

Blue Door, Home Depot team up to help homeless 2SLGBTQ+ youth

Nearly 30 per cent of 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness in York Region left home before or upon turning 16.

It's a troubling statistic and, as Pride Month arrives, Blue Door and Home Depot Canada locations in Aurora, Newmarket, and Bradford are once again joining forces for The Orange Door Project Campaign.

On now until June 22, the three stores will be gathering donations from customers to benefit Blue Door's INNclusion program, which provides a supportive community where 2SLGBTQ+ youth can rebuild their lives, gain stability, and feel truly seen and valued.

The first program of its kind in York Region, INNclusion was established by Blue Door to do just that.

"We are incredibly honored to once again partner with The Home Depot Canada Foundation for the Orange Door Project Campaign," says Emmy Kelly, Interim Chief Executive Officer at Blue Door. "Together, we're able to grow the reach and impact of our INNclusion program offering not just safe housing, but also a sense of belonging and hope for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in our community. This partnership is a powerful example of how collective action can drive meaningful and lasting change."

Kelly tells The Auroran that early displacement of youth who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ can result in a greater risk of insecurity and mental health struggles as they're without their support networks, and experience significant challenges with housing and income.

"That kind of escalates into having to make precarious choices, which often results in exploitation," she says. "Then, of course, the mental health challenges that result can happen because of the lack of inclusivity and results in identity-based abuse and discrimination."

There are high rates of homelessness in York Region, often hidden homelessness, she adds.

Before the INNclusion program was established, such youth were supported out of a youth shelter on Newmarket's Gorham Street. Since then, they have been able to bring on support to foster a "home where there is inclusive and safe programming for this population."

"The housing crisis is growing across our nation and I do really believe that it's a time for everyone to come together," says Kelly. "We can't solve this alone. Blue Door, the Home Depot Canada Foundation, this partnership is amazing. We're super honored and grateful to be partnering once again, and we need the whole community behind us to continue to advance housing priorities and to make sure that everyone has access to safe and dignified housing."

"Credit goes to the Home Depot Canada Foundation for always showing their interest and leadership and looking at innovations towards preventing and ending homelessness. Another very large piece of the partnership we have with the Foundation is an investment that they've made into a program called Tradeworks. They've committed for a multi-year span to basically advance a trades-based employment social enterprise, which is a solution that we've helped to create, looking at those who are facing barriers to employment and recognizing the gap in the labour trades."

Kelly estimates that 323,000 workers in the trades will be needed before 2033.

"We have a population detached from labor market that we can provide wraparound supports and help them transition into long-term careers in the trades that actually pay a living wage, allowing you to afford housing," she says. "Blue Door helped to launch a coalition across Canada of several social enterprises that focus on this preventative approach. Besides the Orange Door campaign, they are very intentional about the partnership and the work that they're supporting to help youth escape homelessness."

Notes Amy Bilodeau, Senior Manager of Community Investment with the Home Depot Canada Foundation: "The Home Depot Canada Foundation proudly invests in programs and initiatives in our community that align with our company's core value to give back and our Foundation's mandate to work to prevent and end youth homelessness in Canada. Each year The Orange Door Project Campaign demonstrates this commitment by raising \$2 million to support youth serving organizations working to end youth homelessness, together with our Associates and Customers. We are thrilled to partner with organizations who are doing incredible work to transform youth's lives daily."

For more information on the Orange Door Project, and how you can help, visit www.orangedoorproject.ca.

By Brock Weir