

High tea at Armoury will highlight Inn from the Cold, need for transitional shelters



The need for transitional housing units for men and women requiring shelter services will be underscored at a high tea set for the historic Aurora Armoury on November 5, hosted by the staff of Newmarket's Inn from the Cold.

Set for 1 ? 3 p.m., the high tea event will support Inn from the Cold's ?All Inn!? capital campaign which will lead to the construction of a 16,000 square foot housing centre in Newmarket that will offer transitional housing units for those in York Region. All told, it's a project with a \$15 million price tag.

The \$2.5 million fundraising goal of the All Inn! capital campaign is the largest ever undertaken by Inn from the Cold in its 18-year history and aims to be a game-changer within the Region.

Ahead of the event, Inn from the Cold Executive Director Ann Watson had nothing but praise for staff who have organized the tea from the ground-up.

?We landed on the All Inn! name because we really wanted every member of our community to be all-in in terms of making this happen,? says Watson. ?That includes our staff, our Board. Our staff came up with this idea of holding an event and they came up with the idea of a high tea because it is something different and the Armoury was really gracious and gave us the space for free. The first one we had last year was incredibly successful, a beautiful event.?

While the event is a great chance to enjoy a full high tea, it's also a great opportunity to help Inn from the Cold address dire needs within the community.

Shelters, says Watson, really emerged in the late 1970s and early 80s as a response to ?unprecedented? challenges. They were initially hoped to be a ?temporary fix to a structural issue? that was going to be addressed. Unfortunately, this turned out to be more of a dream than a reality.

?We're seeing that now young people in their 20s and 30s can't even fathom how they will get into homeownership,? she says. ?As it has now reached that generation in terms of recognizing we finally have a crisis, for decades it affected those who are low income. Homelessness has continued to escalate since the late 1970s and now it is really at crisis proportions. The pandemic really increased the numbers. A lot of people who were living on the cusp, just able to maintain their housing, lost their housing and now they are facing or experiencing homelessness as well. With this project, while we're not going to increase our shelter beds, we're going to increase our traditional housing program which we're really committed to doing because that project really saw people start to get housed who were in the shelter system. Too many people get stuck in the shelter system because there is nothing for them to move onto.

?Our hypothesis is if we can come up with options for people to move out of the shelter system, we won't get bogged down in the shelter. Shelters are being used for de-facto housing because it's impossible. Their income doesn't meet the cost of rent, even for a room for someone who is low income. We're creating those options for people to move.?

The resulting 18 units will complement the five units they have now, she added, and will also support their Please Come Inn program that allows Inn from the Cold to offer rental opportunities in the community post-transitional housing ?that are achievable.?

?Everything we do is kind of predicated on the idea we want to move people out of the shelter. We don't want to be just a good shelter, we want to be that shelter that really encourages people, values them, says ?You're worthy of a place to live' and we're going to help you get there. That's what the new location is all about: helping us do more.?

By holding their event at the Armoury, Watson notes it helps bring the Aurora community into the conversation because, although Inn from the Cold is based in Newmarket, the needs are felt in Aurora as well ? particularly where, over the past two years, transitional housing for men proposed by the Region of York for south Aurora, has seen pushback from some residents.

?I'm a homeowner, too, and Inn From the Cold is a neighbour in our community. We all want to be good neighbours and I think the thing we all need to remember is we're serving residents of York Region,? says Watson. ?We're serving people born and raised in Newmarket, in Aurora, in Richmond Hill. They are our kids, our parents, and grandparents and for whatever reason those folks fell between the cracks. Organizations like Inn from the Cold plug those gaps and they are the net that catches these folks. Our intention is not to just hold them there in that position, it is to work with everyone in the community and that person.

?One of our signature programs, Getting Ahead in a Just Getting By World, and that is all about where you are at, how do you get unstuck, how do you unpack all the stuff that happened to you, all the things that continue to happen to you, both personal and structural? How do you unpack all that? Get the right supports in place so you can move forward with confidence. We have had so much success. We have housed people who slept in bus shelters for a decade. It does happen, but it does take a really committed community to make it happen, too, and I just wish we could push past the worst-case scenario and look at what the best-case scenarios are ? and think of it as you would a family. I don't think any family is immune to having someone experience difficulty and usually what happens is people rally around that person, they show them love, they show them support, they show them patience and/or they accept them for who they are. But not everybody is afforded that same family and that same opportunity and we want to build that compassionate community around these folks so they can move forward.?

High Tea in Support of Inn from the Cold's All Inn! campaign will take place at the Armoury on Sunday, November 5, from 1 ? 3 p.m. For tickets and sponsorship opportunities, call 905-895-8889 or email info@innfromthecold.ca.

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