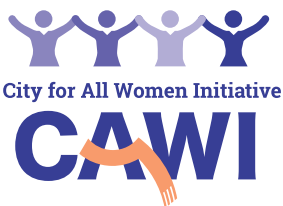


what
we heard

OVERBROOK

In Overbrook,
together: walking,
listening, and
learning in place



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This document provides a summary of the Overbrook Caring City's walk completed on May 10, 2025.

Thank You

This walk was made possible through the generous support of OCA, with funding from WAGE. We are deeply grateful to the community members who joined us on this walk. Your lived experience, expert knowledge, and strong ties to the community have been the heart of this work. We honor the trust you placed in us.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the place now known as Overbrook, exists within unceded, unsurrendered, and treaty lands whose history is shaped by the stewardship and resilience of Indigenous Peoples, including the Algonquin Anishinaabe. As a community organization, we recognize our role in listening to this land's stories, both those of enduring Indigenous presence and those of the vibrant, caring community here today. We commit to using our research not just to document, but to advocate for conditions that honor this legacy of strength and solidarity. Let this work be guided by reciprocity: learning the treaties that shaped this place, uplifting Indigenous voices in our efforts, and acting in ways that foster collective care for the land and its peoples; past, present, and future.

Community Accountability

This report is part of an ongoing conversation. Community accountability means staying in dialogue; not just reporting to you, but learning with you. We welcome your reflections, feedback, and questions. Your input helps us stay rooted in community priorities and ensures that what we share reflects your experiences, stories, and knowledge. Please reach out to info@cawi-ivtf.org if you have comments or concerns.

Research Statement

In nature, learning doesn't happen in a single sense. It happens through full-bodied attention. Trees respond to changes in light and soil. Rivers adapt to changes in terrain. Animals move through the world guided by sound, smell, touch, and instinct. Guided by this, our approach to research extends beyond what we hear in the recordings from this walk. Our learning was shaped by what we noticed and felt: the energy of the group, the generosity of collaboration, the interactions between participants, and the stories that emerged between stops. In this way, our research became not just an act of observation, but a shared practice of being and learning together in place. The following pages reflect what we heard, felt, and learned together.

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These pages share the key themes that emerged during our community walk in Overbrook. Each theme is supported by 5-6 summary points, along with quotes from participants that reflect lived experience. These stories speak to the day-to-day realities of walk participants and highlight both challenges and community strengths.

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Here, we provide an outline for how we can carry this work forward. This includes potential areas for continued advocacy.

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The final pages include reflections from the research team who participated in the walk. These are included to offer transparency around our process, acknowledge how our identities and relationships shaped this work, and highlight the importance of learning with community.

Part 1: What we heard

These themes reflect the stories, concerns, and hopes shared during our walk through Overbrook.

Key Themes:

1. Access to services and daily essentials
2. Housing
3. Social Connectivity
4. Sense of community
5. Care services



Theme 1: Access to Services and Daily Essentials

Walk participants emphasized challenges of meeting basic daily needs without a private vehicle. While many have food and other essential services within close proximity, true access is shaped by weather, mobility, transportation, and infrastructure. These barriers are felt most by seniors, caregivers, and people with disabilities.

- While food and services are within a 15-minute walk, true access depends heavily on weather, mobility, and transportation options.
- Many walk participants rely on corner or convenience stores due to the longer distance to grocery stores primarily located on arterial roads outside of the residential neighbourhood
- Places mentioned for food access include: Corner stores, deli, community garden, Green Fresh, Adonis, and stores along McArthur & St. Laurent.
- Participants reported travelling to multiple locations to access services or needing to “patch together” disparately located services to meet daily needs, often travelling across neighborhoods for errands and access to care.
- Barriers such as poor sidewalk conditions, lack of snow removal, and fast-moving traffic especially impact seniors, caregivers with strollers, and residents with disabilities or mobility challenges.
- Public transit was described as infrequent and unreliable, especially during off-peak hours

“I go to different stores depending on the weather. All grocery stores are about a 20–25 minute walk, or I can take the #18 bus. The convenience store is used often because other options are far.”

