

Acorn Family Place

...a place for families



Annual Report

2024-25

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Acorn Family Place is an organization led by staff who grew up being looked after ancestors from all over Turtle Island and even globally. Our organizational roots are in Winnipeg near Nistawayak (Three Points), not far from the place where the Assiniboine River and the Red River meet. Nistawayak was a traditional Indigenous stopping place. We recognize that Treaty 3 Traditional Territory and Shoal Lake First Nation 40 is the primary water source for Winnipeg, and that community until very recently had a water boil advisory.

Our centre is located on Treaty 1 Territory, the original lands of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and homeland of the Métis Nation. These peoples have lived here for many thousands of years have made countless contributions to our region. Indigenous people are still here, many of them are members of our community today and worth celebrating.

As an organization committed to truth and reconciliation and social justice, we have a responsibility to try to change the colonial conditions around us that continue to cause harm to members of our community. We strive to be an agent of change and of social justice, to take the lead from our community, and commit to always trying to do better and be better.



WHO WE ARE



At Acorn Family Place, we believe that strong families are the foundation of a thriving community. As a family resource centre, we offer a wide range of programs and services for caregivers and parents of children aged 0-6. Our services and supports range from drop-in and basic needs supplies (food, diapers, clothing, laundry, phone and computer access), to group programming (parenting groups, personal development and wellness workshops), to individualized support (resource navigation, a pre employment program, wraparound supports); we also have an onsite licensed playroom where children can be cared for by Early Childhood Educators while caregivers take a break in our drop in, or attend a workshop.

Acorn Family Place is a community built on connection, compassion, and care. We walk alongside families through every stage of their journey, meeting them where they are and celebrating who they are. Here, everyone belongs and together we grow stronger.

Our mission is to create equitable opportunities for all families to connect, thrive, and reach their fullest potential.

VALUES



We walk alongside you.

We meet you where you are at.

We honor your story.

We value you as you are and celebrate you and your family.

We weave lasting connections.

We bring people together and create a place of belonging.

We are stronger together.

We support and build each other up.

2024-25 Staff List

Executive Director – Carey Richards (December 2024 - Present)

Emma Fineblit (-July 2024)

Manager of Programs –Kristen Wiltshire (returned March 2025)

Katherine Johnston (Interim)

Manager of Operations– Melissa Perron (on leave)

Katherine Johnston (Interim starting March 2025)

Playroom Director – Nadine Mackenzie

Food Connections Manager - Joanne Jeanson

Drop-In Coordinator (Interim) – Blessing Woghiren, Carlos Sosa

Drop-In Coordinator (on leave) - Vanessa Wharton

Parenting Coordinator – Jennifer DeFehr

Community Support Worker – Marisolle Negash

Personal Development Coordinator – Alescha Anderson

Wellness Outreach Coordinator – Deja Opaleke

Linda Elmi (-June 2024)

WrapAround Program Supervisor – Margot Brandt

WrapAround Support Workers - Tiffany Nolin, Ruby Garcia,

Jochebed Seyoum

Caring Dads Facilitator- Matthew Shorting

Early Childhood Educators - Darla Smith, Debbie Smith, Olivia Doucet

Child Care Assistants - Surriya Miraj, Asaria Crouch, Khadija Moghrabi

Kitchen Coordinator/Contract Worker– Ubaida Dramani

Food Connections Contract Workers – Jessica Nippert,

Tsion Sibhatu, Akuac Dut Kuol, Letensea Mesel, Abrahatsion Abay

Counsellor - Marcie Wong (-July 2024)

Communications & Community Engagement Coordinator –

Lindiwe Lord (-November 2024)

Communications Assistant - Riley Ray (beginning January 2025)

Fund Development Officer - Mahira Miyanji (-January 2025)

Community Leaders - Kathy Hanson, Helen Luke, Phillip Mann, Meagan Hoskins, Jolene Shoup

