



# BUILDING TOGETHER

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

**BEYOND**   
HOUSING YEARS

Creating a Place to Call Home



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

As we look back on this past year, we're reminded again and again that real progress happens when we build together. In a season filled with challenges, your support has helped move important work forward for families across Waterloo Region. Thank you!

One of the clearest examples of "building together" is the momentum of our New Beginnings – A Place to Call Home capital campaign. With support from donors, partners and government, construction on 20 new townhomes in Kitchener began on November 19. This is the first time in our history that a capital campaign reached its goal before we even broke ground! That milestone belongs to everyone who believed in our shared vision: safe, stable, deeply affordable homes for women and children who have experienced domestic violence. These townhomes, built in partnership with Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region, will open in the fall of 2026, offering these families a new beginning.

We've also seen the spirit of building together alive in our current housing communities. At 544 Bridgeport, for example, tenants

imagined and created a Butterfly Garden and eight new garden beds with the support of dedicated volunteers and the City of Kitchener's LoveMyHood program. These projects build more than beautiful spaces.



*Enthusiastic Out-Spok'n riders and walkers — and the 350+ donors who sponsored them — raised more than \$96,000 for New Beginnings.*

They create connection, confidence, and a shared sense of pride. They remind us that strong communities grow from collaboration.

This year's Out-Spok'n bike-a-thon echoed that same spirit. With about 60 riders and walkers — and 350-plus sponsors cheering them on — our community raised more than \$96,000 for New Beginnings. Whether you cycled the Kissing Bridge Trail, participated from your own neighbourhood, or sponsored a rider, you helped move this project closer to completion.

And as we celebrate our progress, we continue looking ahead. With more than 9,000 households waiting for affordable rental housing in our region, we are preparing now for our next projects. We look forward to sharing more about these new developments in the months ahead.

The year 2026 marks an important milestone: Beyond Housing's 25th anniversary. A quarter-century of people rolling up their sleeves, pooling their resources and lifting each other up. As we celebrate over the next twelve months, we'll honour the people who started this work, the families who trusted us, and the donors and partners who have stood alongside us since the beginning.

Thank you for your trust, generosity and belief in our mission. You make our work possible, and we're excited to continue building with you in the year ahead.



Dan Driedger  
Executive Director



Chip Bender  
Board Chair

*Cover Photo - This artist's rendering shows the New Beginnings townhomes in Kitchener that will welcome families escaping domestic violence.*

# BUILDING TOGETHER

Martin Buhr, MennoHomes' first Executive Director, remembers meeting a young woman who was so desperate for a place to live that she rented a space beside a furnace in a basement.

"There was no window, no bathroom," he says. "But that is what desperation does when vacancy is at one per cent or lower."

Stories like hers are the reason that MennoHomes, now Beyond Housing, exists.

In 2001, the organization began with little more than the belief that everyone deserves a decent place to live. There was no money in the bank, no land and no blueprint for what would come next. What changed everything was the way the community stepped forward.

"Early experiences showed us that our supporters recognized the critical need for affordable housing, and they were primed for action," Martin says.

Wallenstein Feed Charitable Foundation was among the first to act. When Martin met

with the Foundation's directors, they offered funding before he asked, a gift that marked the beginning of the Foundation's ongoing support.



**"None of this happens alone. It takes churches, donors, partners and neighbours working together."**

**- Martin Buhr,  
President Emeritus**

When Faith Lutheran decided to sell the land adjoining their church, they chose to sell it to MennoHomes, rather than private developers. That land would become MennoHomes' first project, Village Road. Another milestone came when

Eastwood Mennonite Community offered vacant land, originally set aside for long-term care expansion and/or affordable housing for seniors. MennoHomes' proposal unlocked new provincial funding and led to much-needed homes at Rockway Gardens Village.

To fulfill its mission, MennoHomes also collaborated with private sector partners.

Churches also came forward to help. Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church approached Martin with an offer: an interest-free loan drawn from bequest funds. That loan allowed MennoHomes to incorporate, seek legal support and take its first practical steps.

In 2003, the organization had secured funding for a project but had no land. The Region of Waterloo connected Martin with Blaze Properties, which had land but no government funding. Together, they created the Camelot townhouse complex on Fischer-Hallman Road. While this was a one-time collaboration, it's another example of how, time after time, partnerships solved problems.

On a personal note, when Martin decided to celebrate his 85th birthday in 2024 by raising \$85,000 for the Sprucelawn expansion, friends and family flocked to support him. With their help, his fundraising bike ride raised more than \$100,000.

For Martin, stories like these reflect the heart of the organization's work.

"Safe, secure and affordable housing is the foundation on which a healthy life is built," he says. "But none of this happens alone. It takes churches, donors, public and private sector partners and neighbours working together."

A quarter century after its launch, that spirit of collaboration remains at the centre of Beyond Housing's mission. Every home built is a reminder of what can happen when a community decides — together — to make room for everyone.

