

Home Depot's Orange Door campaign supports homeless 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

2SLGBTQ+ youth are 'significantly over-represented' amongst younger Canadians experiencing homelessness, and Home Depot is stepping up this month to help make a difference.

Now through July 7, The Home Depot Canada Foundation and The Orange Door Project are teaming up to support Blue Door's INNclusion program, which is the first and only transitional supporting housing program for this demographic in York Region and South Simcoe.

Through to the end of the campaign, customers at Home Depot stores in Aurora, Newmarket and Bradford will be able to contribute \$2, \$5, or \$10 in-store, 100 per cent of which will support INNclusion and its programs.

'There are numerous factors that contribute to the overrepresentation and push 2SLGBTQ+ youth into homelessness,' says Blue Door. 'Identity-based family conflict is the most common cause of homelessness for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, as they are often forced to leave their homes due to family rejection and unsafe living conditions. Additionally, many 2SLGBTQ+ youth do not access shelters due to discrimination preventing them from equitable housing opportunities.'

Home Depot has been a long-time supporter of Blue Door, from contributing to their Construct social enterprise through their Trade Words Program, as well as INNclusion.

According to Michael Braithwaite, CEO of Blue Door, INNclusion sees youth have a 'short stay' with the organization where they can get the supports they need.

'They're able to stay in a safe environment among people who are from the community and they're going to stay housed and it prevents them from experiencing homelessness,' he says. 'That's Home Depot Canada's primary focus - how many youth can we prevent from experiencing homelessness?'

'I love this program because it's the only one of its kind in York Region and I would venture to say Simcoe as well.'

Braithwaite notes the program was developed through research from Seneca College and elsewhere that indicated that 'youth from that community don't feel safe with what's currently available.'

'They need different types of supports, different types of staffing and medical supports,' Braithwaite continues. 'We didn't want to have surveys just sitting on a shelf; [we wanted to] take action. Four years ago, Blue Door, without funding at the time, jumped into it and said, 'We're going to do this. We rented a house - and, sadly, because of transphobia, it took us a long time to find the house - and through a foundation we were able to actually purchase the home and have our construction company be able to retrofit. Now it houses five youth; it's pet-friendly if youth have pets, and Home Depot loves this. This is an example of where the money should be going.'

And, for Braithwaite, it's hugely important to underscore that the dollars raised through The Orange Door campaign stay right here in the community, providing inclusion for all.

'It provides inclusion, which is transitional housing, it actually saves dollars. There are a lot of youth who will go into emergency housing who don't necessarily need emergency housing,' he says. 'Emergency housing, while necessary, is very, very expensive to run while transitional for individuals who are ready has way better outcomes is a quarter of the cost. You're just talking about rent and a little bit of support, rather than 24-hour service and food around that. It is independent living and it teaches the youth how to live independently, how to get their finances sorted out, and it helps build connections in the community, and it really sets them up to move out on their own in the future into permanent housing, so they're no longer having to access supports in the system.'

?The money is directly going to a service in your community that lifts people out of poverty and puts them on a path towards prosperity in your community. I think in a time of a housing crisis right now, I think we all agree that everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to call home. People experiencing homeless are just neighbours without a home.?

For more information about Blue Door, INNclusion, or to make a direct donation to initiatives, visit www.BlueDoor.ca.

By Brock Weir