# 2019-2020 HOJO ANNUAL REPORT





## **GREETINGS FROM HOJO**

The 2019-2020 year was transformative and challenging for HOJO. As the primary resource hub for students living and working off-campus in Montreal, we witnessed firsthand how shifts in the rental and employment landscapes impacted students. This report offers a snapshot of our key initiatives, the challenges students faced, and how HOJO adapted to the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Student Housing Crisis**

The ongoing housing crisis in Montreal has significantly impacted students, with many forced into precarious living situations. The ongoing housing crisis in Montreal has significantly impacted students, forcing many into precarious living situations. In 2019, students faced difficult choices as housing options became increasingly scarce. Some of the challenges included:

- Living in flexible but unstable Airbnb rentals: Students often had no lease, renter protections, or housing stability.
- Sharing bedrooms in downtown converted hotels: These private student residences offered leases, but students had no control over their roommates, and they were often separated by just an office divider.
- Renting space in overcrowded apartments: Some students resorted to living in another student's living room or hallway, facing conflicts due to a lack of personal space and the need to remain unnoticed by landlords.
- Living off-island: Others chose this option, resulting in longer commutes. This challenge is more familiar to cities like Toronto and Vancouver than Montreal, which was traditionally known for its affordability.

The pandemic dramatically altered the landscape of student housing and employment and disrupted our operations and the lives of our students. Despite this, we remain committed to adapting our services to meet students' evolving needs and ensuring they continue to receive the support necessary to navigate these unprecedented times.

## MISSION & VALUES

HOJO works to empower, educate and support the Concordia community by providing reliable housing and employment information, resources and referrals. We encourage a proactive approach towards finding housing, part-time and summer employment. Our work gives us a unique insight into the challenges and opportunities that students face as tenants and workers. HOJO is guided by the following core values:

- We respect the dignity and rights of all beneficiaries of HOJO services.
- We recognize that students have unique needs with respect to their time and budgetary constraints.
- The main means we use to achieve our objectives is through our staff; the personalized interaction offered is essential in dealing with sometimes difficult situations.
- The transparent exchange of information, ideas, knowledge, and values is essential to the achievement of our mission.
- The management of HOJO is performed with openness and integrity; we are accountable to the students of Concordia University.

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- We believe that continuous improvement enabled by client feedback is essential to maintaining the high quality of our services.
- We ensure the right to confidentiality and privacy with respect to information provided to us by students.
- We recognize that some governmental organizations may have limitations in their organizational scope with regards to meeting the unique needs of students in both official languages. We cater our services with this in mind.
- HOJO is a service that is centered on students' needs. We strive to support students in learning about, and exercising their rights, as tenants and employees.



# SERVICES & RESOURCES

HOJO empowers students, graduates, friends, neighbours and community members to advocate for themselves from when they enter the rental and employment market to when they face difficulties or concerns with their housing or employment. When they need us, we are there to offer personalized legal information to help guide them through issues they are facing.

Our services are available on a drop-in, first-come, first-served basis for housing or employment searches and more general or preventative inquiries. We also offer scheduled meetings to those facing questions requiring research and follow-up consultation

When someone contacts us with a question or concern, we review all documents, provide assistance with Régie du logement or CNESST processes, help with demand letters to employers or landlords, translate French documents, or, if necessary, accompany them to other services for continued assistance.

The information we offer is based on regulations established by the Régie du Logement, the Commission des Normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and the Quebec Civil Code. We collaborate with other on and off-campus services and community organizations to assist students and provide them with the most relevant resources.

For students with questions outside our operating hours, we have two web resources: classifieds.csu.qc.ca for apartment, room, and job posts and likehome.info for information.

Our web application Classifieds requires us to screen new accounts, apartments, rooms & job ads to ensure they meet our affordability policy, aren't on our Student Complaint Database of problematic employers and landlords, and ensure all content follows legal standards and is free from discrimination.

