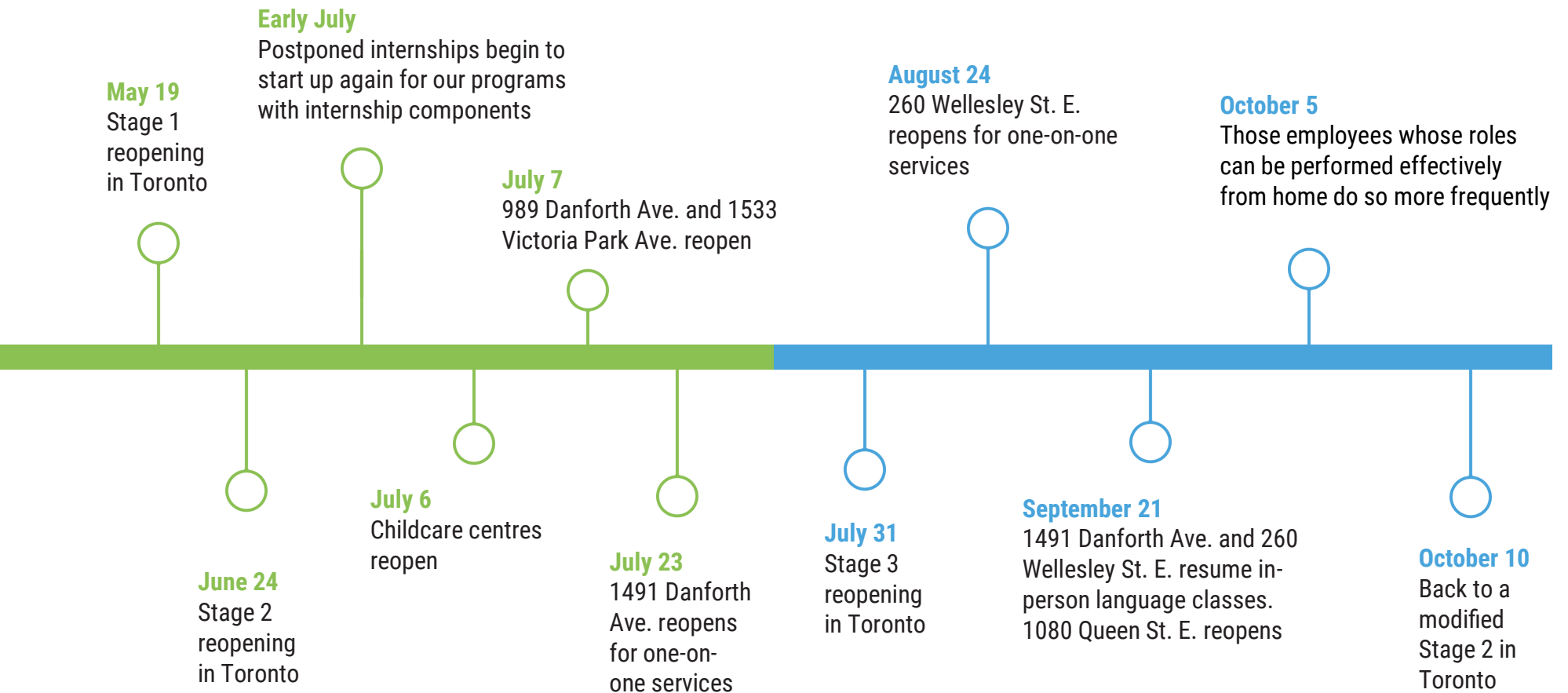
EMPLOYMENT LEAVES: Some staff required leaves of absence because they belong to vulnerable health categories (and/or other designated categories) or needed to be primary caregivers for their children. Although this was not the majority of staff, some programs and staff were impacted by these resulting COVID19 labour effects.



Timeline

The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Toronto spanned several months which impacted WoodGreen's programs in different ways at different times. This timeline reminds us of this and of key dates, as well as sheds light on the fluidity of our temporary reopening; each next step was based off of the previous.





Case Studies

Statistics and quantified data are well complemented by narratives, stories, and case studies because they provide detailed, individual-level information. These next three sections provide samples of the kinds of creative adaptations and thoughtful responses WoodGreen's programs carried out in 2020.

Crescent Town



Crescent Town is a collection of six high rise buildings located in the Taylor Massey neighbourhood in the east end of Toronto, just behind Victoria Park subway station. Historically, it is a transition neighbourhood for newcomers and currently consists of about 56% immigrants, of which the largest diaspora is Bengali. Before the pandemic hit, WoodGreen had an interprofessional care team in place since 2017, which offers the support of case counsellor specialists working alongside physicians in the local clinics. This community was facing serious health concerns, such as mental and physical health, that were interwoven with the challenges they faced as newcomers and immigrants. Therefore, offering case management directly alongside clinical healthcare was allowing clients to receive proper care based on an educated understanding of the unique social determinants of their health as residents of Crescent Town.

Then COVID-19 hit and created even more challenges for the neighbourhood. A virtual model had to be implemented for safety reasons by all the organizations present in the area (WoodGreen is not the only service provider in Crescent Town). Michael Garron Hospital recorded several cases from one of the buildings and asked WoodGreen to step in and run an informative campaign focused on the virus and how to avoid spreading it. This included informational posters in the buildings in multiple languages, the dissemination of masks, and spreading the word through personal networks.

Two collaborative teams were put together to get things under control; An Advisory Team of executives from all the service providers and healthcare practitioners in the area and a Community Response Team made up of on-the-ground volunteers from each building. When cases were spiking, Michael Garron Hospital was able to provide the first pop-up testing centre in the province in only 48 hours.

The stress of the pandemic was weighing greatly on residents so WoodGreen also prioritized mental health supports through newcomer wellness hours that run webinars such as self-care, self-compassion, and mindfulness training. Clients were repeating that a lot of the stigma they faced as newcomers was rooted in how stressed they were and so WoodGreen also responded with income maintenance support and immigration support to help manage and reduce the causes of their stress. Through our partnership with East Toronto Family Practice network, East Toronto Health Partners and Crescent Town Health Centre, we provided almost 1600 virtual visits to 160 clients in the first five months of the lockdown. 20 virtual group workshops impacting over 200 attendees were possible where clients could anonymously or openly ask questions and receive vital information. Additionally, the team distributed to the community 6000 masks and grocery gift cards totaling over \$25,000 to 1351 residents.