Housekeeper - Asaria Crouch

Bookkeeper - Leah McCormick



Summer Staff & Students

Summer Staff (2024) – Diana Ahima,
Tuva Bergstrom, Akasha Lord

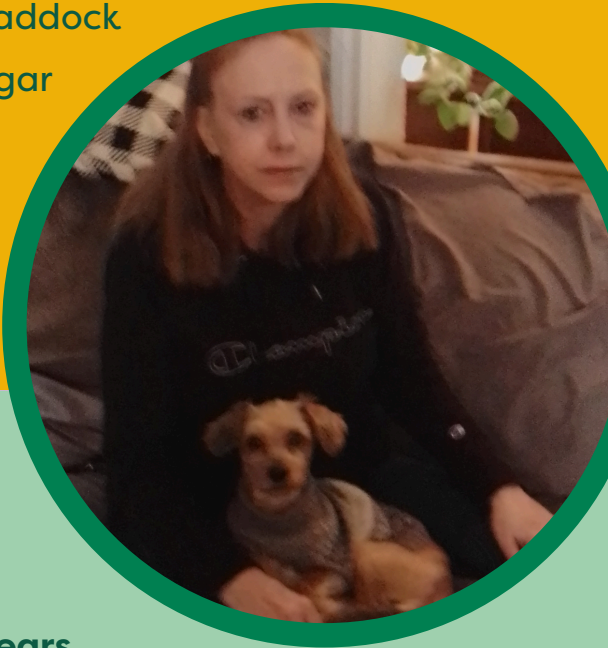
Practicum Students: Rebecca Nicholls,
Tamara Dixon, Mary Nadim, Melvin Earl
Mercado, Abel Tesfu, Aicelle Arevalo,
Maisy Nguyen

Volunteers

There are many volunteers who contribute
to Acorn Family Place and our success
year round, thank you to the 19 volunteers
from 2024-25!

Board List 2024-25

Bhavesh Mistry – Chair
Noelle Campbell – Vice Chair
Jacqueline Flett– Secretary
(until Sept 2024)
Nataliya Postnova - Treasurer
Krista Ringland
Christina MacIsaac
Jordy Craddock
Kate Wagar



Volunteer Highlight

April has been part of Acorn Family Place for over 20 years.

She first came to us when she was new to Winnipeg. Over the years, she says the Centre has supported her with everything from housing and family visits to finding a sense of community. Now, she supports us by volunteering around the Centre, always ready to sort donations in our clothing depot, lend a hand at events, and help with whatever else we might need. April is also a valuable member of our Community Council, where she meaningfully contributes her ideas around improving services and programs at Acorn Family Place. We’re so grateful to April, and to all of our incredible volunteers, who give their time, energy, and heart to support our community. We couldn’t do it without you!

...thanks April!

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

The past year at Acorn Family Place has been one of both change and resilience, and one that revealed, more than ever, the strength of our team and community. This year, we navigated a period of transition, welcomed new leadership, and faced growing community needs, all while continuing to be a place where children and families find connection and support along their journey.

We began the year by honoring the remarkable leadership of Emma Fineblit, our Executive Director of six years, whose dedication shaped so much of who Acorn is today. Following her departure, we undertook a careful and inclusive search for our next leader. Over four months, staff, leadership, community members, partners, and the Board came together to imagine Acorn's future, which informed the Board's decision to select the right person to guide it into the future. We were thrilled to welcome Carey Richards as our new Executive Director, and we look forward to the vision and energy they bring to the next branch of our family tree.

During the leadership transition, the pressure on staff and leadership was immense; yet they rose to the challenge with compassion, creativity, and unwavering commitment. They not only kept programs running but improved and expanded them, even as we faced funding and resource constraints, rising community needs, and safety challenges across our neighborhood. It is a powerful reminder that the heart of Acorn is its people, those who go above and beyond to make sure families of all kinds, feel seen and supported.

Even amid challenges, there was much to celebrate. In 2024, Acorn was honoured by Mayor Scott Gillingham with a Community Service Award at International Women's Day and by Honourable Lisa Naylor with a Member's Statement in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly recognizing our impact. These honors reflect the dedication of every staff member, volunteer, partner, and supporter who makes Acorn a beacon for families in our community. As we look ahead, we do so with optimism and renewed purpose as we revisit our Strategic Plan. With Carey's leadership and the ongoing dedication of our team, Acorn will continue to be a place where families are welcomed, strengthened, and empowered to thrive.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, THANK YOU! to our staff, partners, donors, funders, government, volunteers, and families, for your resilience, your trust, and your commitment to our shared vision. Together, we are building a stronger city, that is a more inclusive and nurturing place to live, than any one of us could create alone.



With deep respect and gratitude,

Bhavesh Mistry – Chair, Board of Directors at Acorn Family Place

Message from the Executive Director

It's with great excitement that I share my first message as the new Executive Director of Acorn Family Place. I'm grateful to the Board of Directors, Hiring Committee, Staffing team, and the AFP Community for providing me the incredible opportunity and honour to join an organization centered around community connection, wellness and empowerment.

This past year has been a year of significant transition (within leadership particularly) and a year where the team demonstrated resilience and profound commitment. Emma Fineblit moved on from the role of Executive Director in July, and I had the pleasure of joining the team in December 2024. Although there was a five-month vacancy in the Executive Director role, the Board, Leadership and Staffing Team did an incredible job keeping the Centre and programs running smoothly, successfully, and in alignment with our values. The extraordinary efforts of the Leadership Team, the Staffing Team and Board of Directors during this gap is to be commended and celebrated. Thank you for your care, and the commitment demonstrated in remaining supportive and responsive to communities needs, while going above and beyond in taking on additional responsibilities. I'm beyond grateful to join such a caring, supportive and strong team.