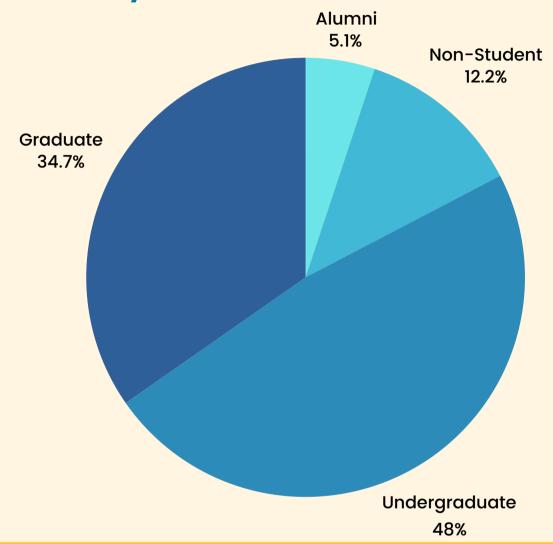
LikeHome was made for and by multilingual Montreal students. Its content is available in three languages: English, French, and Mandarin. The site has three parts.

- 1. is a series of short articles introducing Quebec housing rules and regulations.
- 2. is an interactive map of the city. It helps compare neighbourhoods by average rental price, the availability of groceries and other services, and the commuting time to all 4 Montreal universities via transit.
- 3. contains a comprehensive list of questions and answers to frequently asked questions about renting in Montreal. There are more than thirty common questions or problems and step-by-step instructions they can follow to address their concerns, ranging from noise complaints to subletting and privacy concerns.



## OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

## **Total Visits by Education Level**

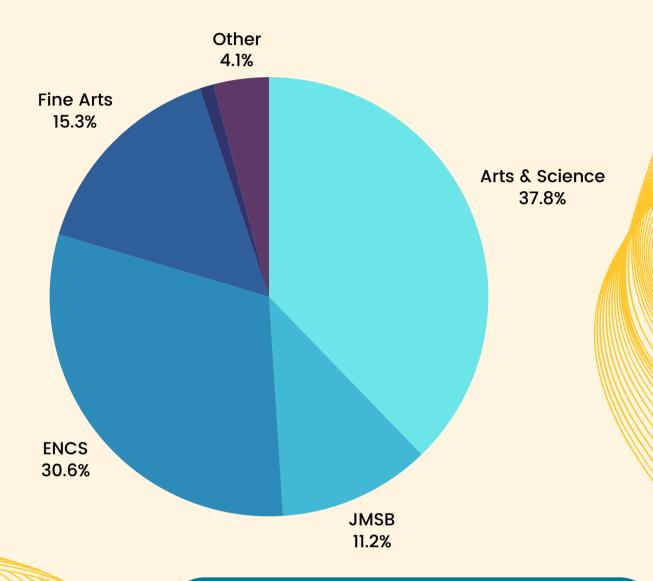


Graduate students make up a significant portion of those served by HOJO, even though undergraduate students constitute the majority of the university population. This has allowed us to understand better the specific needs of graduate students, who frequently encounter precarious housing and employment conditions.

A larger proportion of international students at the graduate level introduces additional challenges. International students often face unique barriers in securing housing and employment, partly due to a lack of knowledge about housing and employment laws and procedures when they begin their studies.

## OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

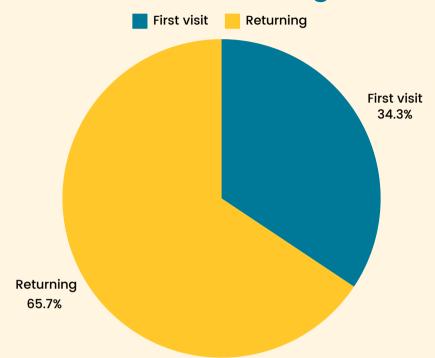
## **Visits by Faculty**



This breakdown helps us understand our reach across all faculties of the university. Our goal is to ensure that we are a well-known presence on campus, allowing us to expand and continuously improve our services.

## OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

## First Time vs Returning Visitors



The bulk of our service usually employs a preventative approach to informing students of their rights as tenants from the time they receive their letter of acceptance until they graduate.

This year has been extremely challenging. Many students found themselves navigating a great deal of precarity from their housing arrangements on and off-campus to their summer work plans and their unexpected and sudden job loss when covid restrictions took effect without warning.

