

LIFE*SPIN NEWS!

February 2023

*LIFE*SPIN is working with low income people to create real solutions to poverty – simple basic things that we all need to feel stable, so we can be involved in the community, go to work, follow our dreams, and raise our families*

LIFE*SPIN was formed around the collection of enabling information, based on the premise that information is power. Since 1989, LIFE*SPIN has provided a central point for information and referrals, where those struggling in poverty can utilize the resources collected to help themselves, with free access and control of all the tools and resources that may be needed, before a crisis occurs, which in turn would otherwise necessitate accessing a “service” to deal with an issue that may have been avoidable in the first place.

Not only was LIFE*SPIN designed by “consumers”, the organization continues to remain in control of those who benefit from our work. Our Charter documents prescribe that at least 60% of our Board be comprised of low-income volunteers.

People usually come to LIFE*SPIN for assistance in resolving a specific crisis, one that may quickly lead problems if it is not resolved. For example, filing your income taxes after the deadline, can leave a sole-support mother standing in line at a food bank, facing an eviction, without car insurance to get to work, without heat or water, without a telephone, without means to get her child to daycare; without hope and a sense of dignity.

Part of what keeps LIFE*SPIN unique and innovative is the foundation of personal experience, peer support and a profound sense of caring for each individual who is courageous enough to reach out when they need a hand up.

If you have used any of our programs in 2022, we are asking you to tell us how we are doing. Covid-19 restrictions removed many of the opportunities to see you in person, as we had to stop the community meals and social nights. We are all blessed by the hundreds of hours of volunteer time dedicated to helping each other and thank each of you who were able to lend a hand to this work.

Fill out our winter survey by February 17th, to be entered in a

draw to win a \$100 Grocery Gift Card

[click here for LIFE*SPIN Winter Survey 2023](#)

a few things we noticed this year...

- Many more families are living together under the same roof, to afford housing/heating costs.
- More seniors are struggling to keep their housing, especially when their spouse passes away.
- Parents trying to support children who have disabilities, have a lot of difficulty accessing the supports they need
- Property standards by-laws are inadequately enforced in London, leaving families in unsafe units that are not fit to live in, just because the rents may be lower, even though the City has the power to fix them.
- The ‘homeless industry’ in London has all but eliminated families with children as a priority, meaning longer waits for subsidized housing and lack of programs to meet the increased housing needs of families.
- Families that are expecting a newborn struggle to find resources that can help them through the months of pregnancy, with a sense of dignity and joy.

Your voice matters and when you share your story with us, it helps us to design programs and workshops for the coming year.

PROGRAM UPDATES:

Free Store

The Free Store was conceived by low-income moms who had no local network of family members that could share ‘hand-me-downs’ to their children. It is a community-wide family network where those struggling can share their resources and support each other. It is a mechanism to help someone get appropriate clothes for a job interview or in setting up a new home, to provide linens and housewares to help make their house a home. All donations are received as shelf-ready, cleaned and in good repair. It is a boutique that offers shoppers dignity, a meeting place and tangible supports that improve their well-being.

The Free Store is now open two days a week. We have added Wednesdays from 3:00-7:00 pm, as some shoppers are working low-waged jobs during the day or going to school and requested additional shopping hours.

You still register on-line at <https://form.jotform.com/221305775229254> You only need to register once. Shoppers are welcome one day each week.

Income Taxes

Income Tax Assessments must be provided to Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and London Housing annually, in order for benefits to be continued.

Families with children must file their Income Tax in order to receive their Child Tax Credits, which now makes up the basic needs allowance portion for children in families receiving OW and ODSP.

OAS/GIS income benefits are calculated on income taxes filed for the previous year.

Some folk have great difficulty filing their tax papers on their own and some do not receive the necessary supporting documents to file them on time. LIFE*SPIN assists families and individuals in completing their personal Income Tax. In 2022, we completed 579 returns. This resulted in \$1,986,052 in direct benefits for those living in poverty due to age, disability, unemployment, and under-employment.

- We are pleased to have Len Roozen assisting you in the preparation of your 2021 and prior years Income Tax Returns, and can prepare year tax returns as far back as 2012
- At the end of February, we can begin to efile returns for 2022.
- Our service for preparing taxes is by appointment only and you must complete the application for this service at <https://form.jotform.com/221305529033244> when you have received the T-slips for 2022.
- We will phone you to book an appointment time. Appointments are for 1/2 hour. If you indicate that you are a couple, we will book you 1 hour together. If you have more than one year, we will allot additional time

- Returns will be completed by telephone. The phone number will come up as unknown caller if you have call display. If you do not answer, we will not be able to reschedule until all other requests are met
- During that phone call, Len will attempt to verify your identity using a process provided by the CRA. Under that process, you will need to correctly answer questions based on your tax records on file with the CRA
- LIFE*SPIN provides free assistance to file income taxes for low-income individuals, who do not have earnings from self-employment. We are unable to file returns for deceased individuals.