There were many lessons learned from the work completed in Crescent Town during the pandemic. The common issues of access to technology, information dissemination, and food insecurity were of course apparent. But what really stood out was the importance of communication,



transparency, and connection to the community. The structured approach worked well and by collaborating with other organizations and community members, we were able to determine the most effective issue management. Additionally, the unique relationship that was formed with the private physician in the local clinic has allowed WoodGreen to truly be a part of primary care for the residents and earn the community's respect for addressing the true social determinants of health.

First Step to Home



First Step to Home is one of WoodGreen's programs that incorporates all three aspects of our organization's transformational program components: Housing and Homelessness, Community and Health, and Financial Empowerment. It supports senior men (age 55 and above) who are experiencing long-term homelessness or precarious housing in Toronto. First Step to Home provides four-year housing, counselling, and life skills development to all participants, plus any additional wraparound supports required.

These participants are often considered 'hard to house' due to the extensive length of time that they have faced homelessness and mental health and addiction issues. Even one year of living on the streets takes a significant physical toll of five to ten years of one's life, so their effective age is quite advanced. There can also be increased aggression between the residents, as they are transitioning from living in adverse conditions, like the streets and shelters, to living with each other in the housing units. However, in providing stable housing and support, these men can prioritize their well-beings and health over finding a place to sleep for the night. They are able to collaborate with social workers to establish individualized plans on prioritizing the areas for improvement in their lives and ultimately have an active, participatory role in achieving independent living.

Yet, challenges arose with COVID-19 as the usual day-to-day activities were greatly limited. In learning how to manage day-to-day tasks, staff normally provide assistance to the participants with various life skills such as laundry, taking medications, and cooking. But during the pandemic, things were a bit different as laundry had to be scheduled in shifts and communal cooking classes were put on hold. Food assistance increased as a result of these restrictions and equipment such as microwaves and personal (non-communal) dishes and cookware were not available to every participant. Common spaces like the TV room had to be closed and the men do not have many belongings besides what is provided for them in the studio apartments, which left them virtually nothing to do during quarantine. This was especially challenging for them as many also face stress, aggression, and mental health issues.

Luckily, technology was able to play a crucial role in overcoming these challenges as First Step to Home generously received donations from TELUS, Cisco, and Compugen. They provided immediate help with refurbished laptops and delivered sustainable, long-term support by providing WIFI access for all the men in the building. WoodGreen also created a landing page with quick to access resources to make it easy for seniors to use this new technology. This had an enormous positive impact for our participants and so through these transformative donations and solutions, we really realize the importance and potential that technology has in improving our clients' lives.

And, of course, the value of case counsellors and creative program staff could not be over emphasized. Their continued preventative care and support helped keep the participants healthy during these challenging times. No matter what issues arose in the First Step to Home residence or what other impacts of the pandemic were felt, they were always there to support the clients and prioritize their needs. That is the mark of a truly client-centered program.



Back Office Units



This report has highlighted the fantastic work that our programs have managed to do despite all the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we have teams working hard in our back office units that have faced their own struggles and achieved their own outputs. This report would not be complete without recognizing and discussing their vital operations during the pandemic.

WoodGreen could be said to operate like an orchestra, with each unit as a section and each program as a musician. Although the programs play the instruments, central services fill other roles like conductor, stage manager, music librarian, and concertmaster to ensure the smooth execution of the score. The entire orchestra must prep, practice, and perform together, just as our central services did with our programs.

Payroll: an often unnoticed essential function continued to operate on time while dealing with requests for leaves of absences, providing employment records for departing staff, and navigating the complicated and new topic of pandemic pay. The newly created Project Management Office managed PPE procurement, tracking, distributing, and installation to keep those working on-site/in the field safe and allow the reopening of some sites.

The Foundation worked hard to support programs with clients facing food insecurity as well as receive key donations (such as devices and internet service) wherever possible. In the early days of the pandemic, the Foundation was instrumental in securing hand sanitizer, face masks/shield, and other PPE when it was next to impossible to source these resources from existing supply chains. This was invaluable to the staff on the front lines.

As new information and policies rolled in daily, People & Culture had to stay on top of all labour relations. Making decisions regarding all 750 of WoodGreen's employees was particularly difficult with this everchanging and limited information. This led the team to always feel like they were two days behind; by the time a decisions was made and approved, the state of the city had already changed. However, keeping our staff's health and safety at the core of all operations, from a COVID-19 assessment app to keeping on the pulse of new public policies, ensured that our staff were taken care of.

IT was a principal player as technology, hardware, software, and troubleshooting impacted every staff's ability to do their job effectively during the pandemic. Moving from a largely in-person service organization to a full mobile workforce is a huge feat to take on overnight. Luckily, IT had already started the transition to using cloud-based solutions and were able to speed up this process exponentially. Laptops and cellphones had to be ordered, set up, and deployed to staff as well.

Finally, every back office unit had to perform harmoniously through strong communication, collaboration, and prioritization. Stakeholders and employees needed to be kept current and aware of what was going on internally. Groups needed to share best practices, communicate their needs, and even put their needs aside to help programs requiring immediate resources and support. Redeployment, cross-pollination, and resource optimization were strong tools used during this time. Every back office unit helped each musician play their best despite the challenges—one on-time payroll payment, one procured donation, and one note at a time.



Extraordinary Moments

HOMeward BOUND

Mothers' Day looked different this year during COVID-19, but Homeward Bound ensured that the single mothers felt appreciated. Shoppers Drug Mart gift cards and meals from Real Food for Real Kids added a little something extra to their day.

WORKERS INITIATIVE NETWORK

A father who has partial custody of his child struggled with keeping them engaged and entertained all day. His counsellor stepped in to help by sharing activity kits and their expertise in other areas to go above and beyond in supporting him.

FIRST STEP TO HOME

A client had never been able to afford a cellphone. But once Telus donated a phone to some of the participants, he was able to call his daughter for the first time in months as well as connect with his grandchildren.