Many of the students we met as they began their time at Concordia contacted us again for emergency financial support information and assistance when facing the above issues.

# THIS YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS

This year has been exciting and productive for HOJO as we continued offering vital services to the Concordia community. During the fall and winter semesters, we hosted workshops on Apartment Hunting, Tenant's Rights, Job Search, and Employee Rights for new students. We tabled at the CSU Clubs and Community Fairs and the welcome events (WISE) organized by the International Students Office. We also met with prospective students at university Open House events, providing insights into living off-campus and finding work.

Our office maintained a steady flow of students seeking assistance through outreach campaigns, workshops, and one-on-one services. Our legal information services supported students navigating housing and employment issues, preparing them for rental experiences, asserting their rights, and dealing with provincial housing regulations. We helped many students find jobs in Montreal, understand their rights, and contact the CNESST when necessary.

In the context of a growing housing crisis, students are particularly vulnerable to predatory renting practices due to inexperience. This year, HOJO expanded workshop offerings, organizing an anti-gentrification session with Professor Goyette to highlight gentrification's impact on student lives.

We provided critical information to students moving from residence into rental housing through "Moving Out of Residence" workshops at Grey Nun's and Hingston Hall. Our day-to-day support for students continued until March 13.

After Concordia's closure due to COVID-19, all HOJO services transitioned online, and staff began working from home. The pandemic brought challenges, with students increasingly reaching out for guidance on financial assistance and housing rights. We created a streamlined communication method in collaboration with CSU services and the executive team, providing daily updates and resources on financial aid and housing concerns.

Our team supported students through housing transitions and emergencies, organizing an online workshop on refusing rental increases—a major issue for many. We also offered short-term accommodation workshops for students needing housing unexpectedly.

In the spring of 2020, CSU services participated in a press conference against a wave of Anti-Asian discrimination.

Through research and online communications, our team has continuously worked to protect and assert student rights in housing and the workplace throughout this crisis.

## NAVIGATING COVID-19



## **Unprededenced Difficulties & Support For Students**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented and rapid loss of jobs and housing, forcing our HOJO office to adapt quickly. Our staff kept pace with the quick succession of the requirements for each essential support program to effectively support students and their needs during this time.

Between March and June 450,000 jobs lost in Quebec, most losses were in the service industries, food and accommodation services, manufacturing industries and retail. This situation affected mainly women, students and minorities. Due to the stop in construction, many renters were left without housing, prompting the Quebec government to establish financial aid.

## In the Housing Market

This year, we worked with Concordia Residence and students stuck in limbo seeking short-term housing while waiting to return to their countries.

### Housing

- Interest-free loan offered to tenants by the Quebec Housing Society (SHQ): This loan ensured that Quebecers could find housing on July 1st if they were experiencing financial difficulties because of COVID-19.
- The SHQ is also offering 2,000/month in temporary housing reimbursement for a maximum of two months for those who must delay their move-in date due to COVID-19.
- Francois Legault invited landlords to be patient with their tenants and to be less strict about late rent payments
- Apartment visits were restrained until April 2021, causing HOJO to re-evaluate our housing evaluation tactics and how to prevent scams with online visits

## In the Labour Market

HOJO developed an information sheet detailing government financial aid and eligibility criteria, including how to apply for various support programs. Key points include:

- Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefits: Up to 26 weeks of assistance for medical-related work absence.
- Provincial Temporary Aid for Workers Program (PATT-COVID-19): Support for workers in isolation who were unable to earn their full income.
- Emergency Care Benefit (CERB): Financial aid for employed and self-employed Canadians impacted by COVID-19.
- Incentive Program to Retain Essential Workers (IPREW): \$100 per week for up to 16 weeks for eligible workers.

The aim was to simplify access to essential financial information for students and others facing job loss.

### **COVID 19 Disruptions**

### **Hydro Quebec**

Indefinite suspension of administration charges for unpaid bills. There were no power interruptions for non-payment for several weeks following the provincial shutdown.

