

Blue Door purchases fourplex in Newmarket to provide affordable housing to the homeless



A new supportive housing fourplex in Newmarket has been purchased by Blue Door, York Region's largest emergency housing provider for underserved people experiencing homelessness, creating more opportunities for affordable housing for the most vulnerable populations.

\$1.6 million was received by Blue Door thanks to funding from United Way Toronto and the Federal Government.

Blue Door said in a press release that the contribution provides opportunities for affordable housing, specifically for highly vulnerable senior men experiencing homelessness in York Region.

Alex Cheng, Director of Community Programs at Blue Door, says the impact of the new purchase comes in two parts. Those who seek support from Blue Door are offered both affordable housing and wraparound services provided by the organization such as counselling, child and youth programs, and wellness programs.

On a basic level, non-profit service providers like Blue Door, we aim to ensure that housing stays affordable for the most vulnerable. In addition to this, we have an expertise in terms of supporting the most vulnerable. I think that sets us apart in that we're able to provide wraparound supports for people to be able to sustain long term housing, he said.

We're not a traditional property manager or landlord, but we have a supportive team that understands the needs of the population that access the units.

As housing units in the community continue turning over, rental costs increase as well, making the purchase of a property an investment that ensures the housing stays at an affordable level, Cheng says.

One of the important pieces around an investment like this for a non-profit like Blue Door is that we're able to once we've made the purchase, ensure that the rent stays at an affordable level, he said.

Cheng notes that building entirely new housing units may not be possible, therefore purchasing existing properties is one of the best solutions.

We can't just build new units to deal with the prices, but it is also very important for us to address the fact that existing units should also remain affordable. I think for us, in terms of a long-term plan for Blue Door, we would ensure that we are part of that solution.

The process of applying for the funding was straightforward, says Cheng, noting that the original funding call for service providers

came out around November 2021. In the past, Blue Door has received funding from foundations such as one that sought to provide housing for LGBTQ+ youth.

According to a press release from Blue Door, approximately 60% of individuals experiencing homelessness in York Region are men; senior men are overrepresented and under-supported by available services.

In addition, women and children are often forced into homelessness by domestic violence, which increased dramatically during the pandemic.

Blue Door has purchased two properties in the past year—one in March 2022 and another in March 2023—one of which is currently being used in a collaborative effort with Yellow Brick House, a nonprofit that serves women and kids seeking refuge from domestic violence.

“Right now all units are occupied,” Cheng said.

Michael Braithwaite, Blue Door's CEO, expressed gratitude for the funding for its ability to make a lasting impact on the community.

“We are immensely grateful to receive this funding from United Way Greater Toronto and the Government of Canada to support providing refuge to these two very vulnerable groups in our community. Our deepest gratitude goes to these two organizations, who share our vision of creating a compassionate society where no one is left without housing or protection. Together, we can make a lasting difference,” shared Braithwaite.

By Elisa Nguyen