

High tea at Armoury will help Inn from the Cold provide transitional housing options



Newmarket's Inn from the Cold is on a mission to provide the homeless population in York Region transition into stable housing ? and an upcoming high tea at the historic Aurora Armoury will help the non-profit organization get closer to their goal.

The Armoury at Mosley and Larmont Streets will be the scene of a special high tea on Sunday, September 25, from 12 noon to 3 p.m.

The tea is the brainchild of Christa MacCauley, Assistant Cook from Inn from the Cold, who felt an autumnal fundraiser for their \$2.5 million Capital Campaign would be a great addition to their summer golf tournament and their winter Coldest Night of the Year fundraiser, which invites members of the community to see the real-time struggles of York Region's homeless population at a most difficult time.

?We're at \$1.4 million in our Capital Campaign from when we started in October,? says Ann Watson, Executive Director of Inn from the Cold. ?There are so many people in the community who have contributed and it has been quite incredible so far. Our staff really wanted to do something as well, so this tea is really their effort to make the campaign a success.?

Through the Capital Campaign, Inn from the Cold has secured a plot of land on Yonge Street, just north of Newmarket, for a new shelter space. But, once complete, this will not be an ordinary shelter space; it will include 18 new units of transitional housing to ?specifically serve chronically homeless men and women.?

?Unfortunately, this is a growing demographic in our community,? says Watson. ?Typically, they're some of the hardest to house individuals and we really want to make a dent into that growing demographic. We do already have a small transitional housing program called Stability Now and we have had a 75 per cent success rate over the long-term in transitioning people from homelessness to transitionally housed to permanently housed. Over the last four years (of Stability Now) we really felt we had this opportunity to build something new. We wanted to really expand the program because it really changes people's lives.

?The shelter is important because it saves people's lives but we didn't want to stop there. Once you've got someone in the shelter, you build some rapport and relationships of trust with people, but you've got to be able to offer them some way out. Transitional housing seems to be the best tool to move people from homeless to housed. We just really want to build on the success of that program ? and we weren't going to settle with just building a shelter; we wanted to get that housing in there as well.?

Inn from the Cold was one of the first organizations to offer transitional housing to men. Their project was the first one in York Region and it happened quite by chance. They had a tenant in their property who moved out and wondering what to do with the

vacant space, they offered a transitional housing pilot.

It was an immediate success and proved to Inn from the Cold that they had to do more.

“Transitional housing was kind of the go-to program in the past,” says Watson, who says this more recently took a back seat to a “housing first” trend. “It was a process that was really pushed for a while. It did have some success, but it's much more [complicated]. There are so many types of people who become homeless and some just need a light touch and they can be housed again successfully. With chronic homelessness, the level of support that they need to make that transition from homeless to housed is really high. I think we're circling back to that transitional model as a building block to people being able to manage their own housing once they're done. The “housing first” model gives people housing and then provides supports to keep them housed. That works for a lot of people, but for those who require really, really intensive, 24-hour supports, it's not enough.

“These transitional housing programs, with Housing First, is a perfect marriage. You get people to where they can get into housing and then the other programs that provide Housing First, they just really wrap all the supports that they need to keep them housed, but they've already got the basics.”

The first six months of transitional housing can be difficult, she says. “A lot of people don't feel they're deserving,” she adds, noting that some people have never before experienced housing stability.

“Some never really got to know what ‘home’ means and how that stability and safety can be building blocks for moving forward,” says Watson. “While it may seem like a basic instinct, it's not. It's a learned instinct. The transitional housing programs are those vehicles to give people time to adjust, to feel they deserve it, to feel what it's like to come into your space every day, to have control over that space, to sleep in the same bed every night. All of those things that might seem so basic to people, unfortunately there are a lot of people in our community who never get to experience that.

“The word transition is an important one. For the chronic homeless, they have spent pretty much their entire adult lives, if not their entire lives, experiencing homelessness and instability. Just building routine, building opportunities for them to explore what they want to do with the rest of their lives. Just building that into these transitional housing programs is, I think, the difference that it makes between being homeless and being housed. We don't want people to be back in the shelter. We want to do it and do it right.”

To support Inn from the Cold's capital campaign, tickets for the tea are now available by contacting Martha Barry at 905-895-8889 x221.

By Brock Weir
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