## **Tribunal Administratif du Logement**

The Tribunal du logement will be closed from March 13 until its gradual reopening begins on June 1, 2020.

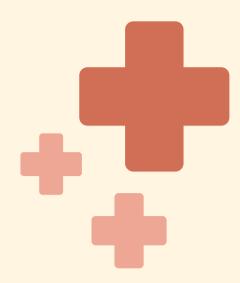
### **Public Health**

- More tenants question their landlord's responsibility for cleaning and maintaining common areas.
- No visitors allowed; cannot visit from one unit to the other
- The Montreal Regional Public Health Directorate (DRSP) created orders for landlords of large complexes to reduce the propagation of the virus

## Canada Post - no signatures

There was been a change in the door-to-door delivery of items that normally require a signature. This safe drop process allows Canada Post delivery men to leave the packages in a mailbox or outside the door, which caused issues with the proof of notification required by the Tribunal.

## NAVIGATING COVID-19



### Emergency Financial Supports (March 13 - May 31, 2020)

During the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, HOJO staff provided students with information about the following financial support programs:

### • Concordia COVID-19 Emergency Student Relief Fund

o Offered financial assistance to students facing hardship due to the pandemic.

### CSU Emergency Food Fund

They provided grocery vouchers for students experiencing food insecurity.

### • Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)

- It provided financial assistance of \$2,000/month for individuals who lost income due to COVID-19.
- Available for workers and self-employed individuals.

### Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB)

- They offered \$1,250/month to eligible post-secondary students and recent graduates who were unable to find work due to the pandemic.
- It increased to \$2,000/month for students with dependents or disabilities.

### • Programme d'aide temporaire aux travailleurs (PATT)

- Emergency financial aid for Quebec workers not eligible for CERB or El.
- It provided up to \$573/week for those affected by COVID-19 closures.

### • Incentive Program to Retain Essential Workers (IPREW)

• This program offered a monthly taxable benefit for Quebec essential workers earning less than \$550 weekly.

### • Sick Leave via Employment Insurance (EI)

• This program supported workers who could not work due to illness, including COVID-19 infection, and provided up to 55% of their earnings.



## **GOVT COVID-19 FINANCIAL AID**

# FOR EMPLOYEES IN QUARANTINE AND SELF-

## 1.Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefits ISOLATION:

You are eligible it:
-have worked 600 insured hours in the 52 weeks before your illness or quarantine or You are eligible if:

self-isolation due to covid-19.

-you're unable to work or your weekly regular earnings have decreased by more than you're unable to work or your weekly regular earnings have decreased of 40% for one week due to covid-19 (sickness, quarantine or self-isolation) self-isolation due to covid-19.

\*Workers in Canada are eligible to receive El benefits, whether they are Canadian \*Workers in Canada are eligible to receive El benefits, whether they are Canadan citizens, permanent resident or temporary resident. If your SIN begins with a 9, you will need to supply proof of your immigration status and work permit

-If you registered for access to El special benefits for self-employed people -If you registered for access to EI special benefits for self-employed people
-Waited 12 months from the date of your confirmed registration -The amount of time For self-employed workers: Waited 12 months from the date of your confirmed registration -The amount of time you spend on your business has decreased by more than 40% for at least one week you spend on your pusiness has decreased by more because of your illness, quarantine or self-isolation

You must have been ordered to self-isolate by the Government of Canada, the Government of Quebec or another responsible authority.

- **HOW TO APPLY:**

Financial assistance: 55% of your weekly paycheck based on your best 22 working weeks, and up to 15 weeks of income replacement

## 2. Provincial Temporary Aid for Workers Program (PATT-COVID-19)

you are eligible as of March 19th, 2020 if:

- You do not qualify for the Federal Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness Benefit program.
  You have contracted the virus or present symptoms OR you have been in contact with
- an infected person OR you have returned from abroad.
- For self-employed workers

  If you do not qualify for the Federal Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness Benefit
- You must have been ordered to self-isolate by the Government of Canada, the

Government of Quebec or another responsible authority.

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## **HOJO CAMPAIGNS**

## **Negotiating your rental increase**

Each winter semester, we distribute hundreds of our informational postcards through tabling on campus, informing students of their 3 response options when faced with a proposed rental increase. We discuss with students the step-by-step process that a tenant must take in order to respond to the notice properly.

