

A close-up, low-angle shot of five diverse children and youth looking up at the camera with joyful expressions. The group includes a boy with glasses and curly hair, a girl with a wide smile, a boy with glasses and curly hair, a girl with curly hair, and a boy with curly hair. They are all smiling and looking directly at the viewer.

Gratitude Report 2023-2024

Ensuring all children and youth in Ottawa
can reach their full potential and grow up great.

Welcome

Within this Gratitude Report, you will learn about the incredible work that OCYI and its partner organizations have been involved in over the past year. We are so grateful to all the frontline staff, partners, and funders for their incredible work to help support children and youth from communities all across the city.



Table of Contents

Message from OCYI Steering Committee Co-chairs 2023-2024 4

OCYI’s Vision..... 6

OCYI Structure and Leaders 8

Task Groups in Action10

 Critical Hours 12

 Early Childhood Development 14

 Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health 15

 Ottawa Collaborative for Parenting Support..... 16

 Research and Evaluation 18

Communications 20

 Partner Profiles 22

 Social Media and Website 24

Financial Summary Fiscal Year 2023-2024 28

Message from OCYI Steering Committee Co-chairs 2023-2024

On behalf of the OCYI Steering Committee members, we want to express our deepest gratitude for the outstanding work and dedication of the members of our task groups. The task groups tireless efforts and steadfast commitment to improving the lives of children and youth in our community have not gone unnoticed.

Through their collaborative approach, innovative ideas, and passion for positive change, the task groups have made significant strides in addressing the challenges faced by children and youth in Ottawa. Their willingness to invest time, energy, and expertise into this important initiative is truly commendable and inspiring.



Mary Donaghy
Ottawa Catholic School Board
Steering Committee Co-chair



Kelly Raymond
Children's Aid Society of Ottawa
Steering Committee Co-chair

The impact of their work extends far beyond the confines of meetings and discussions. The task groups are shaping the future of the Ottawa community by advocating for policies, programs, and resources that empower children and youth to thrive, succeed, and reach their full potential.

As we reflect on OCYI's accomplishments and look ahead to the opportunities that lie before us, let us continue to pursue in our shared mission to create a brighter and more inclusive future for all children and youth in Ottawa so that they reach their full potential and grow up great.

THANK YOU.
Mary and Kelly

Growing up great

The Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative (OCYI) is a collaborative of community organizations and agencies with a shared commitment to promote the healthy development of children and youth.

OCYI's Vision

OCYI's vision is to ensure all children and youth in Ottawa can reach their full potential and grow up great! We seek to achieve this foundational vision by supporting the 80+ organizations in our network so that they can best support infants, children, youth, and their families in the work the organization is focused on doing. Specifically, **OCYI is focusing on how organizations are able to respond to the evolving mental health and well-being needs of Ottawa's children, youth, and families.** OCYI's task groups are working to do this by asking the task group members to bring their organization's experience, expertise, concerns, and struggles to inform the work we do.



OCYI Structure & Leaders

Steering Committee

- **Co-chair:** Mary Donaghy, Ottawa Catholic School Board (term started January 2024)
- **Co-chair:** Johanne Levesque, Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services (term ended December 2023)
- **Co-chair:** Kelly Raymond, Children's Aid Society of Ottawa
- The OCYI Steering Committee is composed of senior leaders from organizations that support children and youth in Ottawa and the task group chairs