FULL CIRCLE TEAM

An interesting discovery of the talents of two clients allowed for an unsuspecting connection. One client loves playing piano and another guitar, so a staff member introduced them so they regularly play music over the phone together to meaningfully connect during the pandemic.

CHILDCARE

Many children missed their friends terribly and needed a break from their parents. WoodGreen was able to help connect parents and kids through our secure online platform and facilitate virtual playdates.

NEWCOMER PROGRAMS

Due to the pandemic, a newcomer client's husband lost his job and she was the only one working in the household. They also had one young daughter to care for and another on the way very soon. Her C-section was going to happen in the height of the pandemic. Her case counsellor helped her secure a crib, grocery cards, EI maternity leave, and counselling. She gave birth to a healthy baby on June 11.



WoodGreen's Invisible Heroes

During the unprecedented COVID-19 health crisis, social workers, case counsellors, and support workers have stepped up and taken the roles of unsung heroes. In the face of a grave national emergency and great uncertainties, frontline workers shouldered the task of being the backbone of the healthcare defense. Even though essential work is widely recognized as work that ensures basic necessities for human survival like food, health, and safety, many social workers, case counsellors, and support workers are left out of this essential worker narrative. Because these positions mainly provide preventative care to the most vulnerable population instead of immediate care to COVID-19 patients, their effort and importance is often undermined in the media and unknown to most people.

Many people only see those who work in physically endangering places outside of their homes (doctors, nurses, grocery store workers, etc.), and not those who help prevent others from leaving their homes or accessing healthcare, as essential workers. For example, many community posters and banners thanking essential workers have no visual representation or mention of jobs like social work. According to the Social Work Careers Magazine, social workers were declined the same opportunity to “skip the line” from a chained grocery store that was meant for healthcare professionals. The store employees did not recognize them as frontline workers and questioned extensively what the workers’ roles were in the hospital.

However, the lack of recognition of their importance has real life implications beyond just receiving praise and public attention. The importance of the social, cultural and economic barriers to healthcare (known as the social determinants of health) was heightened by the pandemic and made underprivileged populations, which are the majority of WoodGreen’s clients, more at risk than ever. WoodGreen’s essential workers’ roles became increasingly urgent, as they improved these social determinants of health by connecting clients with essential resources such as housing and food. Their work was indispensable to the healthcare system as they provided vital supports to ensure their clients can physically distance and maintain good mental health.

WoodGreen has recognized that the lack of acknowledgement of these essential workers’ importance has serious and immediate consequences on their lives and the whole healthcare system. It hurts their morale and creates barriers for them to get proper compensation and support. WoodGreen has taken the action of creating a special newsletter to recognize the contribution and sacrifice of their employees, referring them as “WoodGreen Heroes”. The company has also interviewed frontline workers to better understand their challenges and to include their narratives as part of this section of this report. The interviewees are speaking on behalf of the general feelings and struggles that social workers, case counsellors, support workers, and the like face along with their personal experiences.

COVID-19 has exaggerated many difficulties for these essential workers, such as not having enough safe physical space to meet with clients. It also has been increasingly difficult to recruit and onboard staff virtually during the pandemic, as well as securing the right technology and devices. Usually they would accompany their clients to hospital trips to avoid them from having panic attacks and other complications during the process, but this has been made impossible by the COVID-19 restrictions. It takes a tremendous amount of advocacy work for hospitals to make an exception for the clients.



One such staff is a WoodGreen Adult Protection Service Worker (APSW) who provides holistic support to adults with developmental disorders to live independently in the community. She has worked for WoodGreen for over ten years while being in some provincial and municipal councils to help break down accessibility barriers in the city. She has used social stories to transform factual information about COVID-19 into a more engaging and narrative format to help adult clients who have been identified to have a developmental disability understand the social context and behavioral expectations better. The social stories include certain sentence structures and visual cues that facilitate the communication of key information. Most Adult Protective Service workers make about 20 phone calls a day, at times can be an hour long, to remind clients about the rules around COVID-19 and to address any concerns. She even delivered food bank donations on her bike to clients facing food insecurity. Adult Protective Service workers also provide preventative care for clients and help them understand their health to eliminate unnecessary visits to the Emergency Room, and hence lowering their risk of contracting COVID-19 and reducing the stress on the already overstretched healthcare system.

Unfortunately, as an APSW, she feels little recognition by the community for the importance of her work. When her neighbours were clanging pots and pans to cheer for essential workers at 7:30pm I yell, "What about the social workers?". She feels that because her work is mainly preventive care and unity. Additionally, because during the time period of stay-at-home orders, her work was mainly remote, h she has been working about much more during the pandemic all while homeschooling her daughter.

Other staff also expressed similar concern for the lack of recognition that these invisible heroes get. Another interviewee feels like the reason why mental health workers have been left out of the essential worker narrative is that most people don't know what they do. Like many mental health workers, she provides counselling and case management to adults in the community to help them develop healthy coping skills with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Her program includes a variety of supports for a wide range of clients. The program also has minimal eligibility requirements in order to have fewer barriers to participation. This work is essential as they help individuals and communities cope with experiences of grief, confusion, anxiety and trauma related to COVID-19. Despite the importance of this role, many feel rather devalued in the community.

As COVID-19 continues to affect Toronto, the working conditions and environment desperately need to change for social workers, case counsellors, and support workers. It is vital for policy makers, organizations, and companies to recognize the importance and difficulties of these essential workers and to be able to provide them with proper compensations and support. It is vital to tell the stories of the invisible heroes in our community who diligently work above and beyond to ensure that the most vulnerable groups can get through this national crisis. It is vital to incorporate their voices as consultative feedback to continue to get through the lasting effects of the pandemic. It is vital to take this opportunity to demonstrate creativity, innovation, and leadership by influential agencies. It is vital to thank the invisible heroes.



Themes Among Our Staff

Through this research, several key themes continually surfaced. They are issues, challenges, solutions, actions, and discoveries during the first wave among our staff, our clients, and both or other areas. These themes informed many of our decisions and prioritizations and help describe what the first wave of the pandemic looked like to a non-profit like WoodGreen.

