



circle

Community LandTrust

2023





## we acknowledge

*The land on which Circle's homes were built exists across multiple treaties.*

*Toronto is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabek, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.*

*The land on which Circle's current and future homes was built exists across multiple treaties. To the West of Woodbine Avenue, Toronto is covered by Treaty 13. To the East of Woodbine Avenue, Toronto is covered by the Williams Treaties. In 2015 the Mississaugas of the Credit submitted a land claim to the government of Ontario, claiming unextinguished title to the lands covered by the Williams Treaties. The Scattered Homes sit on land that exists in this context.*

*As an organization, Circle is committed to critically looking at what it means to own and operate housing on this land, and how we can support reconciliation and Indigenous sovereignty.*



Further to this land acknowledgement, we also recognize that our work to better understand our relationship and responsibility to the land is intertwined with making a commitment towards dismantling colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression. Circle seeks to create new models and approaches in our programming and services that further economic, social, and environmental justice.

### Truth & Reconciliation Committee

As part of our ongoing work to explore the role that Circle can play as a “landowner” in the process of reconciliation and supporting Indigenous sovereignty, our Truth & Reconciliation Committee organized two events to facilitate learning and discussion among our staff: the Ten Missing Pieces workshop with Indigenous educator Sandi Boucher, and a follow-up reflection session where we talked about what we learned, how this ties into our housing work, and enjoyed fresh bannock that was baked by graduates of the Sagatay program at Na-Me-Res. Circle also worked with Indigenous-led landscaping educators Alter Eden to create custom packages of pollinator-friendly seeds for our Tenants to plant in their gardens.

Our hope is that this is a process that our Tenants will explore with us. Please contact our Tenant Engagement Department if you would like to be involved.

## message from our ceo

Recently, a group of our staff sat down together to reflect on the past two years. We reminisced about those early months of Circle: How we juggled operations with no equipment, and how Metrolinx suddenly expropriated our offices, meaning we had to move in the midst of receiving hundreds of homes in the Transfer! We shared a bonding moment - the kind that

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**So, I'm grateful to express my sincerest thank you to Circle Tenants.** Over the course of 2023, we really got to know you better. I'm continuously blown away by your trust, hospitality, willingness to collaborate, patience, and efforts to hold us accountable with such care. A transfer of this magnitude, and shift to a different way of operating was not easy for everyone, yet so many of you have taken the time to share how happy you are with the work our team is doing, and let us know that you recognize our efforts. This kind of feedback is a great source of motivation for us.

only comes upon later reflection with a group who has collaborated to achieve something meaningful.

One theme our conversation kept returning to was trust, and how so much

**In addition to that, I owe an immense thank you to Circle's staff and Board.** We had some major staff growth in 2023. We hired a COO, Lauren Blumas, we welcomed a new Director of Asset Management & Capital Projects, Behnaz Karimi, and we grew the Board and multiple departments. When I started as the first Circle employee in January 2022, I didn't have a laptop, or even an email! We needed to build everything from scratch. As we ramped up, something sort of magical happened: We began to pull in an incredibly creative and inspired group of highly competent people who identified with our mission and vision to protect and preserve our homes in perpetuity for Tenants. The energy and depth that staff show up with every day define the spirit of Circle and our commitment to be better for Tenants.

New Board members, new staff, new partners, new Tenants - As you read through this annual report, you'll see how these groups intersect, and how we're working together to implement our plans, meet the objectives we laid out, and go above and beyond them.

Happy Year 2!  
Alia





## message from circle's board president

It's with great pride that I reflect back on Circle Community LandTrust's second year of operations – and really, on the long journey to this point. As a founding board member – and current President – I have watched this project evolve from an idea that was born in an urgent moment, to a full-fledged organization that is providing affordable housing to hundreds of families across the City, and undertaking an extensive capital repair campaign to bring every home into a state-of-good-repair.

Circle's homes are unique and wonderful places to live and raise a family, and are located in neighbourhoods where affordable housing of all kinds is rapidly disappearing. As someone with decades of experience in the sector, I know how important – and hard-fought - wins like these are. In the last year, we've been fortunate to welcome three new members to Circle's board – Diana Yoon, Sherri Williams, and Karen Hepburn – who all bring extensive experience in affordable housing, capital work, and advocacy.