Task Groups

- **Critical Hours:** brings together member organizations to support children and youth in critical hours programing, which includes before and after school programs, homework clubs, recreation, and youth drop-in centres.
Co-chair: Carly Haydt, City of Ottawa (term ended in January 2024)
Co-chair: Beth Tooley, Ottawa Coalition of Community Houses
- **Early Childhood Development:** aims to successfully support all young children (0 to 6 years) and their families in school entry.
Co-chair: Holly Overhoff, Ottawa Catholic Child Care Corporation (term ended in October 2023)
Co-chair: Natalie Rozon, Ottawa Public Health (term ended in March 2024)
- **Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health—Education and Awareness:** brings together service providers from across sectors to increase awareness of infant and early childhood mental health and how to foster health mental health in early childhood.
Chair: Clarissa Arthur, Education Foundation of Ottawa
- **Ottawa Collaborative for Parenting Support:** community of partners working together to build resilient families that can support their children's healthy development, feel empowered, and are able to cope with the ups and downs of everyday living.
Co-chair: Mariama Aregbesola, Parent Resource Centre
Co-chair: Caroline Girard, City View Centre for Child & Family Services
- **Research and Evaluation:** supporting the research and evaluation needs of the other OCYI task groups as well as developing a framework for OCYI as a whole to support steps towards achieving the long-term objective.
Co-chair: Kady Carr, Ottawa Neighbourhood Study
Co-chair: Erin Montague, United Way East Ontario

Members: 80+ organizational partners from across Ottawa that support children and youth, see [list on our website](#)

Funding:

- **Backbone support:** United Way East Ontario
- **Host organization:** CHEO
- **Additional funding in 2023-2024:** CECCE, CHEO, City of Ottawa, OCDSB, OCSB, Ottawa Police Service, and the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund

Staff

- **Karen Kennedy, Project Manager**
- **Chloe Girvan, Communications Specialist**



Task Groups in Action

Critical Hours

Community Services Recovery Fund

In 2023, OCYI was awarded funding, through the Community Services Recovery Fund, for an innovative new project focussed on mental health capacity building in critical hours programs.

Granted through the United Way and Employment and Social Development Canada, this funding supports OCYI's commitment to bettering the day-to-day mental health and well-being needs of children and youth in our community.

The Community Services Recovery Fund (CSRF) is a large investment from the Government of Canada to support community organizations who are in the process of recovering from the pandemic and adapting to new challenges faced by both staff and those they serve.

As OCYI provides a collaborative platform for 80+ community service organizations, working to foster the positive, healthy growth of the children and youth in Ottawa, this grant allows OCYI to better meet the needs of children and youth in our community through many organizations at the same time.

OCYI's partner organizations, especially members of the Critical Hours Task Group, looked forward to the launch of three new and enhanced projects now possible through the CSRF. Over the past few years, they have seen more children and youth struggling with their mental health than ever before. While the pandemic has impacted children and youth in many unique ways, it has become increasingly clear that additional mental health and well-being support is needed for children and youth at all levels, as well as staff.

Critical hours programs, offered by many OCYI partners, are essential in the daily lives of many local children, youth, and their families. These programs fill the critical hours between when children and youth finish school, and the end of their parents' workday and beyond. These programs significantly enhance social, academic and emotional outcomes for those they serve. Recently, there has been significant staff turnover in these programs and additionally, for many organizations, their own resources, including finances, staff, and time, continue to be stretched thin. The CSRF is supporting Critical Hours Task Group work to map programs, host a training conference, and update training videos, all in the name of better equipping critical hours program staff to support the children and youth in their programs.

Projects include a project initiative to map programs in Ottawa. By knowing where programs



are, gaps can be seen and addressed. Additionally, existing programs will become more aware of other similar options in their neighbourhoods, allowing for networking and relationship building. The relationship with OCYI and the Critical Hours Task Group will be strengthened as well, allowing for staff in critical hours programs to build their supports and training together, particularly around mental health and well-being.

A Critical Hours Staff Training Conference, which took place in November, will ultimately support organizations to deliver higher quality programs based on their central mandate, such as recreation, education, or community building. The intent of the training day is to increase the capacity of staff in child and youth-serving organizations that do not deliver direct mental health and well-being services by providing them with the training to be able to better support children and youth. This training may also reduce staff turnover by giving them additional tools, resources, and support to do their work.

Says Beth Tooley, Coalition Coordinator, Ottawa Coalition of Community Houses, and Co-chair of the Critical Hours Task Group, "Offering training opportunities for frontline staff is a great way to build the capacity of community-based organizations to address the well-being of children. The CSRF is helping us put together a day of learning and sharing that will focus on how to create and maintain safe spaces for young people- something we know is so important after the last three years."