WORKING FROM HOME CHALLENGES: Working from home for many of our staff, given the nature of their work and their personal situations, is not always possible. Many staff are parents who had no choice but to provide primary care and education for their children while attempting to work from home. Plus, having a dedicated, private, and well-functioning work space in one's home is a luxury many do not have. These challenges, among others, made it difficult for many staff to work effectively and healthily from their residences.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES: Staff's knowledge and usage of the online tools available to them was not as high as it could have been pre-pandemic. Due to the rapid need to switch to more virtual work, staff's skills in online tools such as Microsoft Teams and SharePoint increased drastically. Additionally, many staff did not have cellphones and/or laptops available to them to work remotely/offsite with. This access to devices for staff was also greatly increased and these two major technological advancements within the organization will be long-term, useful effects from the pandemic.

REDEPLOYMENT: Redeployment both inside and outside of a staff member's program or unit was quite common during COVID-19. Many staff were placed on a redeployment list for weekly assignments with varying amounts of time (the minimum was about one day a week redeployment). There were also more permanent/indefinite redeployments that lasted weeks or until certain operations were able to resume in later stages of reopening. Many of these redeployments were focused around food insecurity which spanned multiple programs and target populations, from seniors to newcomers to homeless individuals.

Internal redeployment also occurred. One common internal redeployment was moving some housing maintenance staff onto additional cleaning since only essential maintenance jobs were being completed and more frequent and thorough cleaning was needed.

CROSS-POLLINATION: Strong collaboration and communication between units and programs has been instrumental in having programs run as well as they have during the pandemic. The importance of interconnectivity and of not always working in program silos has never been more important and, moving forward, hopefully more attention will be paid to upkeeping these practices. Examples include the Meals on Wheels program cross-pollinating with the Transportation program and staff teaching other staff how to effectively use new virtual technology solutions such as Microsoft Teams.

EXACERBATED VACANCIES: The vacancies that existed before as well as those that opened up during the pandemic were greatly exacerbated by the restrictions imposed by COVID-19. Recruiting, hiring, and onboarding new staff was challenging during this time, but so was attempting to cover the work of these vacant positions. Existing teams had to absorb this work while often already being maxed out with their own work, given the additional tasks that working for a service organization during the pandemic demanded from them.



Themes Among Our Clients

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY: So many of our clients were not initially equipped with the right devices and/or internet access to be able to effectively access all the remote services they required. This was a pervasive issue for nearly all of our programs. Even if some clients had devices, such as our youth clients, they often did not have access to their own data and the public data they normally used (at public libraries, restaurants, WoodGreen sites, etc.) were not available to them during the pandemic. WoodGreen, the Foundation, and our partners were able to rally together and find solutions to these technology accessibility challenges from lending devices, to getting technology/service donated, to increasing our organization's technological capital.

FOOD INSECURITY: Another challenge that was seen in many of our programs was the issue of food insecurity for our clients. Seniors, homeless and low-income families, persons with disabilities, and those with mental health issues are just some of the vulnerable populations we regularly serve who were at high-risk for food insecurity during the pandemic. Food insecurity includes access to food, the ability to grocery shop for oneself, the amount of food support needed, and the development of one's cooking skills (as many cooking classes and workshops to increase a client's independence had to be cancelled or limited). This theme was very evident through the huge increase in demand for the Meals on Wheels program, the countless donated grocery cards and foodstuffs, and the increased use of the Pet and Human Food Bank, to name a few.

NEWCOMERS VULNERABILITY: During the pandemic, newcomers to Canada faced additional barriers that put them in a particularly vulnerable position. Many newcomers faced language barrier challenges that reduced their ability to properly access and understand key public health announcements and government assistance

programs. Our newcomer program staff became a main point of contact for newcomers to stay informed and safe during the pandemic. Additionally, newcomer clients had a high propensity of not having proper access to devices and internet/data.

LIMITED OUTREACH: Part of our outreach strategy at WoodGreen involves going into the community to reach clients where they already are, such as libraries, community centres, and faith-based places. Conducting outreach at satellite sites had to be paused and online strategies had to be the main avenue for outreach, which means we may not have reached the same breadth of clients that our in-person outreach strategies were able to pre-pandemic.

YOUTH DISENGAGEMENT: Some youth have felt less connected to and interested in programs because of the loss of the in-person components. Meeting up with their friends, playing sports, and hanging out in-person couldn't always be replaced well by virtual alternatives and therefore there has been some youth disengagement.



Other Themes

CHANGE IN OFFICE ENVIRONMENT: Two major changes have occurred to the average Toronto office. First, staff working from home has become much more common than it was in most offices in the city. More offices now offer it as an option or offices that allowed remote work pre-pandemic now have more staff utilizing it more often. Second, working in person in an office is now subject to social distancing, wearing masks, and enhanced cleaning. This changes how we work and how we feel at work. WoodGreen is not exempt from these two major work environment changes that the COVID-19 pandemic caused.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS: The pandemic has pushed programs to improve their technological skills and usage overnight. This has actually been a very beneficial outcome of the pandemic as some IT projects and products have not been advanced or utilized as much as they could have been pre-pandemic. These organization-wide technological advancements have also been beneficial for clients as many clients benefit greatly from the flexibility of more virtual options. Barriers to participation for clients have been reduced for some, such as those with challenging schedules, far commutes to WoodGreen sites, family responsibilities, or accessibility issues. Due to these positive IT and service outcomes, staff expressed that offering more services online and programs utilizing technology more are characteristics of WoodGreen's operations that will be here to stay long after the pandemic is over.

THE FOUNDATION'S SUPPORT: Nearly every program mentioned how thankful they were for the support of the Foundation. It cannot be overstated that during these challenging times, the Foundation was able to procure needed items and support major issues like food insecurity and lack of access to technology in a very helpful way to our programs and services.

ADVOCATING FOR OUR CLIENTS: With an organization the size of WoodGreen, we are able to help put weight behind our clients' concerns and push for change from institutions that affect their lives. Several examples can illustrate ways in which we can help advocate for our clients. Our Homeward Bound program staff spoke with the colleges that our participants attend to persuade them into being more flexible with the online courses; Specifically, accommodating childcare challenges by pre-recording classes and allowing online exam periods instead of strict pre-set exam times. Our single mothers should not have to fail a course because their child is walking behind them

while they are taking their exam during an inconvenient time. Also, our income tax clinic needed the CRA to approve virtual filing assistance before our program could assist clients. We were able to express the importance of allowing this to the CRA to help make the case for approving the online process faster.