I look forward to working with my fellow board members and Circle's dedicated staff team as we continue this important work, from an exciting new organization that will own and care for these special homes in perpetuity.

Tom Clement



## capital repair program

When over 600 scattered homes were transferred into our permanently affordable land trust in 2022, Circle made a commitment to bring all of them into a state-of-good-repair over the following five years. Thanks to the support of our funders and partners including **the Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, the City of Toronto, and Toronto Community Housing Corporation**, we were able to make great progress on this important work in 2023. Our Capital Repair Program is providing **once-in-a-generation improvements to the quality, accessibility, sustainability, and longevity of our homes.**

Recognizing the huge responsibility that we had to our Tenants, and the homes themselves, our team and partners worked hard to create a program that would deliver much-needed repairs efficiently, while also supporting broader social benefits and sustainability. We shared our process and progress in detail earlier this year with our report **Retrofit & Renew: Capital Repairs Beyond Rent-Ready in 600+ Homes.**

### By the Numbers... (so far)

**25 full renovations**  
of previously vacant homes

### Infrastructure repairs and replacements:

- Roofs in 50 units
- Hot water tanks in 37 units
- HVAC upgrades in 29 units
- Electrical panels in 40 units
- Foundations in 56 units





### Quality-Of-Life Improvements

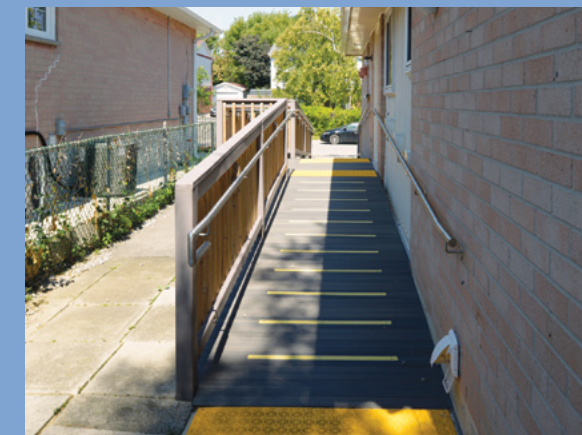
From the beginning, our Tenants have made it clear that quality maintenance is a top priority, so it fills our staff with pride to hear about the difference the repairs are making in our Tenants’ day-to-day lives.

*“I’m a female Tenant with a disability. I am very pleased to have a new, widened doorway bringing more light to my home. I stay home almost all the time because I am ventilated – a new door with sunshine is better for my mental health. Thank you Circle for the new door to my home, appreciate your efforts!”*

**3657 Repair Orders completed**  
(of a total 4070 submitted)  
by the end of 2023

### Life-safety items:

- Mould remediations in 125 units
- Preventative bathroom fan installations in 110 units
- Repairs to decks, railings, and interiors



accurate picture of the work needed in each property, so that we can make sure that the work is tackled as efficiently as possible.

Additionally, we developed a formal tender process that ensures lasting quality and contractor accountability, and considers social procurement values.

These decisions meant that many of our renovation projects did not get started until summer 2023 – which meant a longer wait for Tenants - but the result will be longterm benefits and more efficient spending. Our team is grateful for the patience and consideration that our Tenants have shown us over the last two years.

### Sustainability improvements including:

Shifting off gas to all-electric systems – getting as close to zero-carbon as Ontario’s power grid allows (currently over 90% emissions free)