Beth also looked forward to a third project entailing the redevelopment of valuable training videos. "The original training videos have served us well, allowing for critical hours programs across Ottawa to provide their staff with foundational skills. In reflecting on what we have learned and taking into consideration the long-term impacts of the COVID pandemic on children, it is timely to review and update the Critical Hours Three Pillars training videos to equip staff who are planning and implementing children's programs."

This story is part of the [November 2023 Ovation](#).

Early Childhood Development

Exploring Psychological Health and Safety Workshop

In early October, OCYI's Early Childhood Development Task Group hosted a bilingual workshop titled Exploring Psychological Health and Safety. During the event, Faron Smith and Zamin Fazal, Trainers from the Canadian Mental Health Association's Your Health Space team, introduced the topic of Psychological Health and Safety and led discussions with attendees on topics such as improving psychological wellness amongst teams, identifying the 15 psychosocial factors outlined in the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace, as well as current moral and systemic challenges.



With experience as a Child and Youth Counsellor, who has worked in the Ottawa area for the last 15 years, Faron says that the firsthand experience she and her colleagues have had with work-related stress and burn out effect has enabled her to fully understand the importance of cultivating positive mental health both personally and in the workplace. "It is an absolute privilege to be able to provide a brave learning space for care providers and their mental well-being. We truly strive to provide strategies that help to care for the carers, which is so important. I often feel that if I had been offered more opportunities, especially as a young professional working frontline, to learn about these skills, I may have been able to avoid symptoms of burnout, or simply thrive more while working in high stress environments like healthcare. Having worked within the field of OCYI's partners, really ignited me to provide a great learning space for this audience. It's a unique challenge working with young people – which comes with unique strategies for both dealing with stress and maintaining a psychologically health workplace."

To learn more visit: www.yourhealthspace.ca



Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

Bell Let's Talk 2024

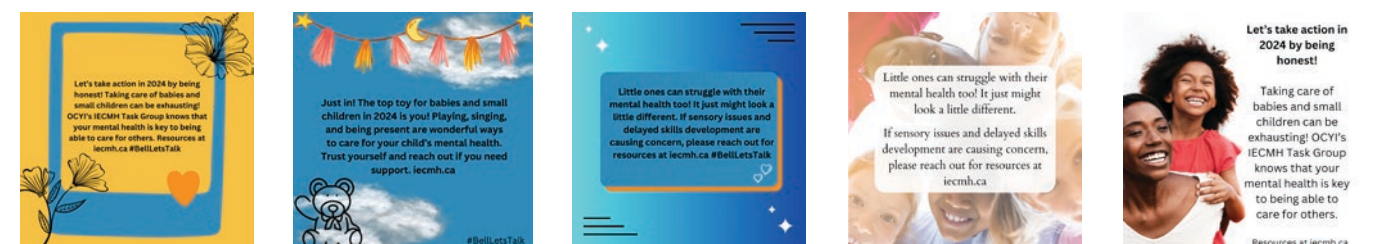
OCYI's Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health-Education & Awareness (IECMH-EA) Task Group brings together early years service providers from across Ottawa to increase awareness of infant and early childhood mental health and offer strategies for fostering mental health in early childhood.

Driven by research that demonstrates the importance of optimal early mental health and the lifelong impacts of the early years, this group works together to make a greater impact and build a stronger system of care for infant and early childhood mental health in the greater Ottawa community.

For the past few years, this has included taking the opportunity to reach a wider audience through Bell Let's Talk Day. The group wants to make sure early mental health is part of the conversation during this wider mental health conversation. Sharing local resources, tips, and compassionate messages, the IECMH-EA Task Group aims to use their collective expertise to support families and care providers by directing them to quality content and helpful information.

This year, the group created a series of social media messages in alignment with Bell Let's Talk Day's 2024 theme of taking action to create real change for those living with mental health issues. OCYI and task group members shared them throughout the day on January 24th and enjoyed engagement with our partners.

This story is part of the [January 2024 Ovation](#).