**Minimum Wage** 

This campaign introduces students to their basic rights as employees in Quebec. We break down the two main minimum wages for tipped and non-tipped workers. This campaign is helpful for those who are in the process of finding their first job in Quebec.

## **Protecting your Personal Information**

This campaign informs Students seeking housing and employment about what personal information can and cannot be requested when trying to rent an apartment or apply for work. We explain what types of private financial and identifying information landlords and employers can ask for, making it a useful reference for new renters and workers.

## **Heating in your Apartment**

Every year in late winter, HOJO talks with students who have unnecessarily suffered from inadequate heating in their apartments, and we wish we had reached them earlier. This campaign aims to help students proactively address a heating problem in their apartments. We discuss with students what is considered a normal temperature range and what to do depending on who is responsible for heat in an apartment.

## **Bed Bugs**

This campaign aims to guide tenants through the steps they must complete if they suspect an infestation in their apartment. We encourage proactive communication between tenants and landlords, including a landlord's responsibility to provide information on preparing for extermination. In some cases, we also introduce students to the necessity of alerting the city inspectors if necessary and assuring an accredited exterminator is used.



## **PROJECTS**

## The Woodnote Solidarity Cooperative Incorporates!

In preparation for the Woodnote's opening in the summer, HOJO Woodnote support staff assisted our student volunteers. During the fall semester, while construction continued, we worked on the apartment application process, and our student volunteers tabled on campus to raise awareness of the project. We also launched our new website to the Concordia co-op and social economy community with an event at the HIVE.

Four Woodnote team members traveled to Austin, Texas, to represent the project at the North American Students of Co-operation conference and to deepen our education in cooperative management and administration. The Woodnote celebrated a major milestone in completing the registration of the cooperative, advancing the incorporation of the solidarity coop. To support accessibility as well as solidarity with Indigenous students, The Woodnote worked with The CSU to develop an Indigenous Student Bursary program, supported by The CSU BIPOC committee.

January 2020 marked a major milestone for The Woodnote as we celebrated the launch of applications. As construction proceeded steadily, The HOJO brand ambassador team and student volunteers represented the project across campus in preparation for the application period. Amplifying the project's presence, we hosted tabling events, room-mate mixers at Reggie's bar, application clinics, and Q&A sessions, seeking to engage The Woodnote's future residents and community. The roll-out of the applications was incredibly successful. Before the March 13 school closure, The Woodnote had received more applications than available units, indicating the urgent need for this project in Montreal's student community.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, Utile had to suspend construction as a preventative measure, delaying the completion of the building. Students were expected to move in on July 1, but due to the delays in construction, this date has been postponed to September 1. The HOJO team is actively communicating with applicants to reassure them of the delivery of the project and to ensure transparency. The Woodnote team continues to promote the project and to develop the co-op's community and culture through our social media presence. The Provisional Committee student volunteers have been busy proceeding with establishing the coop's infrastructure by developing policies and by-laws, generating creative projects, and working towards the first AGM. We are glad the construction site has now reopened, and The Woodnote looks forward to welcoming student residents in the fall!

## **PROJECTS**

### **Woodnote Brand Ambassadors**

As the Woodnote ramped up for its first leasing period, the months leading up to the winter leasing period were crucial as we wanted to achieve its full occupancy with Concordia students. For this, we created the temporary position of Woodnote Brand Ambassador. Ambassadors worked to communicate with students through Mailchimp, Instagram, and Facebook. They developed and distributed promotional content throughout the leasing period. Ambassadors oversaw all design requests to the CSU design team, ensuring timely updates and follow-ups. Additionally, they created and delivered engaging and educational ambassador training for HOJO and CSU employees, utilizing existing training materials as a foundation.





## HOMESHARE

Homeshare is a mutually beneficial living arrangement that pairs over-housed individuals with under-housed individuals, creating an opportunity to address housing affordability and social isolation through shared living and support.