“The bus doesn’t come. The route here is only every 30 minutes. If I work past 10pm, sometimes there is no bus to get me home.”

Theme 2: Housing and Re-development Pressures

Walk participants highlight a significant need for more affordable and accessible housing in the neighborhood. While new developments bring hope for housing to meet the demand, there is concern that the benefits will primarily be felt by the developer rather than positively influencing the community as a whole.

- Most participants agreed that there is a shortage of affordable housing options and insufficient housing to meet the community's needs
- Walk participants expressed excitement about new people moving into the neighborhood, but worry about the strain it may place on already overburdened services
- Concerns were raised that financial gains from new development largely benefit developers, with limited reinvestment into the neighborhood.
- One suggestion was made for programs and policies that promote local investment and enable small landowners to participate in redevelopment

“I think they [care services] are under threat and need improvement. We need to hold the city accountable to make the neighborhood better without displacing people.”

“There is a big opportunity to increase density in the neighborhood, but big developers are currently pocketing all the resources from re-development. It would be nice to provide loans to Overbrook landowners for them to redevelop their property and receive all revenues associated with redevelopment.”

Theme 3: Social Connectivity and Public Space

Walk participants described their neighbourhood as vibrant with strong community ties. When identifying gaps, residents identified a lack of accessible, safe, and welcoming public spaces to gather, rest, and care for others. While the neighborhood offers many spaces for play and celebration, maintenance issues and poor infrastructure reduce accessibility.

- Walk participants described their neighborhood as vibrant, social, and as having many spaces to gather, but noted that maintenance challenges limit safe use.
- Barriers such as busy streets without safe crossings, uneven sidewalks, insufficient benches, & poor lighting all contribute to reduced use of public spaces due to inaccessibility and sense of comfort for all ages and abilities.
- While some walk participants felt that Overbrook has affordable community spaces for gathering and hosting events, others felt that there was a lack of gathering spaces or that these spaces were overburdened.
- There was a noted gap in programming for teens & pre-teens within Overbrook.

“

Busy streets, Presland park is like a swamp, poor lighting in parks, not enough benches.”

“

They're not always safe & need better servicing and infrastructure.”

“

Children are scared to cross residential streets.”

Theme 4: Sense of Community

Walk participants expressed strong pride in their neighborhood and described Overbrook as a place with beauty, joy, and opportunities for connection.

- Many participants have lived in Overbrook for several years (4-51 years) and expressed a deep sense of belonging.
- Overbrook was described as social and supportive, with neighbours frequently helping each other.
- Community highlights include: green space, a book mobile that comes to the community center, nearby bike trails, and people sitting on their porches, which helps foster connection.
- Participants expressed valuing community events, OCH programming, and grassroots efforts that bring people together across different backgrounds.
- While community ties are strong, some participants noted it took time to get to know people and build relationships.

“It took me a long time to get to know people, but sometimes I can get a drive from a neighbour. Someone sometimes helps me with extra food, which is very appreciated.”

“Events, just friendliness, people want to be social and active in their community. There’s more solidarity between people or different groups.”

“I like the green space, I like that the book mobile comes to the community center. I like that the bike trail [is] close to the river.”

Theme 5: Care Services

Walk participants described a mix of formal and informal care supports in the neighborhood, but identified that they are often insufficient to meet community needs or are hard to get to.

- Participants noted that services in Overbrook are not adequate to meet local needs.
- Formal services were described as hard to reach, requiring multiple bus transfers or long travel times.
- Walk participants noted that many people, especially newcomers, are unaware of available services.
- Informal care networks (neighbours helping each other, community center programs, food truck stops, faith spaces) play a critical role in filling service gaps.
- There are noted shortages of affordable childcare, eldercare, and family doctors.
- The community center offers programming, but demand often exceeds capacity.

“Overbrook has the city’s largest number of Ottawa community residences. Services are needed here. Even the Rideau Hub is hard to get to.”

“A lot of people (esp. newcomers) don’t know about the services that exist.”