Ottawa Collaborative for Parenting Support

Playful Mindset

Chatting with Marnie Power, Executive Director of Ottawa's Playful Mindset, is truly a breath of fresh air. Playful Mindset, a collaborative initiative striving to be both evidence-based and creative in approach, was built on the concept of "playing with play".

First introduced to OCYI last year, Marnie ran a workshop at OCYI's 2022 Critical Hours Training Day titled Supporting Youth through Play in the Critical Hours.

Marnie says that Playful Mindset's and OCYI's missions are well-aligned. "Our mission is to 'disrupt' adverse childhood experiences and support the mental health of children from birth to age twelve through outdoor play and play-based learning."

With a background in social work and education, and other related work over the past two decades, Marnie has witnessed the power of play as a supportive tool for children. She is fascinated by the learning and discovery, brought by play, but perhaps most intrigued by the social emotional outcomes.

"Play can be a beautiful disruptor to trauma. We need to disrupt and support and I think that play holds so much power for children and adults. Play saved me as a child. And as a single parent, I was the best parent I could be when I stepped outside. The second I opened the door, anytime I was feeling overwhelmed, I was a different parent and very proud of what I could offer there."

And the message to adults, caring for children, is that it is okay to stop directing every experience and interaction.

"Children need time for unstructured outdoor play. To engage in risk, awe, wonder and self-agency that is on offer through play. This is where the beneficial social and emotional outcomes come from. Children experience and come to understand the world through play, play is the language of childhood. When children are supported in play they can really be seen and heard, they have self agency and can step into their imagination. Nature has



the power to really hold us in that play, provide a buffer from a chaotic world, and act as a soothing balm to the nervous system."

According to Marnie, an unstructured play experience can be had in many accessible and urban spaces. "A patch of five trees is a vast woodland for a three-year-old. An unused parking lot can provide endless play affordances. Loose parts like planks, pinecones, tires, blocks, sticks, and stumps are ideal and open-ended play materials. Little ones are seeking an element of magic and want their own land and agency over that space."

With much societal pressure on caregivers to orchestrate every activity, the teachings of Playful Mindset also give adults permission to let go, slow down and find wonder. "It is about seeing and stepping back. Being attuned but not attached. Dipping and weaving in during a special moment or helping children with a difficult skill, but also getting out of their way to play."

Asked why it is important to help Ottawa's children to grow up great, Marnie references time spent visiting nature schools in Denmark. "The programming was developed with the belief that children deserve to go through childhood with a twinkle in their eye. And this stuck with me. Growing up great, and maintaining a twinkle in children's eyes, means playing in abundance, and this can significantly and positively impact their future."

This fall, OCYI's Ottawa Collaborative for Parenting Support hosted Marnie and Playful Mindset for a two-part workshop to support organization staff in their work with parents.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

For more information about Playful Mindset or to contact Marnie, please click [here](#).

This story is part of the [December 2023 Ovation](#).

Research and Evaluation

OCYI Strategy Meeting 2023

On July 5, 2023, OCYI’s Research & Evaluation Task Group (RETG) led a Strategy Meeting to refine OCYI’s Theory of Change and Strategic Direction. Thirteen members of the OCYI community, representing each task group and the Steering Committee, met in the offices of United Way East Ontario for a morning of dialogue. RETG Co-chairs, Kady Carr and Erin Montague, kicked off the day by presenting a draft Theory of Change document and then facilitated a discussion to finalize the following long-term objective: “Organizations are able to respond to the evolving mental health and well-being needs of Ottawa’s children, youth, and families.” The long-term objective was decided upon after a careful review and discussion of the terms “mental health and well-being” to ensure that they are inclusive of an array of needs as well as identifying the essential need to include families as part of the circle of support for children and youth.

Following a coffee break, the participants settled into creating impact pathways, which connect the two-year action plan for each task group to the long-term objective. While it was clear to all participants how, in general, the task groups projects supported OCYI’s overall long-term objective, the impact pathways exercise clarified the specifics. The impact pathways themselves were later taken to each task group for review, allowing the task group members to better see how their work fits in the wider framework of OCYI’s work. This exercise created meaning for task group members, illustrating how their work supports a larger vision and supported the use of creativity in approaching different steps of the work.