*Martin Buhr at the construction site of MennoHomes' first project, Village Road, in 2003.*

## NEW BEGINNINGS: OPENING THE DOOR TO HOPE

When Sadia\* arrived in Canada with her husband and two young children, she carried a quiet but determined hope. She believed that here, she would finally be able to escape her husband's physical, emotional and financial abuse. When a violent incident escalated and Sadia and her 10-year-old daughter called 911, everything changed. Her husband was arrested, and Family and Children Services referred Sadia to Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region (WCSWR).

From there, Sadia began rebuilding her life, step by step. An outreach worker helped her connect with a family lawyer, develop ongoing safety plans, find immigration supports through the YMCA, and report further breaches to police. But housing remained an enormous barrier. Because of her immigration sponsorship status, she wasn't allowed to apply for housing, and once the sponsorship ended, she no longer qualified for the Region of Waterloo's community housing program.

"Clients like Sadia don't always 'fit in the box,'" says Christina Silva, Relief and Prevention Programs Manager at WCSWR. "But they still deserve safe, affordable housing and a chance to move forward."

This is exactly why Beyond Housing's New Beginnings – A Place to Call Home project matters – and why the support of our donors and partners has been critical.

Built in partnership with WCSWR and made possible by land donated by the Hallman family, government funding at all levels, and generous donors, New Beginnings creates a path for women and children who face barriers that traditional housing can't solve. These 20 stacked townhomes – including three and four-bedroom units for larger families – will provide the stability

they need to heal, grow and connect with their communities.

Christina knows how difficult it is for families leaving violence to find a place to live. "Affordable housing is the biggest barrier," she says. "Long wait times, rising rents, discrimination, financial abuse — many women are turned away by landlords again and again. It's heartbreaking after everything they've been through."

Through Beyond Housing's partnership with WCSWR, families can move directly from shelter into homes they can afford, with outreach workers continuing to support

**"We're so grateful for this partnership with Beyond Housing. Together, we're helping families overcome the barriers they face."**

**– Christina Silva,  
Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region**





them in their new neighbourhoods. That support can be as practical as walking with a mom and her children to the local community centre, helping them learn a new bus route, or connecting them with programs, interpreters or school resources. “For many, every part of daily life feels new,” Christina explains. “Those small steps help rebuild confidence and autonomy.”

The townhomes will also offer something else: dignity. A front door of their own. A small outdoor space. Room to breathe. A place that truly feels like home.

Today, Sadia is living independently with her children. She has strong community connections, supportive neighbours and a sense of stability she once only imagined. Her journey reflects what New Beginnings will make possible for many more families.

“This project gives families hope,” Christina says. “That’s why we’re so grateful for this partnership with Beyond Housing. Together, we’re helping families overcome the barriers they face. We’re making that hope real.”

\*Name has been changed



*Thanks to our partnership with Women's Crisis Services Waterloo Region and the generosity of our donors, families escaping domestic violence will move into safe, affordable housing this fall.*

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CAPITAL CAMPAIGN CHAIR

Thank you to everyone who supported the New Beginnings – A Place to Call Home capital campaign. Your financial support has helped us reach our \$2-million campaign goal, and I’m grateful for every gift that made this possible.

Because of your generosity, twenty new townhomes will soon welcome women and children who have experienced domestic violence. These families will finally have safe, affordable homes where they can regain stability and rebuild their lives.

This project is especially meaningful to our family. New Beginnings is the site of the home where my siblings and I grew up, and now new families will find safety and security there.

Thank you for helping make this vision a reality. Together, we’re building more than housing — we’re creating new beginnings for families who need them most.



Jim Hallman  
Capital Campaign Chair

# GIVING WITH HER WHOLE HEART

Twenty-five years ago, when MennoHomes was nothing more than a bold idea, one person stepped forward without hesitation. Mary Buhr Nightingale became the very first donor to support the new organization. It was a moment that reflected a lifetime of generosity.

Mary's younger brother, Martin Buhr — MennoHomes' first Executive Director — remembers how deeply engaged she was in the lives of her eight siblings. "Mary was always interested in what we were doing," he says.

Whether Martin was leading programs at House of Friendship or later championing affordable housing through MennoHomes, Mary backed him completely. She was always among the first to pledge for his Out-Spoken fundraising rides, cheering him on with unwavering pride.

Her giving, though, was never just about supporting her brother. It sprang from the

strength of her convictions and from a family tradition that shaped her life. Their mother kept her egg and milk money in a small black box on a shelf. The first ten per cent of what she earned always went to charity.

"The first payment is to God. No matter what, God gets paid first," she taught her children. Mary believed in that principle wholeheartedly. Today, one of Martin's granddaughters treasures the black box, carrying that tradition of giving into a new generation.

