

Social Planning Council, Public Library shine light on Housing in new podcast series

Housing affordability was a hot-button issue in this spring's Provincial Election campaign, but, now that the ballots have been counted, the Social Planning Council of York Region and the Aurora Public Library are teaming up to make sure the topic stays in the spotlight.

The organizations are now in the midst of recording a new four-episode season of the podcast Hidden Stories of York Region. While previous seasons have focused on youth and COVID recovery, this season will look at the ins and outs of housing across York Region and indeed the country.

"The perception is York Region is affluent, that there are no special issues, no economic strife - it's all those picture-perfect ideas that people have and we know that is not the case for most of the folks that we work with," says Yvonne Kelly of the Social Planning Council of York Region. "We want to interrupt that narrative - and not just interrupt it, but also make space for other stories, other experiences, diverse voices, and just really giving the fuller picture of what it is to live, work and play in York Region, and then inspire people to want to do more."

Adds Reccia Mandelcorn, Manager of Community Collaboration for the Town of Aurora, "This is to give power to our community to do more. It is to excite them about possibilities and ownership of solutions to problems that we all face. For me, it was not just a matter of information, and that is why I love working with Yvonne; it is not just about information delivery, but it is about the mobilization of community and that's a huge, important piece."

The collaboration between the Aurora Public Library (APL) and the Social Planning Council has deep roots, but this collaboration on the third season of Hidden Stories of York Region came out of an APL screening of the film Push, which sparked a panel discussion on housing.

"It touched on so many issues in our community from precarious housing to food banks, from women staying in abusive relationships because they had no place to go, and housing for seniors," says Ms. Mandelcorn. "It was just too huge an issue to be dealt with in one panel discussion. Collaborating [on the podcast] was a hard yes [from us] and when we brain-stormed we realized there were so many issues involved with housing that we would devote all four episodes of the season to it. Even at that we were only touching just a bit on it because it is such an important conversation."

From Ms. Mandelcorn's perspective, the podcast can serve as a "call to action" for the community - individuals, groups and leaders - to do more.

"The whole housing issue affects all of us," she says. "It even affects people in the middle-income stream who can't afford to buy a house, it affects people who can't afford to rent. It is a homeless issue, it is a generational issue, it is an aging in place issue. We could go on and on and have [more than] four [episodes], except we do have other jobs!"

"For too long, libraries have been seen as unbiased agents, that we serve people - but libraries should be agents of transformative social engagement and we should be working together to better our communities. At APL, we call ourselves a community-led library, so I think we're well positioned to cross party lines and work with community groups to tackle the challenges our community members face, to identify solutions and actions for change. For me, this represents libraries at its finest and I think this podcast series is one of the best things I have ever had the opportunity to collaborate on and I am so proud of the work."

By Brock Weir
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