In 2024 and beyond, the task groups continue to evolve their action plans, careful to connect the work to OCYI’s Strategic Direction. This is keeping us unified under a larger umbrella goal. The RETG is continuing to develop an evaluation plan to support the Theory of Change so we can collectively measure and track our progress towards and impact of the long-term objective.

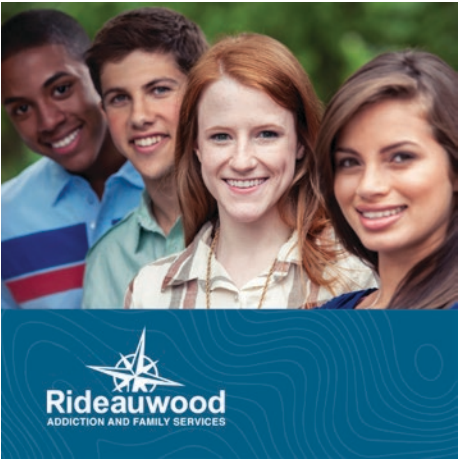


A close-up photograph of two young girls. The girl on the left, with light brown hair and bangs, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is wearing a red top with white floral patterns. The girl on the right, with dark skin and her hair in two buns, is leaning in and whispering into the ear of the first girl. She is wearing a green and white striped top with purple suspenders. The word "Communications" is written in large, white, bold letters across the center of the image, overlaid on a semi-transparent blue horizontal band.

Communications

Partner Profile Series

OCYI’s Partner Profile Series has proven to be a meaningful way to connect with our partner organizations and learn more about how each supports kids and youth in Ottawa. Over the past year, OCYI spent time with our partners asking them about their work, the needs and challenges faced by each, and the benefits of their partnership with OCYI. OCYI hopes that the process of sharing these stories will enhance awareness of the programs and resources available to children and youth across the city.



Rideauwood Addiction & Family Services
Ottawa’s **Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services** opened its doors in 1976 with funding for just four programs and services. Today, more than 45 years later, this valuable OCYI partner offers over 15 programs to youth, adults, families and support persons who are struggling with the role that substance use, behavioural addictions and mental health issues play in their lives.

[Click here for the full story](#)

Emily Murphy NPHC
Emily Murphy Non-Profit Housing Corporation has been providing supportive affordable housing to single parent families in Ottawa since 1987. Developed in response to community recognition that single parents were being discriminated against in the housing market, Emily Murphy is now the permanent housing piece of Ottawa’s Young Parents Support Network.

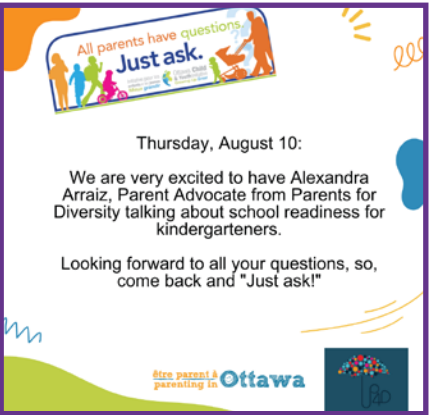


A townhouse complex, of 39 units including a program office, Emily Murphy is named after the leader of the Famous Five, who was an equal rights activist and the first female judge in Canada. Executive Director, Pam Cripps, hopes that Murphy’s legacy serves as a reminder that “you can do anything that you set your mind to.”

[Click here for the full story](#)

Parents for Diversity
Parents for Diversity (P4D) is an Ottawa-based collective of parents and allies who share a commitment to protecting every child’s right to an education that is free from discrimination. Founded in 2016 by three women of colour, who recognized a lack of representation in their children’s schools, P4D is now operated by two part time staff members and a volunteer board of directors. Staff member and Parent Advocate, Alexandra Arraiz, highlights that the group is currently all women and primarily women of colour. “I am very proud to work here as we are a small team, made up of mostly all volunteers, who get a lot done! This speaks to the passion and commitment that every person brings to the table.”