Mary built a successful career in health care education, invested wisely in real estate, and poured her energy into volunteer work. With her husband, Don, she supported many community initiatives. Friends remember her welcoming hospitality, her independence, and her steady commitment to causes she cared about. "When she supported a cause, it was with her whole heart," one friend recalled.

Mary's final act of generosity was a legacy gift that will help Beyond Housing continue creating safe, affordable homes for years to come. As Martin puts it, "She believed that we are our neighbour's keeper." Mary lived that truth every day.

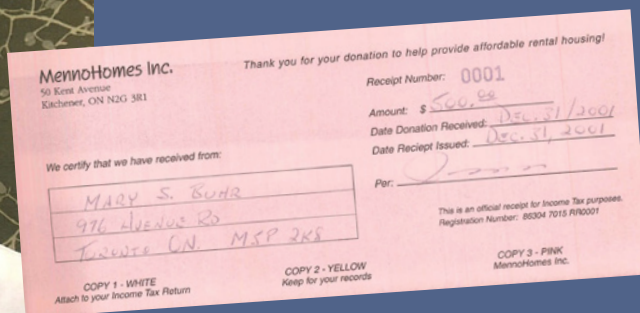
Mary Buhr Nightingale passed away in October 2024, but her legacy — and her example — continues to guide and inspire us.

**Like Mary, you can make a difference in many ways. Along with annual or monthly gifts, some Beyond Housing donors remember us in their estate or give capital equity, such as stocks, creating ongoing funding for affordable housing projects.**

**To learn more about these options, please contact Dan Driedger at [ddriedger@beyondhousing.ca](mailto:ddriedger@beyondhousing.ca).**



*Mary Buhr Nightingale made the very first donation to MennoHomes (now Beyond Housing) and supported the organization throughout her life.*



*Mary was always the first to support her brother Martin's activities, including his 85th birthday fundraising bike ride in support of Beyond Housing.*





# FINANCIAL UPDATE

Beyond Housing closed the 2025 fiscal year in a strong position, with tenant rent covering all annual operating costs and a modest operational surplus at year-end. Our fundraising efforts remained focused on building new affordable housing and reflect our ongoing commitment to financial sustainability and thoughtful growth.

Thanks to the remarkable generosity of our donors, we successfully completed the capital campaign for New Beginnings – A Place

to Call Home, surpassing our goal of \$2 million in donations and pledges. This tremendous support shows, once again, how deeply our community cares about creating safe, affordable housing in Waterloo Region. Thank you!

To learn more about our financial health, our audited financial statements are readily available upon request or can be accessed online: [Beyond Housing - Audited Financial Statements 2025](#).

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chip Bender – Chair  
John Oudyk – Vice Chair  
Jennifer Horner – Treasurer  
Saleh Saleh – Secretary  
Jessica Creces – Director  
Rilwan Banjo – Director  
Brian Unrau – Director  
Fadhilah Balogun – Director  
Rae Sands – Director  
Martin Buhr – President Emeritus

*From left: Saleh Saleh, Chip Bender, Rae Sands, Brian Unrau, Jennifer Horner, Rilwan Banjo, John Oudyk, Fadhilah Balogun, Jessica Creces*



## ADMIN & PROGRAM STAFF

Dan Driedger – Executive Director  
Lori Martin – Administrative Assistant  
Robin Near – Bookkeeper  
Karen Ehlebracht – Community Nurse  
Sue Martin – Community Support Worker  
Taylor Martin – Operations Manager  
Beth Bohnert – Community Engagement Specialist

## PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Satellite Community Homes | Dubrick Property Management Ltd.

Alfred Rempel – 544 Bridgeport Road  
Cliff Rose – Rockway Gardens Village  
Sean & Lisa Harkness – Sprucelawn Apartments for Seniors  
Laura Stanley – The Foundry  
Linda Rempel – Waterloo Mennonite Homes



## VISION

Caring communities where every person can thrive in a safe and affordable place they call home.

## MISSION

We create homes for people in need of affordable housing. We develop housing that is economically and environmentally sustainable and includes supportive services.

## VALUES

### Housing is a Human Right

We believe that adequate, safe and secure housing is a fundamental human right. We are committed to providing quality, affordable housing that is thoughtfully designed and is responsive to the needs of tenants, recognizing that stable and secure housing improves quality of life.

### Equity, Integrity and Respect

We respect and value the diversity of people in our community. We adhere to high ethical and professional standards in our work and relationships. We are fair and respectful in our interactions and treat everyone with respect and dignity.

### Accountability and Sustainability

We are accountable for our actions. We accept responsibility for our performance and share the results of our work in an open and transparent manner. We balance fiscal prudence with asset preservation, environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

### Collaboration and Community

Through collaboration and partnerships, we work with others to achieve common goals, build communities and create places to call “home”. We provide support services to our tenants to develop communities where each person is valued and has a sense of belonging.

### Creativity and Innovation

We are open to change and we continuously seek new approaches to enhance the development and operation of affordable housing.

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