A heartfelt thank you to our incredible Volunteers, whose dedication and warmth help keep our operations running smoothly every single day. Whether welcoming families with a smile, supporting programs behind the scenes, or lending a hand in the Clothing Depot, your generosity of spirit and time is appreciated immensely. Thank you also to our Community Council and the Community Leaders who have helped shape and strengthen our programs and services, by sharing your wisdom and solutions through collaboration. You're all incredibly important parts of our team and help ensure we remain responsive and rooted in community voice.

To our incredible Funders, Donors and Partners thank you for your ongoing support, your continued generosity and your shared commitment to supporting and empowering caregivers and families to thrive. Because of you, Acorn Family Place continues to be a space where families feel seen, supported, and empowered. In the year ahead,

I look forward to collaborating on and creating a new Strategic Plan to envision together our areas of focus for the next several years.

Thank you for welcoming me into this role. I look forward to the journey ahead—together. With shared purpose, deep care, and collective strength, I know we will continue to grow, adapt, and thrive as a community.

With gratitude,
Carey Richards (they/them)
Executive Director, Acorn Family Place



Message from the Community Council

In 2024-25, the Community Council at Acorn Family Place has continued to grow and discuss many essential matters. We've focused on recruiting new Council Members, ensuring that a wider range of voices from the community are represented. Our discussions have covered important topics like caregiver vs. staff responsibility, adapting to service changes within Crossways, and planning for events such as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. We've also taken time to reflect on our strengths and how we can best support each other and our community of caregivers. Through it all, the Council remains committed to bringing meaningful community input into the heart of AFP's work.



-Deja Opaleke,
Wellness Outreach Coordinator
and Community Council Staff Lead

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Our **Food Connections Program** distributed **1110 food hampers**, hosted **52 caregivers breakfasts**, as well as **24 cooking classes**. Our social enterprise provided **605 paid work experience shifts** to caregivers who have barriers to employment.
- There were **4190 visits to the Playroom**, and we supported families to four adventures offsite: Winter Celebration (Fort Whyte), Tinker Town, A Maze in Corn, and Birds Hill Park. The Playroom also hosted "I Love to Read" events and activities, and programs like Music Circle.
- Our Drop-in remained incredibly busy with **5927 visits** (Laundry resources, the Clothing Depot, and access to the phone and computer were particularly busy).
- Thanks to our generous donors we were able to provide **increased access** to diapers, formula, baby food, basic needs supplies like hygiene products, menstrual products, pregnancy tests, condoms, emergency bus tickets, and naloxone kits.
- In total Acorn Family Place hosted **8 series of group Parenting programs** (Including Caring Dads, Circle of Security, Muffins and Tots, Understanding Conflict, Mindful Munchkins, and Creativity for Caregivers).
- Our **Wellness Outreach** program coordinated with **Healthy Baby** to offer **24 sessions** at Crossways, as well as coordinate monthly **Public Health Nurse Drop In** opportunities. The Wellness Outreach Coordinator offered **135 individual support sessions**, and offered **89 outreach activities** (such as Journaling workshops, restorative yoga etc).
- Our **Personal Development** program had 398 visits this past year, and facilitated Muffins and Tots, and Understanding Conflict workshops.
- Our **WrapAround** program has completed its fourth year, and **supported 44 families** who have CFS involvement or are at risk of involvement in this year. Our **WrapAround drop-in programs and activities** saw **97 families**.

Food Connections



Food Connections empowers primary caregivers in our community by providing a supportive work environment where caregivers can build job-related skills and overcome employment barriers.

Operating at the heart of our centre, the Food Connections kitchen is a hub of activity: offering cooking classes, hosting a weekly breakfast club, facilitating our monthly food bank, preparing emergency food kits, making meals in partnership with North End Women's Centre, and providing snacks and coffee for all centre programs.

Staff Menu Favourite:

Chili, a hearty blend of simmered vegetables and legumes, available as vegetarian or with ground beef added. Topped with cheddar cheese, sour cream, and green onions. Served with fresh whole wheat bannock.



In addition to these vital services around the centre, Food Connections also runs a thriving social enterprise: our catering service. Featuring a diverse menu of delicious offerings, from Moroccan Hummus to Ricotta Manicotti, this enterprise not only delights customers but also creates meaningful employment opportunities. Each order helps participants gain hands-on experience and develop transferable skills for future job success.