Advocacy

LIFE*SPIN's greatest contribution to London is the creation of a safe place for low-income citizens – families, our disabled, seniors, children and individuals – to find help that is truly needed and a sense of dignity. For more than 25 years, LIFE*SPIN has been the only organization in the London area that provides specialized assistance to ALL individuals in obtaining government benefits to which they may be entitled, such as OAS, GIS, ACSD, Canada Pension Plan, Ontario Works, subsidized housing, and provincial disability supports and benefits. This is a critical service to the unemployed, the under-employed, those with limited literacy skills, disabilities and mental health challenges. If you would like assistance to fill out these types of applications, please register for an appointment at: <https://form.jotform.com/221304055872248>

The critical needs of our community defines the programs and services we offer. Delivery often involve students from the university community, particularly students enrolled in law, nutrition, social sciences, nursing, information & media studies, as is evidenced in the publications available on our website, including:

- Wills and Powers of Attorney Fundamentals
- Assistive Devices Handbook
- Co-op Housing Kit

In 2022, direct financial benefits to our clients, resulting from our advocacy services, has been granted to them in the amount of \$2,422.197.

We are planning new resources to add to the website this year, including a manual for applying for assistance for children with severe disabilities and a new parents resource manual. We are also planning a baby fair for Monday, March 20th: **Labour of Love** for our families who are expecting a baby in the coming months. We will have door prizes, gift bags, special guests, and of course, copies of the baby manual. You are welcome to volunteer, submit recipes for homemade baby food, or reach out to culturally appropriate businesses to send door prizes our way. Our Advocate, Nicole, will also be on-hand to help you fill out forms for Discretionary Assistance to access items for your infant, such as a crib. To register for the Baby Fair:

<https://www.jotform.com/build/222414017246244>

We will also be reaching out to our seniors regarding access to the internet. There are a couple of programs that offer low-cost internet services, but many do not have the assistance they need to set these up, nor the instructions on how to sign up for government funded supports that are more accessible on-line. We hope to find a way to help improve this and will be calling on our older folks to tell us what help they need.

Upcoming Workshops:

- *Discretionary Assistance ~ How to get new mattresses & dealing with bedbugs! February 21, at 11:00 a.m.*
- *Discretionary Assistance ~ For New Mothers – How to access items for your infant! March 27, at 11:00 a.m.*
- *Registered Disability Savings Plans – April 3rd, at 11:00 a.m. with Jesse Malek!*
- *Applying for Assistance for Children with Severe Disability Benefits - TBA*

Children's Programs:

Christmas

We just have an ask. If you received gifts for a child this year, please send a thankyou card for us to forward to your sponsor. Just sign first names in the card and put your return address on the outside of the envelope, so we can match your card to your donor. This program only can help if generous people buy gifts for your children and some of these kind donors spend a lot of time and energy shopping for your children. It means a lot to them if you take a moment to say thank you... and they LOVE homemade cards.

Summer

We are planning the summer gardening program now, as we have to start seeds for your children's gardens. We will start registration for the program in April, so if you have children aged 7-10, expect an email then, with information about the program and how to register.

Community Food Box

Prior to the pandemic, LIFE*SPIN welcomed our community into our "Living Room" every month, to prepare nutritious low-cost meals together, which we then sat down and ate together. Guest leaders took us all over the world, from Mexico to India with amazing food experiences. However, the pandemic interfered with us gathering, so we reached out to good people in our community to help. Since 2020, On The Move Organics has worked in partnership with LIFE*SPIN to help aid against food insecurity in the local London area. During this nearly 3-year span, they have delivered over 50,000 meals worth of fresh, local & organic food to families and individuals that otherwise would not have access to this food.

The Community Box collaboration has made a tremendous impact on the local community. A heartfelt thank you to all their regular customers, who have contributed to the program this past year, as this is another program that would not exist without generous kind people in London.

We are planning our 2023 program now. The January/February and March order is confirmed and now full. Please bear in mind, this program is not funded by the government, it is just good people who donate when they can, so boxes are limited. The registration form is open, but it will close as soon as the boxes are gone for this delivery. You can order at

<https://form.jotform.com/221305917411245>