[Click here for the full story](#)



Pleo
For over 20 years, OCYI partner **Pleo** has been there to support families whose children, to age 25, are facing mental health challenges. Pleo was originally founded in a hospital waiting room, when three mothers bonded over the shared experience of seeking help for their children, who were each experiencing mental distress. Wanting more resources, skills and shared experience to properly care for their children at home and between appointments, regular meetings soon commenced at a local coffee shop. Word spread and before long, the three took turns taking calls on a cell phone with a number that remains the same today.

[Click here for the full story](#)

Social Media and Website

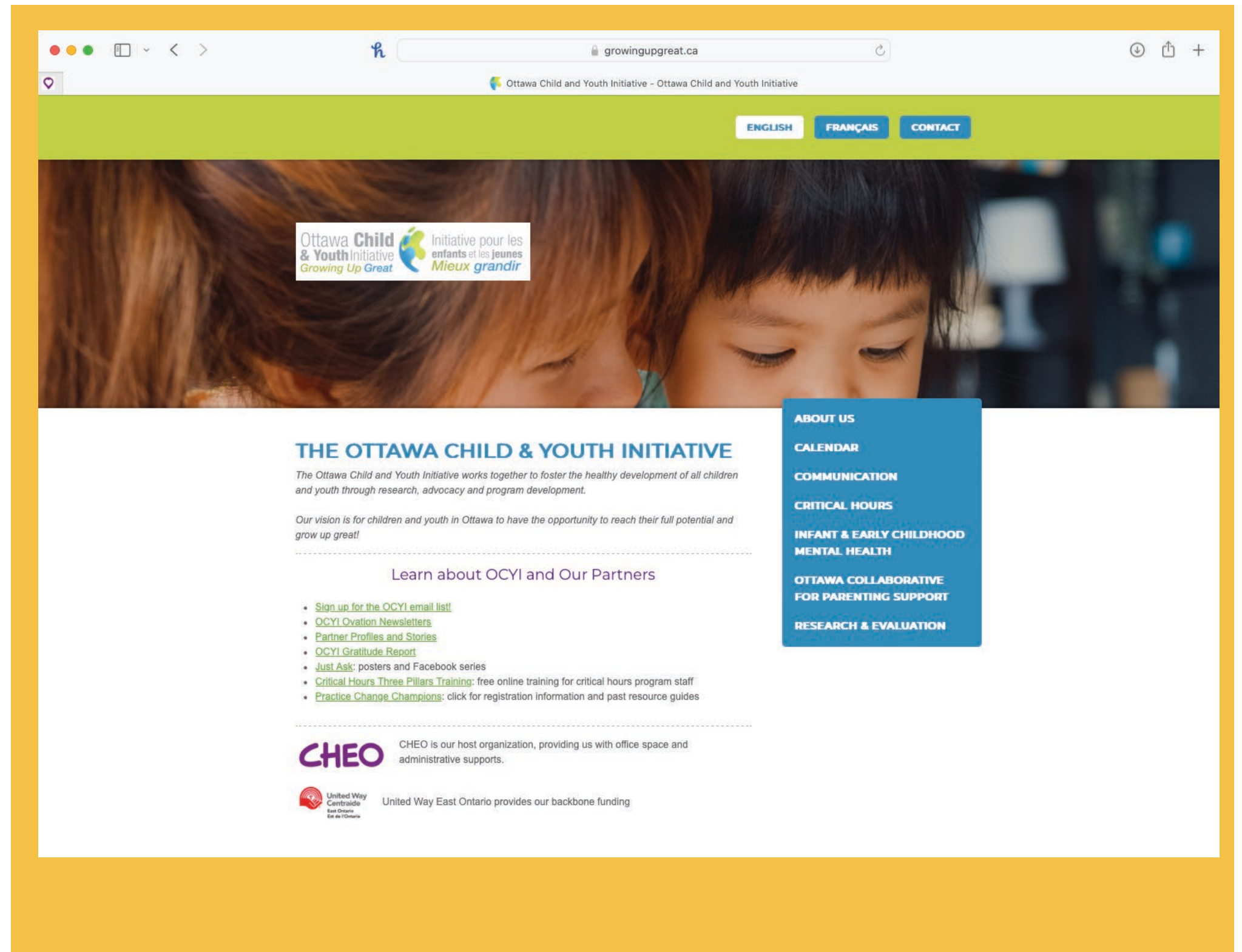
OCYI's website features a regularly updated and bilingual blog of stories, profiles, and individual articles from the OCYI Ovation newsletter. These images and links provide vibrant social media content intended to reach a larger and more diverse audience.