EARLY PPE PREPARATION: Some of our staff had the great insight of stocking up on PPE before facilities closed down, as early as January 2020. This arguably is one of the reasons that during the first wave, WoodGreen saw few cases of COVID-19 within the organization.

CREATION OF THE PMO: There were several projects at WoodGreen that would have benefitted from the leadership of a Project Manager. Then, once the pandemic hit, more projects that required immediately attention popped up in areas such as change management, data, and technology. Thus, a Project Management Office (PMO) was created in May and quickly moved full steam ahead on some of the highest priority projects. The PMO will hopefully be a long-standing addition to the organization and continue its organization-wide impact.

CONTROLLING PANIC: The possibility of contracting COVID-19 has been a scary reality for all of us and has caused a lot of stress for all community members. In some programs, panic has set in and resulted in incidents. Deescalating and controlling that panic among staff and clients was well executed and allowed incidents to remain small and contained. This ultimately ensured the safety of everyone during these overwhelming times. Internally, we increased communication with our staff significantly including disseminating information from the government daily. This level of internal communication was unprecedented and helped contain some of the stress amongst employees.

CORPORATE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: With our corporate volunteer program unable to run during the pandemic, there are hundreds of people who are not learning about, spreading the word about, becoming involved with, and donating to WoodGreen.

GROWTH: There were also new programs and a merger that occurred during the pandemic, which speaks to how hard the organization worked to not just continue operations, but to continue to grow.



Impact of Lost Services

To help comprehend the loss of support due to COVID-19 on the communities we serve, this section focuses on trying to grasp the magnitude of these lost services. Despite WoodGreen's persistent efforts and all the services we were able to deliver during the pandemic, there were still clients we could not reach and many suspended or removed services. Our clients' journeys also looked different than during normal operations, from the first interaction with clients (no more walk-in's or in-person outreach) to supporting all generations in their families.

Suspended or Removed Services

On page 11 of this report, it showed that 70% of WoodGreen's programs had removed services during the pandemic. But what are these removed services? The list below shows the types of services that were removed or suspended. By reading this list, you can see just how important these services are to our clients and to the core of our programs.



All non-essential transportation for clients

Childcare

Child-minding

Common spaces like TV rooms

Congregate dining

Events

Group counselling

Group outings

Group programming

Hip hop group for the Youth Wellness Centre

Housing exits and entrances

In-person appointments

In-person counselling

In-person outreach in the community

Internships

Limited referrals

Meet-up spaces for youth

Soccer, basketball, and badminton

Social gatherings

The number of English classes offered

Trip to Ottawa for Civic Rights of Passage

Visitors

Volunteering (certain types)



Impact of Lost Services

Client Journey Map

ACCESSING WG

Many WoodGreen clients first access our services by walking into one of our physical locations and speaking to our front desk/reception staff. However, during the height of the pandemic, this was not possible and clients learned about our supports on our website, on social media, or on news outlets in the case of our Toronto Seniors Helpline



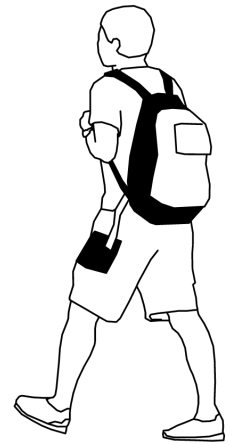
CHILDCARE

For our youngest clientele, childcare is the service they access the most. Unfortunately childcare was completely shut down from March to July. Resources and initiatives to help kids virtually connect with each other were provided as best as possible, but there was no real childcare possible



YOUTH PROGRAMS

Youth may be more tech-savvy than the average adult, but connecting in person is just as or more important to them. Not being able to meet up with friends, organize in community spaces, play in recreational leagues, meet new people, and talk to someone in person were major impacts to WoodGreen's youth clientele during the pandemic.





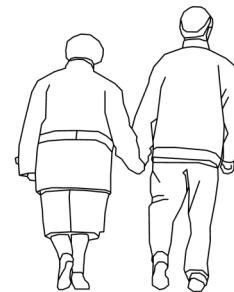
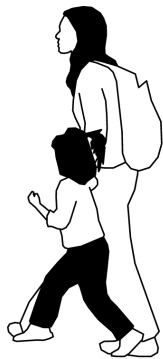
MENTAL HEALTH

Although our mental health support programs have been able to stay in consistent contact with most clients, it has almost exclusively been virtual. The additional comfort and support that comes with an in-person session has largely not been considered safe for staff or clients, which greatly impacted our ability to provide the healthcare we wanted to



NEWCOMER PROGRAMS

English language courses have been moved online, but certain wraparound supports like child-minding were not able to be provided virtually. Also, information regarding the pandemic, how to keep your family safe, and how to apply for CERB was constantly updating. Non-newcomer clients even required assistance with the wave of information being shared, so our newcomers with limited local connections and possibly limited language levels especially needed support. Luckily our staff have been extremely dedicated by answering late night calls and translating key information



SENIOR CARE

Seniors were among the most vulnerable persons during the COVID-19 pandemic and among the hardest to virtually serve successfully. Assisted Living and PSW programs continued as best they could with plenty of PPE. However friendly visiting, transportation, day programs, and other social activities had to halt. These interactions are vital to the health of seniors so activity and wellness kits as well as over-the-phone check-in's took place. Caregiver burnout was definitely heightened during the pandemic, despite our teams reaching out and offering whatever virtual support we could

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)



In many WoodGreen programs, PPE was already utilized to keep staff and clients safe. However, the COVID-19 pandemic completely changed the way PPE was managed at our organization. The quantities and types of PPE grew exponentially, meaning that new processes and solutions needed to be implemented.

