



Website: <https://omraottawa.org>
[CRA Charity No. 88342 9912 RR0001](#)

OMRA Shelter Corporation Annual Report for 2023

OMRA, established in 2001, is a not-for-profit organization whose goal is to provide sustainable and affordable housing to newcomer families. In 2023, we continued the initiative begun in 2017 of providing monthly, portable, time-limited rent subsidies in private landlord-owned apartments.

NB: Many people in this congregation are involved and support OMRA, but OMRA is a separate charity. Thus, this report is provided for information purposes. The OMRA annual report will be voted on by the members at its June AGM, to which you are all invited.

OMRA Volunteers

OMRA Shelter Corporation has no paid employees, but relies on the energy and commitment of our outstanding volunteers.

1) **The Board of Directors and Officers** –Doreen Dyck, Linda Redekop, Maria Rigby from OMC; Donna Rietschlin and Caroline Pestieau from St. Joseph’s Catholic; Karen Walker from Glebe St. James United; and Julia Bruno, Carol Buckley and Amena Khavari, community volunteers. This is an active working board, devoting many hours to the smooth operation of OMRA.

2) **Volunteer Tutors** - OMRA’s tutors visit clients weekly and are invaluable in helping the clients to succeed.

New in 2023: OMRA tried to find a tutor for every family that receives a subsidy. We had 2 tutor training sessions and have set up an online teaching resource bank.

3) **Initial Start-up Service Volunteers** - In this 3-pronged program, volunteers a) prepare and deliver basic start-up kits b) arrange an appointment with Helping With Furniture to obtain gently-used household goods c) assist in the delivery of the furniture, and help with other moving day tasks.

4) **Fundraising Activities Volunteers** –

i) *New in 2023:* **1st Annual Tamarack Race Weekend** - The OMRA Friend/Fun/Fundraising Event on May 27th raised approximately \$19,300.00. Twelve participants, including 3 families with small children and 7 seniors walked or ran in the races. There was a great atmosphere of comradery. The bonus was that many people learned about OMRA and about homelessness in Ottawa.

ii) **Grocery Card Program Volunteers**- Seven faith-based organizations and several community groups are involved. There are about 275 participants and 2023 gross sales equaled approximately \$808,000 or \$67,000/month. In addition to selling grocery cards, both Glebe St. James and Emmanuel United gave \$1000.00 to assist the rent subsidy program.

iii) Sale of Honey – a “delicious” initiative of an OMCer who gave part of the proceeds to OMRA.

5) **Communications Volunteers** - Pierre Chetelat, Aameena Khavari and Julia Bruno produce the newsletters and website, while Carol Buckley regularly posts news on the Facebook page.

6) **Financial Advisors** - Paul Berg-Dick provides advice on finance, Kathy Neufeld helps with tracking finances, Ron Shutler helps with the grocery card program, and Isabel Bouchard is the auditor

Summary of Subsidies given in 2023 and their Effectiveness in Alleviating Homelessness

From January – December 2023, OMRA provided subsidies to 32 households. The total amount of subsidies was \$135,000. The number of subsidies has decreased for these reasons:

1) OMRA no longer accepts families in their first year in Canada because the Federal Government has increased the amount of shelter allowance. The federal allowances used to mirror the Ontario Works rates, but now the 1st year allowance is approximately \$700/month more.

2) Month 13 becomes a very difficult one for families and they are in need of a larger subsidy if they are not yet able to work. In some cases, to prevent homelessness, OMRA’s subsidies per family have increased to \$800/month. Thus, OMRA must offer support to fewer families.

3) Asylum Seekers (Protected Persons) -This year we provided subsidies to 3 asylum seeker families who have received the Protected Persons status and will eventually be permanent residents. Protected Persons can receive an allowance from OW, but do not receive the full Child Tax Benefit. Therefore, they require larger subsidies from OMRA.