Rents in Montreal have been increasing, as have rates of loneliness among seniors. To rectify this issue, we have been researching homeshare programs with the hopes of creating one at Concordia University. We were excited to build on this project in partnership with Dr. Satoshi Ikeda, an Associate professor at Concordia University whose work focuses on sustainable futures.

Homeshare is an arrangement where people with spare bedrooms accommodate those needing a living space at reduced/zero rent for shared activities such as cooking, cleaning, snow removal, etc., and providing companionship. This is generally an arrangement between students and seniors, but it is open to any combination of home holder and home sharer. Those who cannot necessarily afford the high rents can live with seniors and provide companionship, ultimately killing two birds with one stone.

The benefits of HOMESHARE include but are not limited to the following:

- \* Help with household chores
- \* Companionship, which promotes health and longevity
  - \* Foster new connections
    - \* Cultural exchange
- \* Security of having someone in the house in case of emergency

## HOMESHARE

This year, HOJO developed an application form for prospective home holders and home sharers. These forms outline the students' living preferences and what obligations they are willing to assume when living in a home share arrangement.

The application process outlines the kind of dwelling the home holder offers, their interests and hobbies, and the household tasks they would like their home sharers to help with. Homesharers need to provide information on their year of study, living preferences, interests, and the household tasks they are willing to take on as part of the agreement.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 outbreak necessitated the pausing of this project. There is great concern about contagion, and seniors are particularly vulnerable to negative consequences from catching this virus. In the future, we hope to restart our work on this project.





## WORKSHOPS

### **Apartment Hunting Workshop**

August 20, 23, 28, 30 & September 5, January 8,:

HOJO presented an apartment hunting workshop for those new to Montreal or with burning questions about how to find the right apartment. This workshop helped students learn about their rights and responsibilities associated with renting in Montreal and how to search for apartments effectively.

### **Job Hunting Workshop**

September 26, January 8, 14:

We presented a job hunting workshop for those who were looking for a job or interested in learning more about their rights as workers in Quebec. Students could come to learn about their rights and responsibilities as workers in Quebec and get some useful tips about finding a job on or off campus.

## A Student Guide to Gentrification

November 21:

CSU HOJO and Professor Kiley Goyette came together to present a workshop on Gentrification in Montreal and its relationship to student communities, as well as the impact that students can have on gentrification by taking action. Featuring Kiley Goyette Urban geographer, doctoral student, and Montrealer.

### **Moving out of Residence**

February 17, 19, March 10, 11, April 10:

HOJO annual Apartment Search and Housing Rights workshop series for current Concordia students living in residences works to prepare first-year students to move out on their own. Highlights of this workshop include a look at current rental averages by neighbourhood, popular places students look for housing online, students' rights as tenants allow them, where to look for housing and how to protect your private information when applying for housing.

## **Subletting and Lease Transferring**

May 13

HOJO presented an online workshop outlining the regulations around subletting, lease transfers, and other temporary stays. The workshop covered tenants' rights, whether students are the sublessor or the sublessee, how to search for shorter-term leases, and the importance of completing the process formally and correctly completing all the required documents.

## LOOKING FORWARD

01

### **Action or Commitment**

Include a brief description, rationale and intended impact. It helps to keep it concise yet concrete!

02

### **Action or Commitment**

Include a brief description, rationale and intended impact. It helps to keep it concise yet concrete!

03

### **Action or Commitment**

Include a brief description, rationale and intended impact. It helps to keep it concise yet concrete!

## THANK YOU!

## To the CSU

CSU Administrative Coordinator, CSU Advocacy Centre, CSU Legal Information Clinic

## **To Concordia University**

The Birks Student Centre, Career and Planning Services, Concordia International,
Counseling and Development Career Management Services, The Financial Aid Office,
Concordia Security, The Sexual Assault Resource Centre, The Graduate Students
Association, International Students Office, The Link, The Multifaith Centre, Residence
Life And the Residence Assistants, The amazing Campus Tour guides, Concordia
Welcome Centre, The Dean of Students Office & The Office of Community
Engagement

## **To our Montreal Community Partners**

The Centre for Research Action on Race Relations, Project Genesis, UTILE & Youth

Employment Services

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