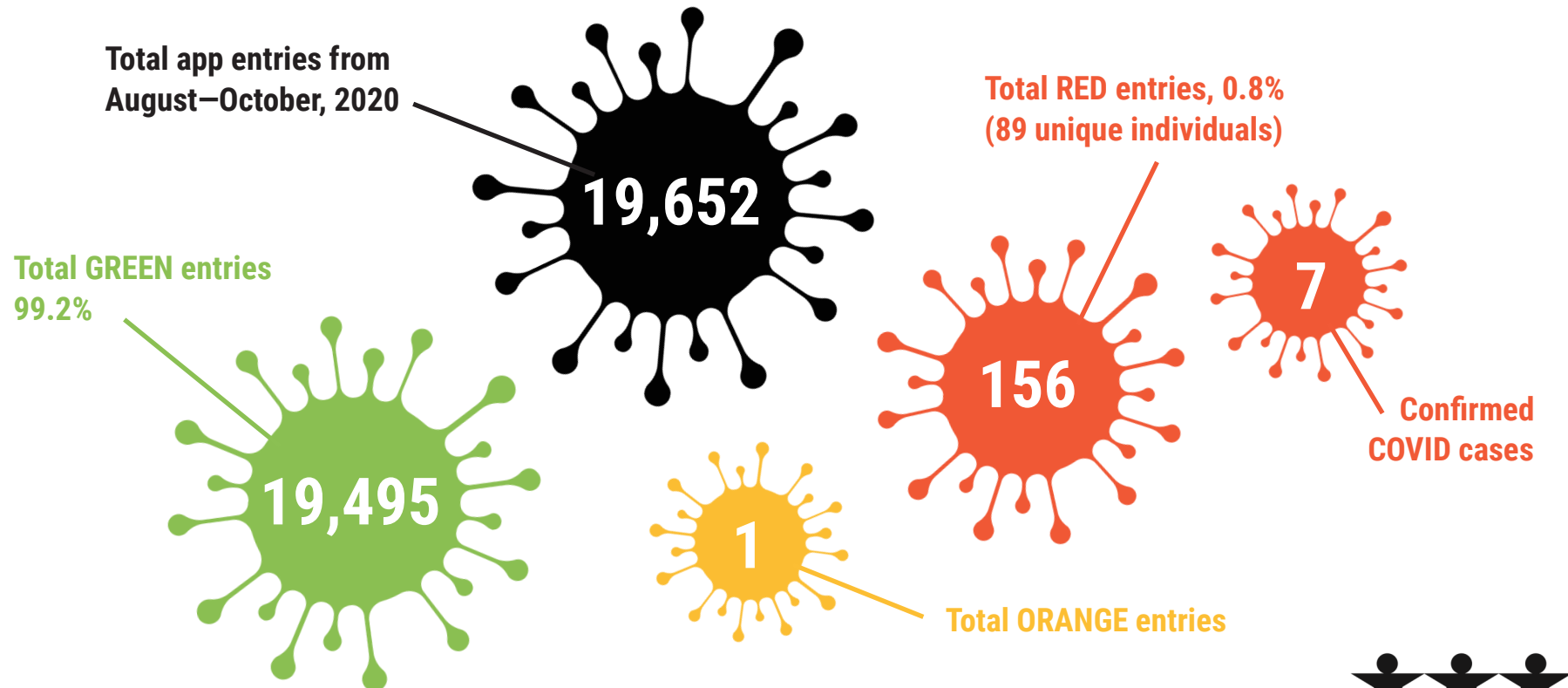
The first 3-4 months of the pandemic were very hectic for managing PPE. Procurement, tracking of inventory, creating PPE apps, training all supervisors on using the apps, and making adjustments had to be done in record time. Suppliers had to be secured when global demand for PPE was unprecedented and certain programs required or preferred certain types of PPE like medical grade gloves versus vinyl gloves.

There were two major hubs of PPE procurement, storage, and dissemination: one that was decentralized for the Community Care Unit (our largest user of PPE comprising of 27 sites) and one that was centralized for the remaining units and operated through our Housing unit. Two apps were created, one for each hub, which helped manage inventory in real time. The apps contained useful features such as alerts for when products were low in stock which were uniquely calibrated for the specific type of PPE. So for example, if the number of bottles of hand sanitizer dropped below a set amount, it would switch from a green visual indicator to a yellow or red one, meaning time to restock soon or immediately depending on the quantity remaining.

Data is from March 24 (for other units data) or April 1 (for CCU data), 2020 to October 31, 2020 (the end of the period this report covers).

