



The

LIGHTHOUSE

Helping People | Changing Lives

1008 Bathurst Street • Toronto • ON M5R 3G7

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Spring 2021

Observations of Service during a Pandemic

Hello, my name is Dorinda Charlton and I am currently completing my final year of the Social Service Work Immigration and Refugees Program with Seneca College. I was interested in this program as I entered Canada as a refugee myself and I know the challenges and struggles that migrants face. With my degree, I hope to enter the field of social service work to positively impact the lives of newcomers to Canada and to advocate for positive changes in the migration process. Securing a placement has been difficult for students during the pandemic but thankfully the Lighthouse was willing to provide me with this opportunity.

This is my second placement with the Lighthouse and things have changed quite a bit with the pandemic. In my first placement, I was involved with the Income-tax clinic, which was hosted within the building. This time around, I was surprised that the Lighthouse was able to continue to provide income tax services to clients in a modified manner. I did not realize the importance of tax returns until staff explained the urgency behind completing returns on time for some. Many of the Lighthouse's clients are housed through subsidized housing organizations. Often, these organizations require their members to provide their recent notice of assessment as a way to prove their income amount. This allows the housing organization to set the rent geared to a client's income. As you can imagine, with the pandemic impacting the closure of free income tax clinics, the Lighthouse was a great option for many and I am grateful to see that clients have been able to have their returns filed.

While this pandemic has amplified the struggles of marginalized peoples it has also shown me the importance of self-care and of communities supporting each other.



Hi, my name is Christopher Bennett and I am currently enrolled in the Community Development program at Humber College. I am in the sixth semester of my program and am completing a placement at The Lighthouse. This is my second placement opportunity with The Lighthouse, my first was completed before the pandemic hit. It has been very eye-opening to see the changes that have happened since then. I am impressed by the resilience of the community and The Lighthouse as they have found unique ways to safely service clients in need.

Apart from the physical needs, this pandemic has also amplified other needs like mental, social, and economic health. Personally, the pandemic has affected my family as it keeps me away from them. My children live in the U.S. and I cannot visit them or hold them. This has been difficult for my family and for many families I'm sure. During my time at The Lighthouse, I have had the chance to chat with food bank clients. Many report struggles with isolation, anxiety, depression, housing, and much more. In my partnership with The Lighthouse and Humber College, my peers and I were able to create a placement student project to respond to some of these needs. We ran a six-week wellness check-in where clients engaged with students over the phone. We were able to provide clients with a conversation, social program assistance, and social service information and referrals. My peers and I were thrilled to have the opportunity to execute what we've learned in our pro-

gram and translate it into field practice. I am looking forward to working more closely with this community as well as the chance to make a positive impact.



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Hello, my name is Tara Torrenueva and I have had the pleasure of completing two different placements at The Lighthouse Community Centre. I am currently in my final year of the Social Service Work - Immigrant and Refugee Program with Seneca College. In my first placement at the Lighthouse, I was able to be involved in a variety of neighbourhood programs and I was even able to assist in facilitating a winter wellness workshop on Thursdays. On Fridays, the Intergenerational Hispanic Seniors Program would also run. It was so great to see that every day the Lighthouse was filled with community members laughing, learning, and often sharing a meal. That is something that I think is missed here. I believe a lot of these members truly benefited from the relational aspects of these programs.

I was very happy to learn that the Seniors Program is continuing to run virtually. The volunteers of this program went above and beyond by reaching out to seniors and helping them set up WhatsApp accounts. Using the app WhatsApp, volunteers and seniors have been able to stay connected. Weekly, volunteers check in on seniors and facilitate virtual art and music activities. They engage in conversations, guided discussions, and drop off supplies to seniors so that they have the tools needed to engage in planned activities. This innovative group has shown resilience and creativity to thrive and gather (virtually) despite the limitations of an isolating Pandemic. It's programs, staff, and volunteers like this that inspire me as a future social service worker, as there is always a way to help those who may need it in our community!



National Indigenous History month (June 2021) provides us with a time of reflection as we honour Indigenous culture, traditions, and contributions to society. It is an opportunity for us to observe, celebrate, and acknowledge the sacrifices, strength, accomplishments, and futures of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples in Canada. This cannot be done without recognizing that Canada's history has been marred by a legacy of racism and colonialism. Taking a stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples supports an affirmative stance against colonial violence during and beyond June. This National Indigenous History Month, let us recommit to working towards Reconciliation, and building a future based on equity, fairness, and inclusion for all Indigenous peoples in Canada. Resources will be posted on our Facebook and Instagram in June!



Hi, my name is Conrod Gayle and I am in my third year of the Community Development program with Humber College. As a placement student at The Lighthouse, I have had the chance to see firsthand, what social service work during a Pandemic looks like. Something that stood out to me was that the Lighthouse was able to keep its food bank running throughout the pandemic. The Lighthouse modified its service by having clients line up outside, performing the intake of clients through a protected window, and distributing the food hampers via curb-side pick. What I noticed was that because this service was done outside many of the neighbours in the area became aware of The Lighthouse and consequently were inspired to support and donate to the Lighthouse.

