

2020-2021

HOJO ANNUAL REPORT



CONCORDIA STUDENT UNION

**OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING &
JOB RESOURCE CENTRE**



HI FROM HOJO

OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING AND JOB RESOURCE CENTRE

We hope this report gives you a snapshot into what the CSU Of-Campus Housing and Job Resource Centre has been doing over the last year, and how we continue to grow and serve our community.

This year has been challenging in a number of ways as the global pandemic has changed many aspects of how we work. Under normal circumstances, our service was run out of our office on the second floor of the Hall building and each fall would be our busiest time of the year, we would welcome the many new students when they arrived and offer resources about rental and working regulations in Montreal.

This year we have pivoted in a significant way: now relying entirely on new methods of reaching students while working remotely. We have held online workshops to introduce students to their rights as tenants and employees: experimenting with various platforms including livestreaming on youtube, facebook live and holding zoom meetings as well as reaching students through online virtual open house and orientation events on the vfairs platform. We now communicate with students via e-mail as well as arranging one-on-one video & tele conferencing meetings. Students have the option of communicating with us in a number of ways and this flexibility has been helpful. We hope to continue to offer multiple methods of communications with students when this pandemic is over.



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 adequate housing, part-time and summer employment.

The CSU off-campus Housing and Job Bank 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.
- 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

At HOJO, we work to empower students, graduates, friends, neighbours and community members to advocate for themselves from the time they are entering 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 search 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 can assist them over email, via the phone, or with a one-on-one meeting where we can review correspondence, provide assistance with TAL or CNESST forms and processes, help with writing 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 Tribunal Administratif 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 work collaboratively with other on and off-campus services and community organizations to assist students and provide them with the resources that are most relevant to their situation.

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

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

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

1. is a series of short articles introducing Quebec housing rules and regulations.
2. is an interactive map of the city. It is useful for comparing 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 more than thirty questions and answers to frequently asked questions about renting in Montreal. alongside step-by-step instructions they can follow to address concerns ranging from noise complaints to subletting and privacy concerns.