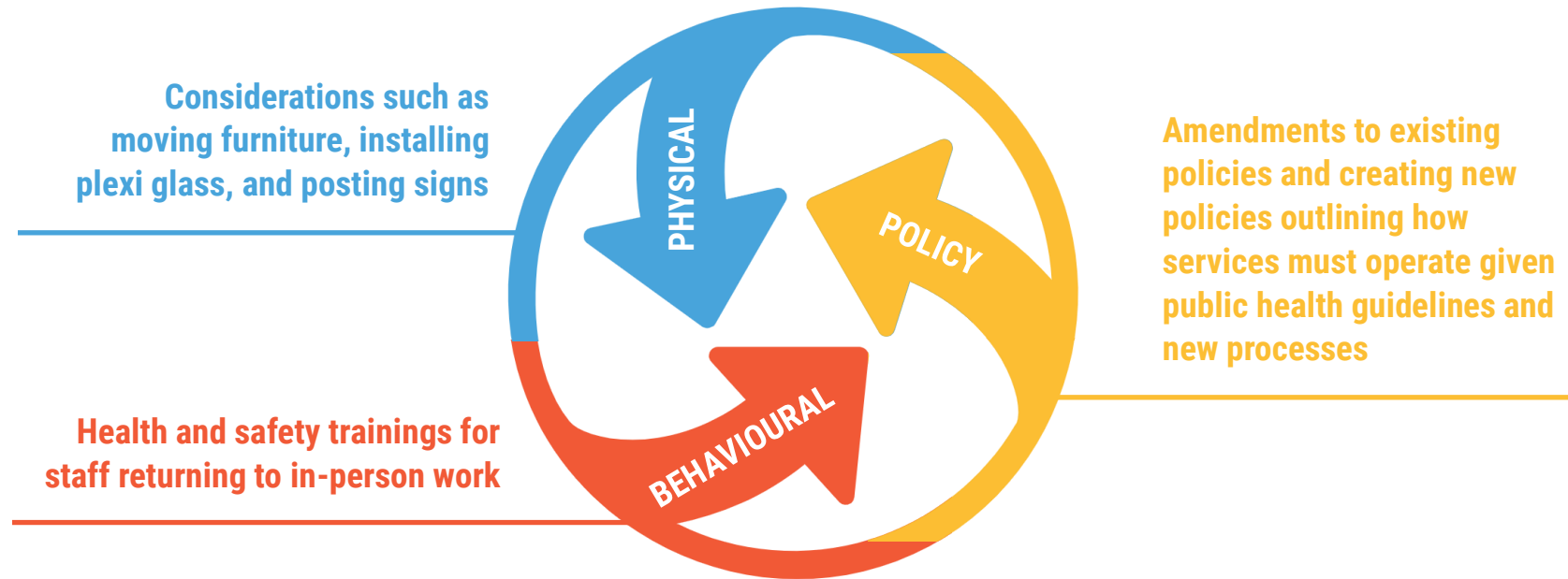
COVID Assessment App

WoodGreen has about 750 staff, many of which worked in the community despite the presence of the virus. We needed to create an effective, yet simple way to screen our staff on a daily basis, so we developed the COVID Assessment App. Before the beginning of a shift, every staff member would complete the app which would automatically submit their result to their manager and to People and Culture if needed. Results were either **Green (clear to report to work)**, **Orange (self isolation recommended due to recent travelling)**, or **Red (COVID test recommended based on symptoms and proximity to COVID positive individuals)** based on the combination of their responses to questions about symptoms they are currently experiencing (that are not explained by other causes), if they have been in close physical contact with a person with symptoms or a positive COVID-19 test result, and if they have travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days. In implementing this process, we were able to make data-driven decisions, inform and remind our staff to monitor their health, and to help prevent and reduce cases from spreading among our staff and our community.



Data is from August 17, 2020 (first day of full implementation of the app) to October 31, 2020 (the end of the period this report covers).

Project Onstream



In summer 2020, cases lowered and some restrictions lifted, making it safe to start to reopen some WoodGreen locations. June 24th marked the beginning of the Stage 2 reopening in Toronto and July 31st marked the Stage 3 reopening. Stage 2 allowed our childcare centres to reopen as well as our 989 Danforth Avenue, 1533 Victoria Park Avenue, and 1491 Danforth Avenue sites. Stage 3 lead the way for us to reopen 260 Wellesley Street East and 1080 Queens Street East, as well as open up in-person language classes at two sites.

The order to our reopening schedule was influenced by the various governmental guidelines. Childcare was the first program to be permitted to reopen so it was allocated first priority. Then employment services, one-on-one mental health services, and eventually some group programming could resume. Before more high-risk activities where physical distancing is more difficult were able to start up again (such as indoor senior exercise classes or our in-person walk-in clinic), Toronto reverted back to a modified Stage 2 on October 10th. Project Onstream was paused as another wave of the virus cloaked the city.

Although reopening was not completed, we were able to build the infrastructure required for full reopening and develop an operational plan to do so. Therefore, once it is safe, WoodGreen is prepared to execute a Project Onstream in its entirety. The graphic above depicts the approach that Project Onstream followed and will follow, specifically addressing considerations for reopening along physical, policy, and behaviour lines.



Looking Forward

At the time of writing, COVID-19 continues to greatly affect our communities and many uncertainties exist. However, WoodGreen is still trying to forecast as best we can so that we can support our clients effectively in the future. This section outlines some upcoming events, potential long-term solutions resulting from short-term changes, other significant global issues affecting our communities, and possible long-lasting effects of the pandemic to account for.

Employment Ontario

One of WoodGreen's funders, Employment Ontario (EO), is completely transforming the way employment services are funded and delivered. Specifically, there will be fifteen Service System Managers (SSMs) who will act as third party contracted intermediaries between the funder and service providers. The SSMs will be operating on a pay-for-performance basis, so they will be focusing on sub-contracting to fewer, high-performing service providers and/or delivering direct services themselves. The new system will also prioritize supporting 'Stream C' clients who are defined as those with complex needs, multiple barriers, and/or clients on social assistance. Before the pandemic, EO had begun piloting the new system in three regions. However in the Toronto catchment area, the Request for Proposal has just been released and the full transition will take over 12 months and extend into 2022.

The pandemic has shifted job markets and industries which means that employment service providers will have to decide on how to approach these new problems and be able demonstrate their ability to do so as the system changes. SSMs will be looking for providers who align with local labour market demands and focus on wraparound support for clients. We are a large, multi-service organization with many partners and community connections who is therefore well-positioned to provide these required wraparound supports and to stay on top of labour market trends. Employment is also an important piece of our new strategic plan and this EO transformation is an opportunity for WoodGreen to improve outcomes for our employment services clients.

This includes initiatives such as testing a new service delivery model, exploring mergers or other partnerships, developing strong relationships with employers, advancing technology solutions, and strengthening performance tracking.

Childcare Sector Changes

Childcare has been turned upside during COVID-19. For months it was completely suspended and when it was able to reopen, significant changes were in place: social distancing, mask wearing, and strict screening processes. Financing childcare and supporting educators and caregivers is also a significant challenge given the many restrictions and lack of funding commitments. WoodGreen is one of the best (and potentially the only) childcare provider in the city who is effectively positioned to influence evidence-based policy recommendations due to our size, partnerships, and understanding of the current operating pressures. Working alongside experts like the Child Care Resources Unit and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, our childcare team is working hard to help influence and advocate for the sector through letters, policy briefs, and sitting at decision-making tables.

Philanthropy Model

It is important to acknowledge the changes not only on the service delivery side, but also on our donation and sponsorship side. How individuals and companies are supporting community service organizations has changed during the pandemic for a variety of

reasons. Imagine Canada outlined some of these changes in their presentation *Philanthropy in a Pandemic: Challenges & Innovation in Corporate Community Investment* (June 2020). They noted that funders are responding with actions such as funding commitments, extending report deadlines, relaxing some restrictions, and releasing new funds for new programs. They also noted that employees are much more engaged in current COVID-19 fundraising efforts compared to an average campaign. We are also seeing Canadians' spending slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels, but many still feel that revenue streams normally utilized by charities are ones they will not be supporting strongly just yet. All of these factors influence how individuals and corporations will or will not be supporting WoodGreen and the Foundation has been preparing for and adapting to these changes.