Part 2: Next steps

Overbrook is a neighbourhood rooted in resilience and community pride. At the same time, walk participants described mounting pressure. Basic needs such as groceries, healthcare, and childcare are difficult to access without a car. Sidewalks, transit, and crossings remain unsafe or unreliable. Housing development is reshaping the landscape, bringing new residents and density, but also raising concerns about affordability, displacement, and whether investments are being made to benefit the local community.

Despite these challenges, residents identified clear pathways for future work and advocacy:

- 1 Access to Essentials:** Residents emphasized the need for safer, more reliable access to daily necessities. This includes improved sidewalks, snow removal, safe street crossings, and more frequent and dependable public transit.
- 2 Affordable and Inclusive Housing:** Advocacy is needed to ensure that new developments benefit the community. This includes preserving existing affordable housing, creating opportunities for local landowners to participate in redevelopment, and investing in housing that meets the needs of seniors, newcomers, and families.
- 3 Public Spaces and Youth Programming:** Walk participants highlighted the importance of safe, accessible, and welcoming space for people of all ages. Investment should focus on the maintenance of spaces that currently exist including; parks, benches, lighting, and multi-use community spaces, as well as youth programming for teens and pre-teens.

This report reflects only a small part of a much bigger story, one that is still unfolding and one that belongs to the people who live it. We hope this report helps make visible the voices, questions, and wisdom that shape Overbrook. The next steps belong to all of us.

Appendix: Reflections from the Field

These personal reflections were written by members of the Overbrook walk planning team. They represent individual perspectives, moments that lingered, and the emotional truths that don't always fit neatly into themes. We include them here to honor the full-bodied nature of community-based research, where knowledge is shaped not just by what's said, but by how we show up, listen, and feel in place.

Reflection by Meg Herod (she/her)

Policy Director, Co-executive Director

The day we walked was one of the first truly hot summer days of the year. I was walking with my son, pushing a stroller. I was keenly aware of the heat and worried that walk participants would overheat. Looking back, the heat accentuated the lack of tree cover and public space. We have a huge lack of publicly accessible shade! It was so extreme, at one point we had to take a break on someone's lawn who had a large tree providing shade over the street. We sat on the curb and on their grass taking a moment's break to recover. Sitting on a curb in the hot sun was like pinpointing inequity. Enabling hyperfocus on the severe lack of public space, shade and common spaces where we can all sit down and rest.

Reflection by Kassidy Ransom (they/them)

Civic Engagement Coordinator

For the Caring City walk in Overbrook, I was part of the organizing team and also supported the day by helping capture participants' words and stories. What struck me most was how the walk transformed ordinary streets into places of history, memory, and belonging through the voices of the people who live there. I heard about the importance of the Overbrook Community Day and how much it means to residents. I listened as people spoke about children gathering to play at the park, and I noticed how those memories carried a sense of pride and continuity. At one point, a neighbor sitting on his porch saw our group and struck up a conversation, which turned into a discussion about community connections and the simple but powerful ways people meet and support each other in their neighborhood. This walk reminded me that a neighborhood is not defined by its buildings or streets, but by the people who bring it to life every day through the quiet, often hidden labor of care, connection, and community building.

Reflection by Cata Jurado (she/her)

Communications and Civic Engagement Coordinator

It was a Saturday afternoon. Days were starting to get warmer after what felt like a long winter. It felt like we skipped spring and went from really cold days to warm ones in a blink. I was thinking about getting our water bottles ready and our snacks, and about how we at CAWI could care for the residents who signed up to walk with us. They generously put their time aside to walk around their neighbourhood and assess it from the perspective of care.

That day, care became embodied in our walk. We were joined by people from many walks of life. The group moved at different paces. Some needed to slow down and take a break because the day was hot and we had been walking for a long time. Each time, neighbours and residents stayed with those who needed to rest and made space for everyone to move in their own time. I thought, “This is such a caring thing to do!”

We stopped at specific places to talk about food security, safe crossings, housing, and other things that shape life in the neighbourhood. Residents shared amazing input and knowledge about their community. What stayed with me is that Overbrook is a community that shows care for one another.

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