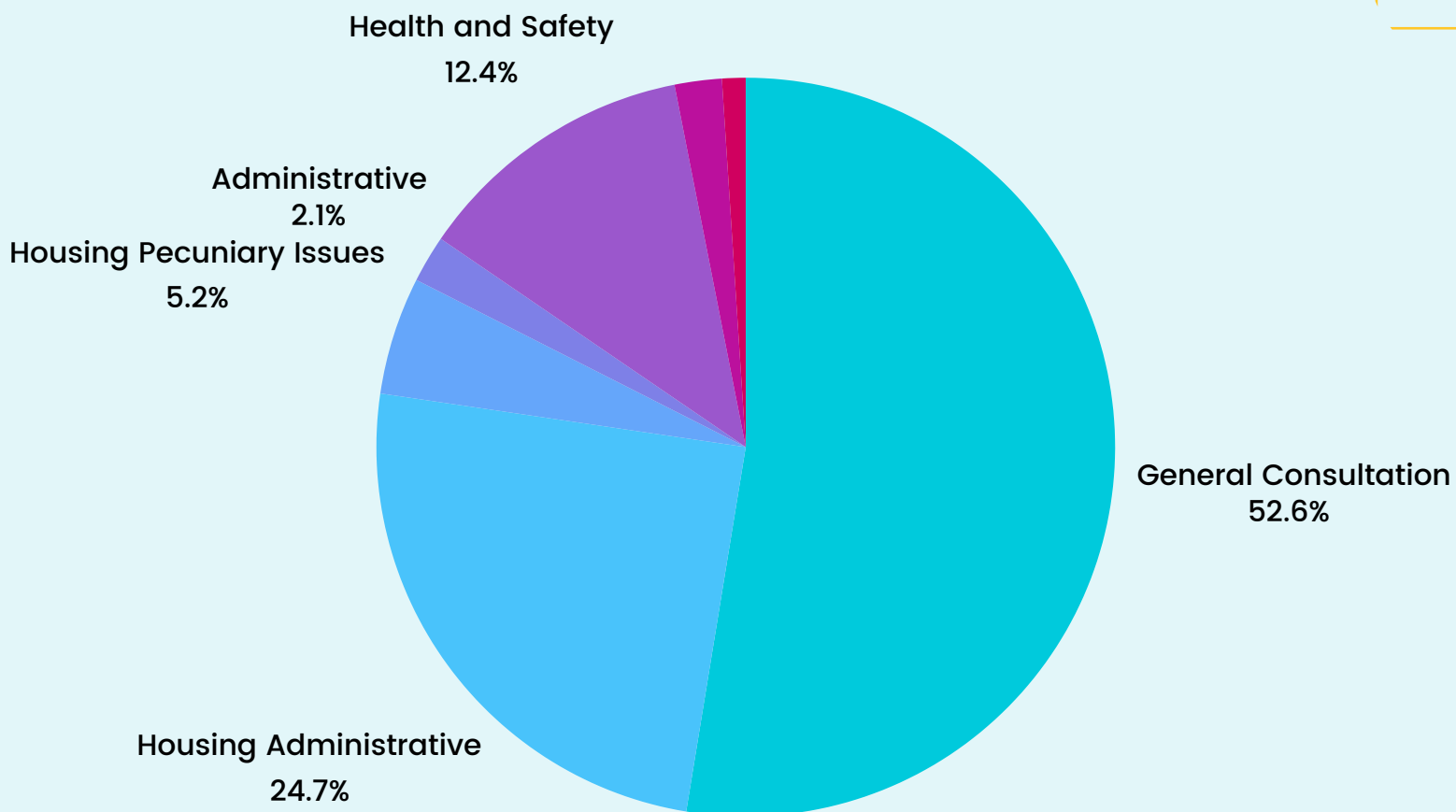


OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

Total Cases by Type

Total New Cases: 1160

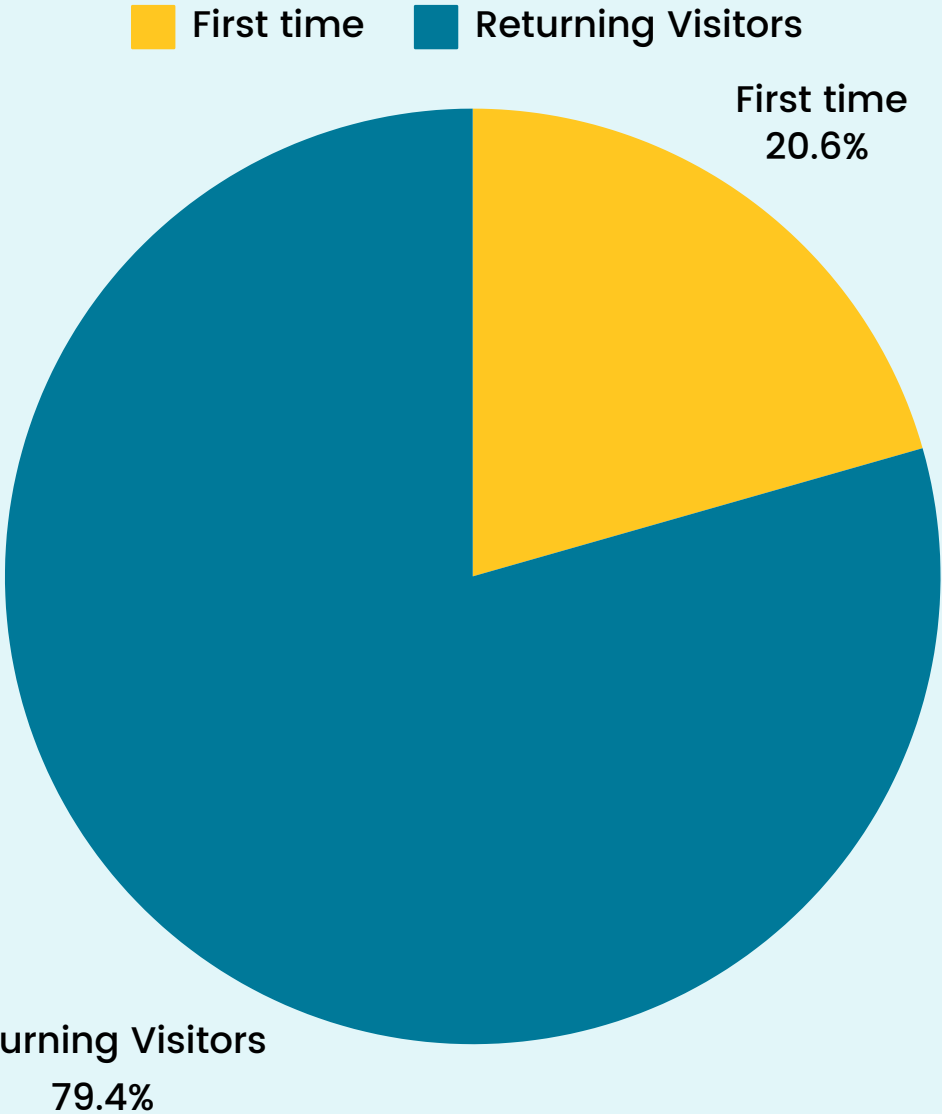
Total Office Visits (includes Zoom, E-mail, and in-person):
4476



OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

First Time vs Returning Visitors

First time visitors 1160
Returning visitors: 4476



YEAR IN REVIEW

2020 was a year of change for HOJO in the way we delivered our services to students and community members. This year we pivoted to becoming an online service due to the necessity of working entirely from home and as a result of this, we are happy to report our service has become more accessible in a way we never before considered. This year for the first time we began meeting with students via virtual appointments. Beginning in the spring, many international and out-of-province students were leaving or had left the province and were able to meet with staff online to deal with concerns around end-of-lease issues like unresolved cancelations, sublets, transfers, and joint tenancy concerns. This new way of communicating allowed us to assist students in different time zones, sometimes thousands of miles away in resolving their issues.

This year a large number of students were unable to find work as service industry jobs that hire students each year were severely restricted in their operating hours if not completely closed. Those with jobs had concerns about health and safety in the workplace as it related to working closely with others and their employer's responsibility to protect workers from customers. A variety of new questions came up due to the pandemic. It was an anxiety-provoking uncertain time for many.

In terms of apartment hunting, fewer students than usual moved within the city, as the province shut down everything and word went out that universities would be online for the fall 2020 semester, fewer still made plans to move to Montreal. The Régie du logement, became an Administrative Tribunal called the TAL (in September and changed many of its procedures and processes) issued guidance to tenants and landlords on safety and apartment visitations, discouraging groups from visiting apartments, and insisting two meters of distance be kept between all parties when visiting apartments. Usually, HOJO would discourage students from signing leases without first visiting in person as you can't fully check for hidden issues including vermin and mold through photographs, however, due to the nature of COVID-19, we redeveloped our list of best practices to help students be as safe as possible in their search. Recorded and live virtual tours became acceptable safer alternatives for prospective tenants seeking housing. Issues of a similar nature existed within the workplace, as being indoors with others became understood as the main method of transmission of COVID-19. We met with many students who were concerned about their working conditions.

We worked with students who were uncomfortable returning to workplaces throughout the summer as restrictions provided by the CNESST were not understood or enforced in many cases and the recourses were complicated. Although training and workplace safety has always been a concern for young workers the lack of options for those returning to work was challenging.

PROJECTS & NOTABLE EVENTS

The Woodnote

This year was a milestone year for The Woodnote, which opened its doors to 144 residents in September 2020. During the construction phase, the HOJO team contributed to the marketing of the project, ensuring Concordia students would receive first priority. HOJO staff acted as brand ambassadors for the project and responded to the many inquiries from prospective tenants. During the leasing period, HOJO staff provided presentations to all incoming residents regarding their housing rights as well as information on the cooperative. HOJO worked with the student volunteers to support the incorporation of The Woodnote Cooperative and the development of the coop's infrastructure from the ground up. Over the course of the year, The Woodnote has welcomed a new board of directors and struck committees including Member Management, Finance, Communications, Sustainability and Food Security, Anti-Oppression and Safer-Spaces, Policy and Governance. As a Woodnote support member, HOJO staff Megan Quigley guided the board's work through training, communications assistance, as well as governance and administrative support. The cooperative has quickly become a dynamic community, planning events and initiatives such as workshops on by-stander intervention, covid-friendly social events (movie nights, games nights, pumpkin carving etc.), community sustainability projects and public art projects. In the Winter of 2021, The Woodnote entered into their second leasing cycle and is looking forward to welcoming new residents in July.



Improved Classifieds Website

This November, we were excited to launch our new and greatly improved bilingual classifieds website; Classifieds.csu.qc.ca! This site has been in the works for a year and now is a mobile-friendly, stylish, modernized not to mention secure site for students to find apartments, jobs, roommates as well as to buy and sell their books and other items. The HOJO team moderates the site, reviewing and approving users and ads and maintains our student complaint database in order to make seeking housing and employment safer for students. Thanks to the CSU IT team, specifically Camil Gagnon-Duguay for his hard work in making this project come together!



