

Click and clip - coupons for local businesses.

Find A Local Business

SEARCH

goldbook.ca



House of Compassion 'the best place in Toronto to live'

July 18, 2009

NEIL HETHERINGTON
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

House of Compassion cares through its housing program for those in Toronto with severe mental illness.

The need for successful supportive housing has grown in the city dramatically and soon after its founding, the facility outgrew its physical space. So, the house next door was purchased, then the one next to that. Now, 21 people have shelter, 24-hour care and a community to call their own. The home's reputation has made it so popular that now, regrettably, it has a lengthy waiting list.

The home was founded in 1988 by Bill Kerr, Michael Wills, Robert Inman and Gerard Collins of Yorkminster Park Baptist church. These men shared a vision of housing and supporting those who had fallen through the cracks.

Today, that vision is carried on by a small board of directors, a dedicated staff and the homes' executive director, Elizabeth Zeidman.

"I feel strongly that this work needs to be done and I feel privileged to be able to do it," she says.

The design of the home matches the philosophy of its housing program. Every resident has a completely private room and excellent community space, both indoor and outdoor. House of Compassion believes each person living with mental illness in the home needs to be afforded the dignity of personal, sacred space as well as the healing benefits of living within a supportive community.

Inside the home is a warm, but fragile person who couldn't imagine living without the caring support of the staff. On her door is a picture of a majestic castle with the words "Carrie's Little Castle." Inside is, in fact, Carrie's castle. It is a small room with a chair, bank of drawers, closet and bed. Carrie says she was living in nightmare places throughout Toronto until her caseworker introduced her to House of Compassion. Now she says she'll never leave.

"This is the best place in Toronto to live."

Enjoying the back deck, Angela agrees to have a chat. We talked about her love of painting, that was rekindled since arriving at her new home in 2003, a dramatic contrast to her life in the shelter system. She is now reaching her personal goal of being a "peacemaker" in the world, and within the home.

Finally, I met David in the lounge. He has been in the home for six years and can't imagine living anywhere else. He has a perfect balance of privacy in his own room and friends in the community space.

"I'm really not sure how to explain it. It's like this, if you'd live here, you'd be happy."

Isabel Teles has been working at House of Compassion for 20 years as its program director. When I first met with her, I expected that she would tell me about the activities offered to the residents. Instead she told me that "when we acknowledge that we, ourselves, are broken, then we can relate to those that this home cares for."

The program isn't just about Wednesday night board games; it is about relationships founded on the grace and humility found in each of the staff. That deep understanding leads to an almost visible culture of care, hope and support for the residents.

Carrie, Angela and David are all on the road to recovery. They are moving to their own personal best through this exceptional care. But there are so many others who deserve the same care, but will have a lengthy wait to move into the home. That's not right.

Zeidman explains that without the support of the community through private donations, which are declining this year, the home could never survive on the Ministry of Health's funding alone – never mind fulfill a vision of assisting more people in need. She contends it simply can't be done without more help from the ministry.

"I would never want the Minister of Health's job, but I would want his ear from time to time," she says.

For more information, go to HOCToronto.com.

Neil Hetherington, the CEO of Habitat for Humanity Toronto, writes an occasional column on issues of poverty and homelessness. To learn more, visit torontohabitat.on.ca.

Ads by Google

Invest in Costa Rica Land

Deal Directly With The Developer.
Be our Guest For 4 Days! Learn How.
CostaLandSales.com

360 Restaurant

Experience award-winning cuisine
1000 feet over Toronto.
www.cntower.ca/360

Chronic Pain Treatment

Suffering from Chronic Pain?
We Can Help! Free Consultation GTA.
NaturalPainReliefCenter.com