Different Future Funding Arrangements

The pandemic has eaten up all three level of governments' budgets, so they will have to look at reconciling numbers. This may result in programs not being funded to the same extent that they were and changes in the prioritization of program funding. WoodGreen will need to be proactive about this, including looking at which programs will need to contract and which will need to be prepped to expand. This consideration is similar to the previous one, but about government funders instead of corporate funders. Imagine Canada also provided some insights into how to combat these changes, specifically that innovation is the key predictor of strong community investment. Organizations that were designed to allow teams to innovate were correlated with the strongest effectiveness of community investment. WoodGreen's board has had a specific committee for Strategy & Innovation for some time, but more specifically and lately we have been ramping up our data and technology strategies through the Project Management Office. We

are working on becoming a more data-centric organization through utilizing technology, which will bring innovation to our learning and operations.

Change in Office Environment

Before the pandemic, few staff had the option or even ability to work remotely. There was not a widespread work from home policy and most staff spent their working hours at a WoodGreen site or in the community. Now, infrastructure such as devices and management tools has now been set up in many teams so that working remotely is possible for a much larger percentage of employees. These remote capabilities will not cease to exist when the pandemic is over and therefore likely will become a normal part of working at WoodGreen. Additionally, work life will not just be different because of an increase in remote work, but in-office work will remain altered. Hand sanitizing, extra office cleaning, social distancing, mask wearing, smaller site capacities, etc. are practices that will still linger even as the risk of contracting COVID-19 subsides. The office environment at WoodGreen will continue to be changed for some time, whether that's many staff continuing to work from home often or health precautions at our sites.

Changes in Real Estate Use and Value

Due to the aforementioned changes in the work environment, it is likely that the amount of office space required by companies and organizations will be lower, which will affect the value of real estate across Toronto. For real estate that is owned, this will have a depreciating effect on WoodGreen's assets. However, it will also drop the cost of acquiring new real estate and one of WoodGreen's key strategic priorities is scaling up housing. There have been many discussions among leadership about how we can seize these potential opportunities and expand our reach, and these important goals are reflected in our new strategic plan.



Potential Virtual Homecare Models

In our Community Care unit, in-person homecare for seniors needed to be minimized during the pandemic. Due to their age and potential underlying conditions, seniors were considered a high-risk group for COVID-19. Although in many cases in-person care was necessary, there were instances where remote care could be utilized effectively. One such example was the implementation of a virtual homecare model where care (such as wellness checks, monitoring visits, and professional services) is delivered to seniors through video conferencing or phone calls. The Ontario Ministry of Health released their support for the expansion of virtual homecare models at the very beginning of the pandemic, to help Local Health Integration Networks (LIHNs) rapidly increase their use of them. The limitations and considerations of the pandemic required this type of service, but after the pandemic subsides, will it still be a useful tool for LIHNs to use? It is likely that virtual homecare models will stick around as a more permanent, widespread service post-pandemic, to which WoodGreen is aware and taking measures to continue these services in a longer-term capacity.

Anti-Black Racism and Supporting Community Services

It is impossible to talk about the pandemic in a vacuum. Other important issues in the world continued to exist while the pandemic raged on, of which anti-Black racism was arguably one of the most significant. As an organization that aims to help marginalized groups of people like Toronto's Black community, it is our responsibility to be actively anti-racist in our work. Systemic racism is deeply ingrained in so many aspects of our lives that it is very challenging to uncover, dissect, and change. However, WoodGreen wants to do this difficult work as best that we can and has put forward multiple, significant changes to move in the right direction.

Our Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Equity Committee identified and has begun applying the *Awake to Woke to Work* model in improving diversity of our organization. We have built these values into our new enterprise-wide strategic plan. We have conducted anti-racism trainings within many of our teams. We have hired a designated Director to take a deeper look at our practices and help implement the changes we want to make. WoodGreen understands that dismantling systemic racism is a tough, long process but we are taking active steps towards change.

Additionally, part of the fight against systemic racism is the call to defund Toronto Police Services and reallocate those funds to community service organizations that are well experienced in working with populations that have been unfairly targeted or mishandled by police such as Black people, other persons of colour, youth, and those experiencing mental health or addiction challenges. As the second largest community service organization in the city, if these funds are reallocated, we need to be prepared to take over some of these responsibilities and funding. It is important to be a part of this conversation as it continues to unfold, including publicly supporting defunding initiatives and providing information to the City so they can create evidence-based and more effective policies.



CONCLUSION

All the information presented in this report points towards WoodGreen being a resilient, nimble, and ever-learning organization. These qualities as well as everything that we have discovered during this research process will help us continue through the remainder of the pandemic. It is also recommended that we use the lessons learned and documented here to inform plans for future emergency situations.

WoodGreen Community Services

VISION:

A Toronto where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

MISSION:

WoodGreen Community Services enhances self-sufficiency, promotes well-being and reduces poverty through innovative solutions to critical social needs.

A United Way Anchor Agency, WoodGreen combines significant scale and a proven track record with an entrepreneurial mindset.

With a rich history spanning more than 80 years, WoodGreen is one of the largest social service agencies in Toronto and the largest, non-municipal provider of affordable and supportive housing.

In partnership with a generous corporate and philanthropic community – and through the efforts of a staff of 750 and the dedication of 1,00 volunteers – WoodGreen serves approximately 40,000 people each year from 40 locations, with more than 75 programs.

WoodGreen helps seniors, with issues of frailty, isolation and dementia, remain living safely and with dignity in their own community; homeless and marginalized individuals get off the streets; individuals and families find safe, affordable housing; newcomers settle in to Canadian life and internationally-trained professionals enter the job market; people living on low incomes improve their financial well-being; struggling, mother-led families gain economic stability; parents access childcare; children and youth access after-school programs and youth find meaningful training and employment; youth leaving the care of the child welfare system transition into healthy futures; and people with development concerns, and mental health and addictions issues gain support.



CHANGING LIVES.
MAKING A DIFFERENCE.