PROJECTS & NOTABLE EVENTS



Events

- **June 8th** The newly incorporated Woodnote Solidarity Cooperative held its 1st General Organization Meeting and Megan Quigley (HOJO Assistant) sat as a Board Support Member
- **June 15th** a Brand-new Customer Relationship Management technology is launched for the CSU Services, helping us to work more effectively remotely!
- **July 21st** Leanne Ashworth Joined the board of the Popular University Student Housing (PUSH) Fund aka fonds communautaire pour le Logement étudiant (Fonds CLÉ) Annual General Meeting as CSU Representative.
- **August 28th** CSU Manager and CSU Team visit the Woodnote right before the big September 1st move in day!
- **September 1st & 3rd** Hojo participated in the first exclusively online Concordia University Orientation events held on the V-fairs platform. We were able to communicate with students via videoconference and a chatroom and also to distribute our informational materials including videos.
- **September 29th** HOJO took part in the CSU's virtual Orientation series of events, with our workshop Working through the Pandemic: Workers rights from finding work to staying safe at work on youtube
- **November 8th** Representing The Woodnote, Megan Quigley presented the keynote panel speech for the North American Students of Cooperation's Choose Your Own Future Institute.
- **November 11th** Hojo launched its new Classifieds web app, a place where students can seek roommates, apartments, rooms, job amongst other things.
- **January 12th** Alex Apostolidis spoke at a Housing Justice Conference put on by the SSMU Affordable Housing Committee (ASHC) on tenants' rights and how students can help keep rents low. At this event the ASHC discussed their new student housing initiative to create their own student building for at McGill through a fee-levy.
- **February 22nd** Leanne Ashworth attended Fonds CLÉ board meeting, discussing Quebec-wide plans for affordable student housing.
- **March 11th** Participated in CSU Campaigns Anti-Consumerism week by presenting our Working through the Pandemic: Workers rights from finding work to staying safe at work workshop via zoom.
- **May 1st** Minimum wage increases to \$13.50 and hour, and \$10.80 for tipped employees.

WORKSHOPS

September 28:

Working Through the Pandemic

A fun, interactive, and free workshop that guided participants through their job hunting process during COVID-19. Our HOJO admins covered many interesting topics including: Myths and Facts about COVID-19, Who can and how to return to work, Job search tips & Staying safe at work. We also incorporated chat-based games to learn more about COVID-19 and staying safe.

March 11:

So, You Want to Kickstart your Job Hunt?

In this workshop, HOJO helps you kickstart your career through interview tips and job resources. This session also provides participants with an information package containing job and employee rights.

November 23, 25, 30 & December 7, 14:

Getting Started with Off-Campus Housing

Targeting students moving to Montreal and looking to kick-start their housing search. HOJO hosted a free online workshop to learn how to find safe, affordable housing in Montreal. Our workshop explained the process of finding housing in Montreal, tips to find an apartment within their budget, and information about rights and responsibilities as a tenant.

December 2, 9, & 16 :

What to know when Signing your First Quebec Lease

Rental applications and leases can be complicated. In this workshop, HOJO guides participants through the intricate details to clear some of the stress around securing housing. We cover: what a Quebec lease entails, the obligations of a lessor and a lessee, and much more.



LOOKING FORWARD

This year the rental housing shortage predicted last year looks to be intensifying. Students have been reaching out to HOJO to learn more about the rent hikes. As a measure of rent control that is put in place in Quebec, standard leases should indicate the lowest rent that was paid by the previous tenant under Section G of the lease. However, there is a trend of landlords leaving this section blank, which allows them to increase the rent significantly between tenants without them knowing about this increase. An aspect of our work this winter semester has been striving to inform tenants of their rights when filing for rent fixations if Section G has been left blank, or if a tenant believes that their rent has been increased unreasonably.

An increasingly common occurrence for students this year has been dealing with renovictions. A renoviction is when a landlord attempts to end a lease to perform renovations to raise the rental value of the building significantly between tenants. The atmosphere to foster these mass renovictions in Montreal has been brewing for quite some time. Some landlords who own affordable rental properties have neglected to upkeep their apartments, which has then pressured tenants to leave to find safer and more stable housing. The pandemic provided an opportunity for landlords to flip apartments when many students left the province, temporarily resulting in a multitude of vacant units. We are now seeing the results of the wave of some landlords skirting the rent controls currently in place, who are now attempting to rent out newly renovated apartments to new tenants for substantially higher rents.

The practice of renovating and releasing apartments at a higher rent is a key factor in gentrification as landlords are diminishing the number of affordable apartments available on the market. The renoviction trend also goes hand in hand with some landlords repossessing apartments under false pretenses, and then illegally converting the rental units to short-term rentals such as Airbnb.

Unfortunately, we are one year into the pandemic, and many are facing caution fatigue - including in the workplace. With the arrival of the third wave of virus cases, there was a correspondingly high level of concern amongst student-workers concerned about their safety at work and sick leave as shops and offices have remained open amidst the arrival of new variants.

THANK YOU!

To the CSU

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

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

HOJO Team

Alex Apostolidis
Alex Clifford
Cecilia Marangnon
Eleni Tsoklis
Leanne Ashworth
Megan Quigley
Panagiotis Papazoglou-Karahontzitis
Safrine Mouajou



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