The staff of OCYI, strive to create communications opportunities that create awareness and advocate for the needs of children, youth, and families in Ottawa.

OCYI continues to produce and circulate its newsletter, the OCYI Ovation. With each new issue, OCYI looks for innovative ways to improve and enhance the impact and circulation of these publications.

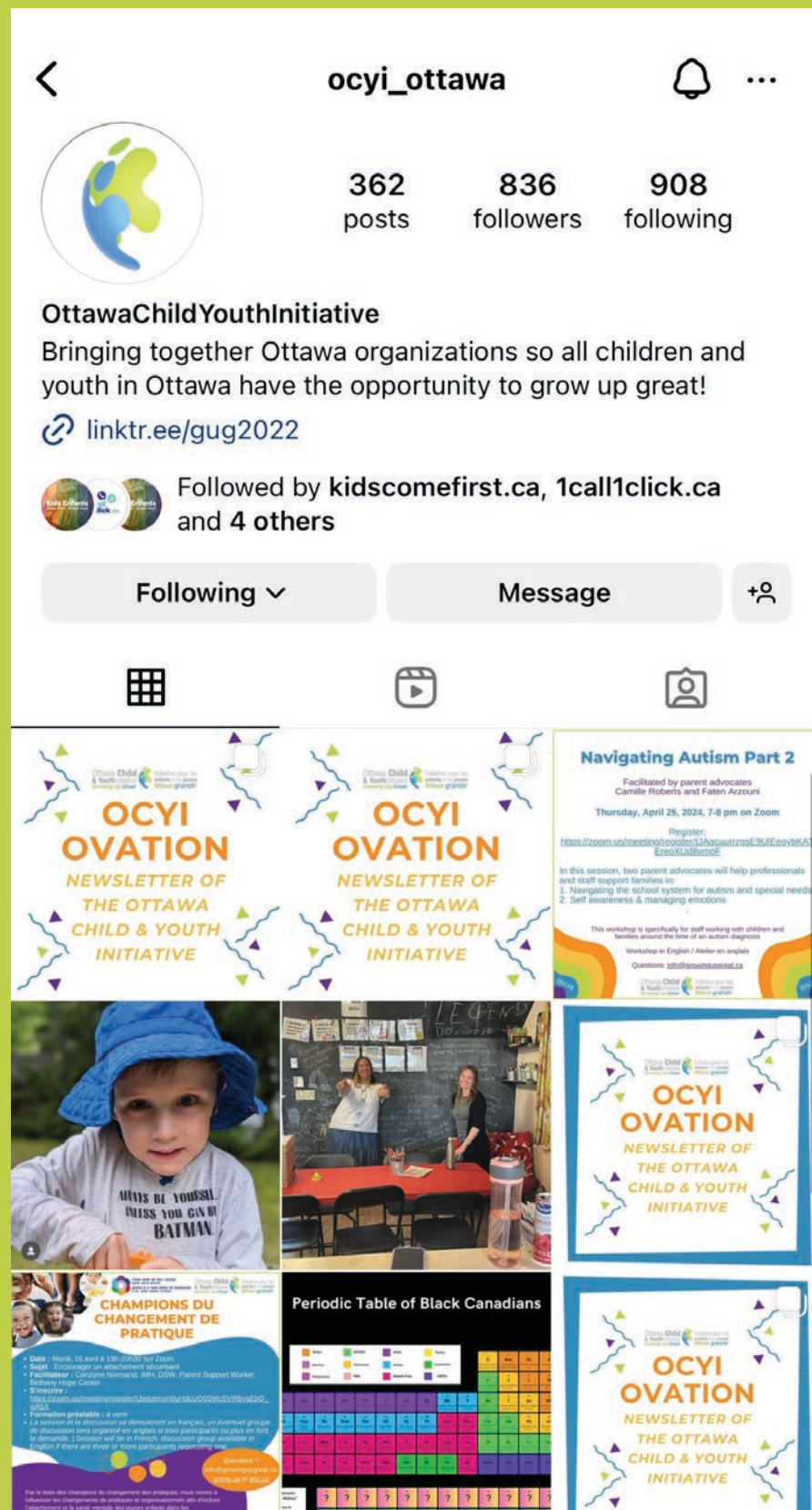
With many new and anticipated OCYI events and initiatives to promote, OCYI has found social media to be an important tool for creating access to timely information and encouraging online registration.