Donors

Many donors made financial contributions through several methods: directly to OMRA by cheque or e-transfer, via Canada Helps, through OMC or Glebe St. James United, through Abundance Canada for stock donations, or through Benevity (with their employer matching program). OMRA is grateful for these donations, allowing us to increase the number of families supported.

Due to confidentiality issues, when donations are made through another charity, OMRA directors may not know either who the donors are or how much they contribute. Therefore, we want now to express our heartfelt thank you for these donations.

New Initiative in 2023: OMRA Application and Reception of the Grants:

- i) Ottawa Community Foundation (\$5000) - two single woman received rent subsidies
- ii) Catherine Donnelly Foundation (\$49,000) - Evaluate the effectiveness of the OMRA rent subsidy model through a contract with two U. of Ottawa professors
- iii) Kindred (\$5000) - purchased materials for our startup kits including 12 fans, 6 Chromebooks; moving expenses for furniture; and grocery cards for needy families
- iv) Alterna (\$1000) – for the purchase of materials for tutoring

OMRA Events in 2023

- 1) Summer Picnic - Highlights were the canoe rides, the delicious food, but most importantly, the connections made between our clients and volunteers.

- 2) First Annual OMRA Holiday Party in December – food, games, and conversation – a wonderful opportunity for volunteers and subsidy recipients to meet and have fun.

NB: Very often OMRA clients distinguish OMRA from other not-for-profit agencies. They are very grateful for the opportunity through social events and visits by OMRA volunteers to be treated like friends or family instead of clients who need help.

Partnerships and Advocacy in 2023

- 1) *New in 2023: Rent Assist Allies (RAA)* – This is an exciting new proposal to take the successful OMRA model of rent subsidies and apply it to the larger homeless population in Ottawa. The initiative is led by Janet Kreda, with advice from a steering committee including OMRA (Caroline Pestieau), The Alliance to End Homelessness (Kaite Burkholder-Harris), Action Logement, Housing Help and The City of Ottawa Housing Registry. A business plan has been developed and funding requests will go out to City of Ottawa and Ottawa Community Foundation. OMRA has agreed to house RAA under its umbrella during the 2-year incubation phase.
- 2) Helping with Furniture provides free, gently-used furniture to all of our clients in need.
- 3) Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa
- 4) Catholic Centre for Immigrants and OCISO – subsidy referral agencies
- 5) Grocery Card Fundraisers – Emmanuel United, Glebe St. James United, Ottawa Mennonite Church, Religious Society of Friends, St. Joseph's Parish, St. Thomas the Apostle Anglican, Temple Israel, Carleton English Department, other community groups.

Financial Report

Both corporations are in good financial shape and are positioned to continue operations for years. The work is conducted through two corporations: OMRA Shelter Corporation is the fund-raising, donations, and rent subsidy arm; OMRA Shelter Alternatives Corporation (OMRA 2) is the property manager and owner of two townhouses for refugee families.

OMRA 1 2023 income was \$188,000, with \$54,000 from Grocery card program, \$53,000 from Donations/Fundraising, \$20,000 from OMRA 2, plus about \$60,000 in grants. Expenses were \$141,000 including the \$135,000 spent on rent subsidies. The OMRA Effectiveness Study (grant from the Catherine Donnelly Fund) will be paid in 2024.

Complete financial statements for the two corporations are available upon request.

Future Plans

OMRA has reached a crossroads and we need to decide if we should expand or remain at supporting approximately 32 households each month.

In 2024, OMRA has a planned retreat to plan for the future, focussing on possible restructuring, processes, succession planning, and increasing our partnerships with other groups in the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa (ATEH). OMRA also looks forward to being part of the Rent Assist Allies and providing advice on rent subsidies.

These are exciting times for OMRA and if anyone would like to be part of the future plans, please contact anyone on the OMRA Board.

Thank you for your continuous and generous support of OMRA.

Respectfully submitted by Maria Rigby for OMRA Shelter Corporation Jan 30, 2024