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Stronger Together: We All Need Community, and Community Needs Us

Humans are social beings. After food, shelter and security, we need love and belonging. That's what psychologist Abraham Maslow tells us. And poet John Donne says "no man is an island". Ubuntu philosophy says "I am because we are".

Bottom line – at a very basic human level, we need connection to thrive. Although we saw many diverse opinions throughout the pandemic, there was at least one clear take away - the pandemic showed us how seriously isolation can affect our physical and emotional wellbeing.

When we think of homelessness, the lack of a home is usually what springs to mind. **Yet the first link in the chain of events that leads to homelessness has to do with isolation.** Women experiencing domestic violence, financial difficulties, mental health issues or who are new to the country, can have difficulty maintaining a supportive network. With no one to turn to, their fears and negative feelings can lead to further harmful consequences that can set them down a path towards homelessness.

At Logifem, we see the power of community. We dedicate our efforts to creating and maintaining a welcoming, inclusive environment.

We nurture and sustain our community in countless ways.

We offer hugs when someone feels sad. We listen when someone needs to vent. We share meals together. We laugh, dance, and sing to unwind. We foster a sense of belonging and contribution by assigning daily chores to the residents. We encourage open communication through house meetings with the

residents, to discuss what's working and what needs to be improved.

Many women arrive feeling extremely lonely, having experienced periods of isolation. Instantly joining a community that understands different needs, based on past experiences, can be life changing.

During the holiday season, those with a circle of family and friends celebrate connections with get togethers, whether over a meal, a gift exchange, a call or a card.

For those who have no one, it is a reminder that they are alone. For this reason, Logifem tries to bring the women together to share special moments. Thanks to our generous community, we host a party for all the residents and the children who have come to Logifem in the past year, we put presents under the tree on Christmas Eve and we serve a special meal on Christmas day.

In this issue, we share the stories of three residents for whom finding community and connection has brought hope and renewed spirit.



Supporting Each Other



We help each other. We take care of each other's children, share snacks and cook together. We even go out together. We have become a little family.

Sonja arrived at Logifem at what she describes as the lowest point in her life. After a horrible experience with a dishonest landlord, she could not find affordable housing for herself and her son. They couch-surfed for a while, but Sonja knew this wasn't sustainable. She was deeply disappointed in herself: not only had she lost everything, she now had to turn to a women's shelter for help.

It was Logifem's La Lumineuse pavilion that welcomed Sonja and her son. She felt relieved to be somewhere safe with her son. Feeling down and stressed from her experience and being naturally shy, she wasn't expecting to find friendship.

As she settled in, Sonja saw that there were others in situations much like hers at La Lumineuse, and this brought her a huge sense of relief: she was not the only one.

For the first time in her adult life, Sonja began to feel a sense of community.

Forming bonds with the other moms happened naturally. They were all mothers living through difficult times. They supported each other in many ways, sharing tips on how to get the children to eat certain foods, trading chores to accommodate schedules, and sometimes staying up late just chatting till the wee hours of the morning.

"There is no jealousy, no competition, no racism. People are kind," says Sonja.

She has also found tremendous comfort in knowing that there is always someone to talk to. Be it an intervention worker or another resident, the house is filled with caring individuals who are there to listen, and who relate to her experience.

"The house is bright and peaceful," she says, smiling.

An unexpected description knowing that there are 12 children living at La Lumineuse!





Coming Together to Celebrate as a Community



Neeli found community at Logifem when she least expected it.

After years of being controlled by her family, Neeli had reached her limit. Her family’s values were too divergent from hers and were keeping her from living the life she wanted. She wanted the freedom to choose the person she would marry, someone she loved. Instead, she was being held captive by her family for refusing to agree to an arranged marriage.

Neeli knew she had no other option but to leave. One night, risking her very life, she escaped through a window and ran. She had no phone, no tablet or car keys. All these things had been taken away from her.



“Looking back, it’s hard to believe that my own family was abusing me,” she says.

SOS Violence Conjugale stepped in and referred Neeli to Logifem.



I was broken,” she explains.

“I lost so much during the journey — my family, my friends, my own confidence.

Neeli arrived at Logifem with a lot on her mind. Not only was she entering into the unknown but she was also planning to get married via a private virtual ceremony in just a few days. She presumed that weddings were beyond the scope of Logifem’s mandate, so she kept her plans to herself. However Adela, her intervention worker, found out about the wedding and immediately offered to help. The Logifem community has seen graduations, births, residents reuniting with their children, but never a wedding! Quickly, the community came together and preparations for the first Logifem wedding were under way!

First things first: Adela gave Neeli suggestions for finding a dress and flowers. On her wedding day, Neeli woke at 3:00 am (the ceremony was

taking place at 5:30 am) to get ready, and was joined by Jane, another intervention worker, who helped with her dress. The team organized a special celebration for Neeli after the ceremony, full of community spirit and sprinkled with wedding traditions. The residents gathered and cheered as the bride walked into the common area to the tune of the Wedding March, accompanied by Nikita and Adela. A special cake was served and our volunteer photographer Cyrille took charge of the official bridal photos.

Neeli had thought she would experience this special day alone. After all, the staff and residents barely knew her. She was touched to see how they came together to celebrate with her and we were so happy to share in her joy.





Living in Community Breaks Isolation



I came to Logifem with no hope, feeling lonely and with no sense of community. All that has changed!

Montreal had been home to Estelle before she moved to Ottawa. But her time in Ottawa had taken a toll on her, and she knew she needed emotional and mental support to settle back in Montreal.

“I had lived in Montreal for 20 years and yet I didn’t know anyone, I didn’t have a community. I often wondered, what’s wrong with me?”

Estelle grew up being told that she was difficult and unreasonable, which significantly impacted her self-esteem.

Her lack of confidence led to her accepting emotionally abusive relationships. She

only began to understand herself when she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder as an adult. By then, she had spent a major part of her life isolated at home and not answering the phone. She longed for friendship, but social anxiety and depression kept her from connecting with others.

When she first arrived at Logifem, Estelle spent much of the time in her room. She was nervous about interacting with others. Andrea, her intervention worker helped her open up.

“Through encouragement, I realized I had to get out there,” says Estelle. “She helped me recognize that was then, this

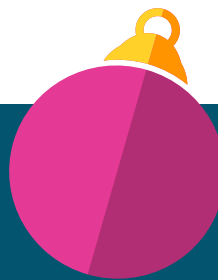
is now. It’s okay to start a new chapter. It’s not too late.”

Estelle now volunteers at a food bank. She is also on a committee that is organizing a fundraiser for the Canadian Women’s Foundation. She has taken up knitting and joined a knitting group, and has recently found a church in the neighborhood she enjoys.

“Mental illness is an isolating disease,” says Estelle. “Thanks to Logifem, I don’t feel so lonely anymore.”

Since 1988, Logifem has counted on the support and commitment of thousands of individuals to provide shelter and care for women and children in difficulty.

To learn more about Logifem and how our wonderful community supports our residents, please follow us on Facebook and Instagram. You can also visit our website for more information or to donate: www.logifem.org. We are grateful for every donation, big and small.



SPECIAL THANKS ✨ ✨ ✨ ✨ ✨

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