As part of our commitment to supporting all our partners, OCYI continuously works to share news, events and initiatives using OCYI social media platforms and publications.



INSTAGRAM

OCYI's Instagram account **OCYI_Ottawa** has celebrated its three-year anniversary with 800+ followers.



TWITTER

OCYI's Twitter account **OCYI_Ottawa** has over 2,000 followers.



OCYI 2023-24 Financial Statement

	Revenue	Expenses	Balance
Balance Forward (April 1, 2023)			\$125,626.10
Revenue			
United Way – Community Wide Initiative	\$75,000.00		
Community Services Recovery Fund	\$74,000.00		
CHEO	\$20,000.00		
City of Ottawa	\$10,000.00		
Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est	\$5,000.00		
Ottawa Carleton District School Board	\$20,000.00		
Ottawa Catholic School Board	\$10,000.00		
Ottawa Police Service	\$5,000.00		
Revenue Totals	\$219,000.00		
Expenses		\$246,370.16	
March 31, 2024 Fund Balance			\$98,255.94

Links

This Gratitude Report was originally prepared for digital use. Below is a list of the URLs referenced as hyperlinks in the text.

OCYI Structure & Leaders

- <https://www.growingupgreat.ca/english/about-us/our-partners>

Task Groups in Action

Critical Hours

- <https://www.growingupgreat.ca/2023/11/17/ocyi-story-community-services-recovery-fund>

Early Childhood Development

- <http://www.yourhealthspace.ca>

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

- <https://www.growingupgreat.ca/2024/01/19/ocyi-story-let-s-talk-2024>

Ottawa Collaborative for Parenting Support

- <https://www.growingupgreat.ca/english/ottawa-collaborative-for-parenting-support>
- <https://playfulmindset.ca>
- <https://www.growingupgreat.ca/2023/12/15/partner-profile-playful-mindset>

Partner Profile Series

- <https://www.rideauwood.org>
- <https://www.growingupgreat.ca/2023/09/12/partner-profile-rideauwood-addiction-family-services/>
- <http://emilymurphynphc.ca>
- <https://www.growingupgreat.ca/2024/03/25/partner-profile-emily-murphy-nphc/>
- <https://parentsfordiversity.com>
- <https://www.growingupgreat.ca/2024/02/20/partner-profile-parents-for-diversity/>
- <https://www.pleo.on.ca>
- <https://www.growingupgreat.ca/2023/10/12/partner-profile-pleo/>

Social Media

- https://www.instagram.com/ocyi_ottawa/
- https://twitter.com/OCYI_Ottawa





Instagram

@OCYI_Ottawa

Twitter

@OCYI_Ottawa

Email

info@growingupgreat.ca

Website

www.OCYI.ca

The Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative works together to foster the healthy development of all children and youth through research, advocacy and program development.

Our vision is for children and youth in Ottawa to have the opportunity to reach their full potential.