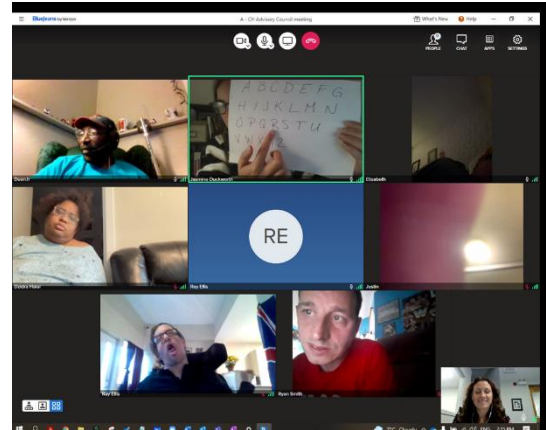


Amanda Burkholder and Keith Dow, with insights from the Our Voices Matter Advisory Group and district leaders who are part of the Onward Champions Working Group.

Jasmine held the letters of the alphabet on a piece of paper in front of her computer's camera. At the *Our Voices Matter* advisory group meeting, we were brainstorming for our 2022 Organizational Theme. One letter at a time, Ray indicated, "no" or "yes," spelling out what he felt was important for Christian Horizons in the year to come: "P-A-R-T-Y!" Dean added, "Don't ever turn down good things," and Ryan suggested, "Give joy and have freedom!" Along with Elizabeth, Dzidra, Casey, and Justin, we created a list of words and phrases about what matters to this group of advocates who use Christian Horizons' services.



Screenshot from the Bluejeans session where the Our Voices Matter advisory group brainstorms ideas for the 2022 theme.

The group of Onward Champions, made up of leaders from each of our districts, participated in a similar exercise. As we heard ideas ranging from, "Bright future," "Limitless joy," and, "Growing together," themes started to emerge that aligned with our core values and Onward outcomes. We heard a shared desire for 2022 to be a year where we move forward and experience joy ...*together*. Joy is often discovered when we feel invited to contribute and know that we belong. We experience joy in one another's presence. To discover joy, though, especially through difficult times, we need to be open to it. In fact, we may need to choose it! By including "joy" in our 2022 theme, we are choosing to look for joy and celebrate wherever it is found.

We surveyed everyone who receives *On the Horizon*, and our 2022 Organizational Theme was confirmed - "*Growing Together: Joy on the Journey.*" During 2021, we put *hope into action* through our work together. There were many bumps on the road, and it was sometimes tough to find joy along the way. As one survey respondent conveyed, many of us are "not yet ready for joy." We hear you! In the coming year, we hope that everybody connected with Christian Horizons discovers places and spaces of joy.

A big part of our growth as an organization is figuring out how to *do things together*. Every decision, every moment, is an opportunity to figure out how to do this well. On that note, here are a few insights from three of our Onward Champions:

- Anna Hummelen (*Program Manager, Chatham*) observes: “If you focus on the steps ahead of you, instead of the destination, you can find beauty and purpose in the midst of your journey. So often, we feel this overwhelming need to feel accomplished and that our targets are met. It robs the joy of the moment and the purpose of the journey. Growth comes from the discomfort of the expedition rather than the celebration of the destination.”
- Tyler Ellis (*Community Development Manager, North*) agrees: “Growing pains hurt. You’re stretched, sometimes torn, and rebuilt in areas that were once comfortable and seemingly immovable. But when the stretching and pain of growth stops, we are in a better place: a place of newness, a place of advancement, and a place of joy.” Tyler draws strength from Psalm 30:5, “Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.”
- Karen Proudlove (*Area Manager, Toronto/York/Simcoe*) also finds strength in her faith: “Joy is not the absence of struggle, but the presence of God in the middle of the struggle. It is not a feeling; it is a perspective. Through COVID, we have had to dig deep to experience hope, and now again, we need to dig deep to experience joy. As I think about growth, I think of a seed that starts out so small, needing water and our care and patience for it to grow. We all have a role to play, and by faith, we can choose joy as we nurture and wait for our seeds to grow.”

Whether we look for strength within the community, in the gifts of people who use our services, our family connections, friends, or faith, each of us can discover sources of joy even through some difficult times. Whatever the coming year holds, we step into it with our arms linked (albeit virtually and metaphorically), grateful for opportunities to grow and to journey together.

Making the Connection

- What words would you use to describe your feelings about the year ahead? “Hopeful.” “Scary.” “Exciting.” “Potential.” “Intimidating.” These are all possibilities. Add your own!
- What helps you find joy in times that are stretching or challenging?