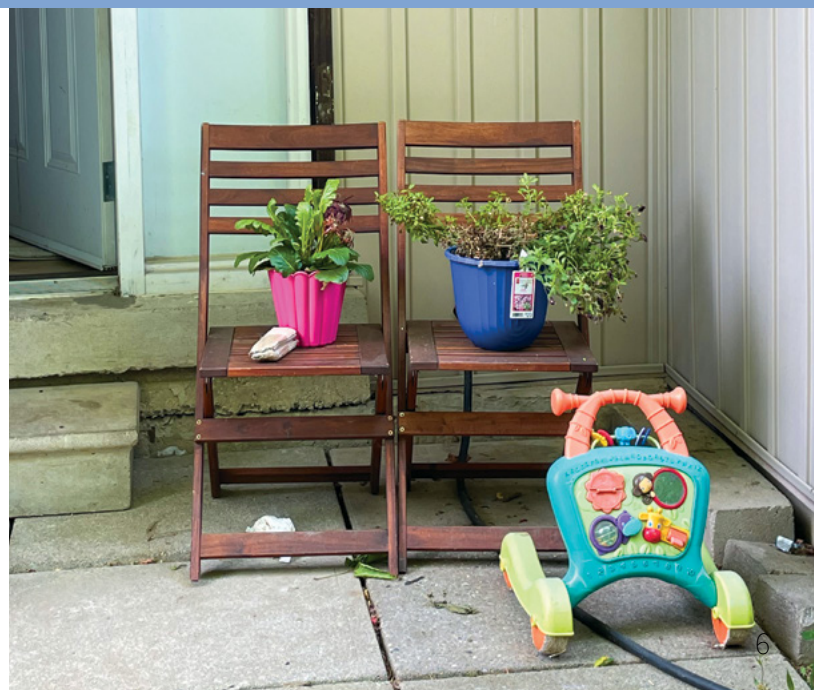


Increasing energy efficiency through higher-performing building envelopes

**Energy Efficiency Retrofit Assessments in 60 units** from ClearRESULT

### Filling Vacant Homes

Since initiating our capital program, Circle has renovated many previously-vacant homes, which are now providing affordable housing to families from the City of Toronto’s Centralized Waiting List, and our referral partners at Sojourn House refugee resettlement agency, and Wigwamen, Toronto’s largest urban Indigenous housing provider.



### Acknowledging a Slower Start

In the months after Circle received the homes in the 2022 Transfer, we heard from some Tenants who were disappointed that long-awaited repairs had not been started as soon as they’d hoped.

Our team learned a lot from the Transfer process – including that our best approach was to inspect every home to get an





## a year of growth

In 2023 we grew, got further stabilized, and celebrated. We started the year off with a launch party, co-hosted with our friends at the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (who received over 80 properties as part of the Tenants First transfers). It was an amazing gathering of advocates, Tenants, politicians, and sector leaders who worked together to protect the Scattered Homes as affordable forever. Alongside exciting growth in our Operations and Finance departments, Circle also made two important new hires in 2023: Lauren Blumas as Chief Operating Officer, and Behnaz Karimi as Director of Asset Management & Capital Projects. Both bring with them deep knowledge and experience in the sector, and have already made invaluable contributions to Circle's work. Lauren and Behnaz round-out our current leadership team, which happens to be all women-identified. This brings a unique and insightful perspective to our work in property management and capital repairs, with an approach that emphasizes collaboration, empathy, and careful consideration of Tenant and community needs.

### Strategic Planning

In Fall 2024, Circle's Board of Directors and senior staff will convene to write our first strategic plan, which will set the organization's goals and approach for the next five years. In 2023 we held two visioning sessions with facilitator Suzanne Gibson – one with our full staff, and one with a group of 15 Circle Tenants – to



gather diverse perspectives that will inform our strategic plan.

### Getting to Know Each Other Better

While Circle received our homes in 2022, the transition continued long into 2023. Across our staff teams, there has been a focus on building relationships with our Tenants: making sure they know how to reach us, taking their feedback, and having fun together. Last year, we launched our print Tenant newsletter Scatter Notes, met twice with our Tenant Advisory Group, and hosted Pizza in the Park with Circle, where Tenants and staff gathered to enjoy fresh pizza from Fairmount Park's wood-burning oven. Our Tenant Services and Maintenance staff teams provided orientations for the many families who moved into their new Circle homes.

Of course, relationship-building is based on nurturing trust, and is not without its challenges and moments of tension. Going into the Transfer, we knew that a significant number of households had shown consistent difficulty paying their rent on

time to TCHC. For our staff, an important part of getting to know these Tenants has been working with them to find a path forward, and opportunities to create new habits and accountability. This work is ongoing (and we look forward to sharing updates in our 2024 Annual Report), but a big focus for 2023 was working with Tenants to support housing stability.