W R A P A R O U N D

Our WrapAround program had a very successful year! We were able to support 46 participants with their involvement with CFS.



Additionally, we organized drop-in activities throughout the year, including events such as Bingo, Medicine Picking, Advisory Committee meetings, Sharing Circles, Art in the Park, Drum Making, and Eritrean Coffee Ceremonies, among others.

These drop-in activities provided valuable opportunities for parents and caregivers to engage, fostering a sense of community where individuals can express themselves, learn, and engage in creative pursuits. The Sharing Circles, in particular, have helped participants realize they are not alone and have enabled peer support among attendees.



Playroom Spotlight: *DARLA*



If your little ones have spent time in the Playroom, chances are they know Darla. As the longest-serving staff member at Acorn Family Place, Darla has been an integral part of the Centre, working with us since 2002, and even volunteering for years before that. A child at heart, she's always dreaming up fun and creative ways to engage with the kids.

She is caring, incredibly kind, and generous. She genuinely enjoys seeing children play and learn. Her patience and loving nature create a safe and welcoming environment where children feel comfortable and secure. She is loyal and trustworthy, helping families and children feel at ease.

What she likes most about being an early childhood educator:

“Kids just come up with the most interesting things. They have so much imagination and creativity.”

“I like their honesty.”

“I love watching them bloom.”

FUN FACTS:

Darla is quite spontaneous and will often break out in song. She likes to knit and crochet and often surprises her colleagues with her creations. She is also a gamer and loves movies.



SUPPORTERS

Everyone of us at Acorn Family Place is endlessly grateful for the support of our 2024-25 funders & supports, including:

- An anonymous donor
- Arts, Culture, Sport in Community Fund (ACSC) Province of Manitoba
- Assiniboine Credit Union
- Birchwood
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Cooperation
- Canada Summer Jobs
- Chamandy Foundation
- Children's Aid Foundation of Canada
- City of Winnipeg
- Communities4Families
- International Misericordia Family
- Jewish Foundation of Manitoba
- Lawson Foundation
- Local Investment Towards Employment
- Margaret's Choir
- Province of Manitoba
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- Shepherd's Heart Fund
- United Way of Winnipeg
- Urban Green Team
- Winnipeg Kinsmen Club
- Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
- Winnipeg Suicide Prevention Network
- The Winnipeg Foundation
- West Broadway Community Organization
- Youth In Philanthropy (Winnipeg Foundation)
- Generous individual donations, including monthly donors



THANK YOU!

PARTNERS

- Art City
- CAPC Manitoba Coalition and CAPC/CPNP Provincial Leads Network
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet)
- Communities4Families
- Community Financial Counselling Service
- Compost Winnipeg
- Computers 4 Schools
- Crossway in Common neighbours: Young United Church, Hope Mennonite Church, Day Nursery Centre, 1Just City, Artemis
- Family Liaison Network • For Every Family Initiative (United Way)
- Frontier College
- Healthy Baby
- Homeless Outreach Community Support (HOCS) Network, End Homelessness Winnipeg, Leading4Impact
- Persons Community Solution
- International Misericordia Family, including Villa Rosa & Misericordia Health Centre
- Klinik
- Local Investment Towards Employment
- Next Step
- North End Women's Centre
- Prelude Music
- RESOLVE
- SEED Winnipeg
- University of Manitoba
- West Broadway Community Organization
- West Broadway Directors Network
- West Broadway Housing Stakeholders
- West Central Women's Resource Centre
- Westminster Housing Society
- WRHA



PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

Persons Community Solutions (PCS) and the Community Safety Hosts Initiative



PCS is a social enterprise that partnered with Zoongizi Ode to operate the Community Safety Hosts Initiative (CSHI). The CSHI was developed to address barriers that people face when trying to access essential services at community facilities. Instead of traditional security that can reject or alienate people, Community Safety Hosts use trauma-informed approaches to welcome people and help them navigate to the services they need.

Why This Partnership Works

The partnership between PCS/CSHI and Acorn Family Place aligns naturally because both organizations recognize that families facing challenges need welcoming, supportive environments to successfully access help. AFP's strengths-based approach to supporting families complements the CSHI's focus on removing barriers and creating positive first encounters. At Crossways, this means families seeking AFP's services - whether for emergency support, parenting programs, or childcare - encounter hosts who understand trauma and can help them navigate to exactly what they need, rather than facing institutional barriers.



A Community Safety Host's Perspective:

"...The person shared with me that they felt a lot safer with Community Safety Host in the building. In another interaction with a person going to one of our services, I'd recognize them from previous work experience and called them by their first name. They were shocked, but felt very welcome to the space... I felt very successful in hosting a welcoming environment..."

Learn more about our work at pcs-scp.ca/cshi



