

Workers at Aurora's Construct have made the season warmer for seniors in need



Tucked away on Earl Stewart Drive is a hive of activity called Construct, a social enterprise of Blue Door Shelters designed to give individuals a chance for meaningful work and to learn new skills in the trades.

Some of their work has gone unheralded, but that changed over this holiday season as senior men of limited income settled into a new supportive housing build in Newmarket that was made possible by the men and women of Construct.

Dedicated late last month by dignitaries, including Newmarket-Aurora MP Tony Van Bynen and officials from Blue Door Shelters and the United Way, the residence welcomed its first residents this month, just in time for the holidays.

"All Canadians deserve a safe and healthy space to raise and care for a family – a sanctuary, a refuge," said Van Bynen, noting he was excited to be on hand for the opening as it provides "accessible, dignified, and independent supportive housing."

"The barriers to housing for senior men can include limited income and physical and mental health issues," he continued. "This offers senior men longer-term stays than the traditional emergency housing as well as personalized case management for their health, their education and for their employment needs. It is a way up and not a place to stay, and that is really critical and important."

The need for such a house was underscored at the height of the pandemic, said Emmy Kelly, COO of Blue Door Shelters. At that point, Blue Door started to see a "real strain on senior men in our community" and set out to plug what she described as a "service gap."

"Our team clearly wanted to do something about that and went straight to work to find the funds [and] get staff to support those who need it and to start doing the work," said Kelly, noting significant support from the United Way GTA that made it possible to purchase the home itself, which was then transformed by Construct.

"Construct helps provide wraparound supports and services for those detached from the labour market to receive training supports, whatever supports you might need, to transition into a long-term career in the trades," said Kelly. "We also have a very skilled team of people in construction that do work and it allows participants to get that hands-on opportunity in the community in a home like this, that we prepare for those we serve. The Construct team actually gutted this entire home and created five individual units. This will be a safe home for five senior men. Blue Door believes in order to make change we have to focus on individual needs. There is no blanket solution to everybody's needs and to solving homelessness, so every day our team works hard to focus on what each

person might be and we intend to do the same in this space.?

For Adaoma Patterson, Director of Community Service Investments, although there were a few finishing touches that still had to be put on the building after last month's opening, it "already feels like a home, so I am sure that the fellows who will occupy this space soon will love it as much as you all do."

"The United Way of Greater Toronto is proud to support Blue Door through the Federal Government's grants. We have worked with Blue Door on numerous projects and this one for supportive housing is another example of our shared belief in a strong partnership," she said. "The United Way is researching, advocating, mobilizing communities with our partners like Blue Door, making connections between agencies and residents, all levels of government, and private corporations. We know that in order to ensure everyone has what they need to thrive, we must work together, build bridges, and forge partnerships. Blue Door is doing outstanding work on behalf of its clients and on behalf of the United Way of Greater Toronto, we look forward to the continued partnership."

By Brock Weir
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