Another area where our team spent considerable time developing trust and building relationships was through managing major renovations with our homeowner neighbours, and supporting our Tenants with neighbourhood integration. A big part of 2023 was simply introducing ourselves as the new landlord – to our Tenants and our neighbours. It's been important for us to take time to reflect, actively listen, and learn about how to navigate the inherent tensions that can sometimes come to the surface in mixed-income communities. In this work we strive for balance and good communication in the short term, and are working towards dignity and the destigmatization of subsidized housing in the long term.



## Sharing Our Work

We may be new, but we're already sharing our learnings with the wider community. The Transfer project was a huge undertaking, and helped us become experts in scattered housing and large-scale transfers. Through the relationships we've built as members of the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts (CNCLT), in 2023 Circle offered knowledge and support to a number of emerging CLTs as they navigated their first property acquisitions. Our staff also presented at many conferences and events, including the Community Land Trust Summit, the FutureBUILDS Incubator at UofT's Infrastructure Institute, the Fintech Cadence IFH Lab, and Building Community: Retrofit Lab, an event Circle co-hosted with People Design Co-op and Building UP.



*"We are so thankful to the team at Circle. Not only have they been great mentors for our journey towards a CLT in Little Jamaica, but they are constantly speaking our names in rooms that we aren't in. This has given our team opportunities to grow, build and develop with the resources we need to thrive."*

*~Little Jamaica Community Land Trust Staff*



## thank you

**Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation**  
Anthony Adrien, Antonin Balma, Suliman Kliebo

**City of Toronto**  
Jenn St. Louis, Marta Chisu

**Toronto Community Housing Corporation**  
Laura Young

**Thank You to our Referral Partners**  
Sojourn House and Wigwamen

**Thank You to our Tenants** for your feedback and patience. A special thanks to members of our Tenant Advisory Group.

**Thank you the Toronto City Councillors in Circle's neighbourhoods, for their support through the Transfer and ongoing capital repair work:** Paula Fletcher, Jamaal Myers, Brad Bradford, Jennifer McKelvie, Chris Moise, Paul Ainslie, Parthi Kandavel, Michael Thompson, Jon Burnside, Anthony Perruzza, James Pasternak, Amber Morley, Vincent Crisanti

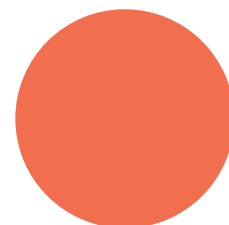
**Thank you to these former Circle staff** who made important contributions to our work in 2023: Betty Omoria, Jim Stoner

**Board of Directors**  
Tom Clement - President  
Joy Connelly - Secretary  
Hugh Hasan – Treasurer  
Angus Palmer  
Diana Yoon  
Sherri Williams  
Karen Hepburn

**Additional Board Committee Members:**  
Paul Connelly, David Robertson, Chris Pelaia

**Thank you to outgoing Board President**  
Heather Tremain

Circle is fortunate to have a Board of Directors that is made up of housing and nonprofit sector leaders with decades of experience, and a deep commitment to their work. Circle would not exist today if our Board had not been so generous with their time, energy, and expertise. **Circle recognizes the importance of diverse representation at the highest level of decision making. As we move forward, Circle is committed to bringing more voices to the table, and fostering a Board that is representative of our Tenants, and the people of our City.**



### Our Funders



### Our Partners



### Our Staff

**CEO:** Alia Abaya  
**COO:** Lauren Blumas  
**CFO:** Amanda Tan

**Asset Management & Maintenance Dept**  
Behnaz Karimi  
Anna Paul  
Charmaine Donnelly  
John Thomas  
Marco Lima  
Navin Bhatia  
Robert Cadet  
Shaun Botes  
Swaib Ssemakula

**Communications & Engagement Dept**  
Ivy Farquhar-McDonnell  
Aaliyah Désir

**Finance Dept**  
Chetan Patel  
Hong Ye  
Kavitha Jagan  
Wendy Zhang

**Operations Dept**  
Julia Gordon  
Kathy Kurtz  
Maariyah Iqbal

**Tenant Services Dept**  
Laura Awosanya  
Christine States  
Jessica Longo  
Olaide Durodola  
Ratha Sritharan

One of our  
Tenant families  
in their new  
backyard.



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