During the start of the pandemic the staff of Summerhill Market (our next-door neighbours), collected large amounts of good food and sent it to the Lighthouse almost 1-2 times a month. They continue to donate food! Similarly, a politician and a few neighbours started collecting and donating food weekly or monthly. Many customers of Summer Hill Market and the coffee shop next door would also drop by to donate funds as well. It has been heartwarming to see the neighbourhood rally around their community centre. After talking with staff I also learned that some of our volunteers are also neighbours. One volunteer named Allie volunteers with the

Lighthouse and with a local carpenter that builds tiny shelters for the homeless in Toronto. This volunteer has been able to shed a lot of light on the housing crisis that has been exasperated by the pandemic. It's neighbours like these that remind me how powerful and life-changing a community can be when they put their heads together. Doing a placement during a pandemic has been challenging but has also been very eye-opening and I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn more.



Hi, my name is Carlos Charles, and I am in my third year of the Community Development Program at Humber College. I previously completed the Community Worker Program at George Brown College. I am so grateful for the opportunity to do my placement with The Lighthouse. I have been learning a lot about the different programs that The Lighthouse has been able to continue despite the challenges that Covid 19 has brought.

I was very happy to hear that therapy continues to happen through The Lighthouse. It's widely known that mental health has generally taken a hit since the Pandemic started. According to the results of CAMH's third poll on the effects of Covid 19 on mental health, 36 percent of Ontarians say they're experiencing very high or high stress, 35 percent are feeling very high or high anxiety, 17 percent say they're always or very often depressed. This is something that is concerning, yet not surprising. After hearing from the Vietnamese Program Director, I learned about how providing therapy via Zoom or even over the phone has been a lifeline for many within this community. Registered Psychotherapist Thuy Tran shared a touching story about a client who was facing serious mental health challenges. The client contacted the Lighthouse as a last resort and was able to receive assistance to safely transition to a shelter as well as receive therapy through The Lighthouse. The client has since expressed, ***"The Lighthouse has helped me regain hope and strength to move forward in life. I no longer think about death but instead, I think about the future."***

It is so great to hear these stories of hope during these difficult times. I am very glad there are organizations like The Lighthouse that exist as a support to those who are at a loss of hope.



**Agriculture and
Agri-Food Canada**

The Lighthouse is very grateful and pleased to receive the Second Harvest emergency food security fund grant of \$20 000.00 to put towards food-related programs. These funds were made possible through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada! We are thankful to have this extra support as the essential service of our Food Bank Program has continued to see an increase in new clients.



Hi, my name is Bella and I am a second-year Social Service Worker Student at George Brown College! I am immensely grateful to be doing my first ever placement with The Lighthouse Community Centre, especially given that the pandemic has created so many extra challenges for me. When my classes went online due to Covid-19, I felt completely isolated and I was worried that I would never be able to properly prepare for the field. Fortunately, working with the Lighthouse has not only proven to be an amazing learning opportunity for me but also allowed me to connect with others at a time when I needed it.

Covid-19 has also clearly impacted the Lighthouse's clients. I have heard firsthand about the increased stress, isolation, and insecurity brought about by the pandemic. Many people have lost their jobs, making the need for our services that much greater. In fact, according to a study by Daily Bread Food Bank, there has been a 200% increase in new clients during the pandemic. At The Lighthouse we have provided food security assistance to 396 new unique households since the start of Ontario's state of Emergency back in 2020. What's more, is that we've had to make adjustments in terms of how we serve our clients. Instead of being able to welcome people into the building, we've had to ask them to wait outside. This adds the challenge of long lines, bad weather, and the risk that large groups congregated together during a pandemic can bring. The clients at The Lighthouse have proven their resilience in the face of these challenges, and I am incredibly grateful for the patience and kindness they have extended towards me as I learn and adapt to the service work environment during these challenging times.



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From Rob's Desk

This past year we have experienced stressful times, challenging times as well as encouraging times at The Lighthouse. Through all this, the Lord has continued to sustain and bless the work at The Lighthouse. It has been wonderful to see how the Lord continues to provide for all who seek assistance.



Covid-19 and the continuous lockdown in the city of Toronto has created many trials. Each day our staff will engage in the routine of asking clients whether they have Covid-19 symptoms, whether they traveled outside Canada, or whether they have been in contact with anyone who has Covid-19. Just asking these questions alone can be stressful for the clients and the staff. It can be difficult to stay on top of these policies and procedures and it is also a reminder of the risk factor involved in our work. Despite this, we know that these Covid-19 policies and procedures allow The Lighthouse to protect our clients, volunteers, and staff and to safely remain open. The challenging aspect for us comes in different ways. We want to keep everyone safe and we are constantly pondering whether more can be done in this regard. We are always brainstorming whether other protocols need to be put in place to provide extra safety. These protocols are necessary since The Lighthouse provides an essential service due to the food bank. Some of the other work we do can be accomplished via Zoom or the phone but providing food hampers requires us to be open and in contact with the general public.

Encouraging moments come when individuals in the community donate food or want to assist The Lighthouse in other ways. This winter we had a grade 3 class, from a local school, walk to The Lighthouse and drop off bags of food. These students stated that they wanted to help those in need. We have also had others dropping off food and monetary donations to help meet the basic needs of our clients. Having individuals, stores, schools, and groups show up and donate has revealed to us that our community continues to care for one another during this pandemic.

At The Lighthouse we are thankful for all those who volunteer, who drop off food, or send donations. It continues to show us how the Lord is blessing the work we do in the city of Toronto.

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- ☐ Canada Helps on line at www.canadahelps.org
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- ☐ Matched Corporate Giving - many companies match employee donations
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Receipts will be issued in the New Year. Canada Revenue Agency #13036 3740 RR0001



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