



Newsletter

Supportive housing for people at risk of homelessness

www.optionsbytown.com

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Options Bytown is a non-profit supportive housing organization in Ottawa that provides not only affordable, rent-g geared to income permanent housing, but also a variety of on-site support services to individuals at risk

Options Bytown puts latest federal homelessness funding to good use

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If you have any comments on this newsletter or would like to contribute to Options Bytown, please contact us at:

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Options Bytown has received funding of over \$800,000 from the federal Homelessness Partnership Strategy (HPS) of Human Resource Social Development Canada.

The funds, covering the period ending in March 2009, will help sustain our resource centre program where we provide on-site housing support services to tenants in a number of Ottawa Community Housing Corporation apartment buildings across the city.

With the help of the HPS support, plans are in the works for entering into a partnership with Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services. This new collaboration will mean that those tenants and clients of Options Bytown who require help, will receive non-residential, group and individual treatment. Rideauwood brings more than 25 years of treatment experience, observation and research to Options Bytown. The organization applies a variety of approaches

and philosophies of substance abuse and addiction. They believe that many factors can contribute to harmful use of alcohol and drugs. Therefore, they use a versatile and eclectic array of tools and approaches to help clients to recognize the signs of substance abuse and addiction and to acknowledge serious problems requiring change. More information about Rideauwood is available at www.rideauwood.org.



Some of the HPS funds will also enable us to carry out long-overdue renovations that will improve the living conditions of tenants at our apartment building at 380 Cumberland St. We will be converting the larger shared apartments into completely renovated and upgraded bachelor and one-bedroom apartments. Tenants welcome the move away from sharing with roommates to having a home of their own.

Options Bytown launches new website

A key component of Options Bytown's public relations objectives is communicating the success of its model, *HousingPlus*, with stakeholders and the public. In keeping with those objectives Options Bytown is proud to announce that it is launching a new and improved website!

The original website, which was designed by journalism students from Carleton in 2003, has been revamped to highlight many of the important linkages that Options Bytown has built over the years with partners in the community and across Ontario. As a result, the launch of the new website coincides with the recent launch of the Supportive Housing Network web-

site www.housingplus.ca in November, 2007.

The new website features updates on the latest news about Options Bytown and *HousingPlus* including, major projects that Options Bytown is involved with, radio profiles and interviews on the latest developments in supportive housing as well as past and present versions of the Options Bytown Newsletter.

For more information on *HousingPlus* and Options Bytown please visit the new website at www.optionsbytown.com.

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City Hall gives nod to supportive housing

There has been a lot of buzz around town lately about supportive housing and its potential for addressing the needs of Ottawa's chronically homeless population.

The Ottawa Citizen reported early in January that the City of Ottawa is poised to move forward with a new strategy to address homelessness in the City and supportive housing will form a key part of that strategy.

Currently, the most vulnerable rely on an expensive patchwork of "emergency shelters, police, hospital

stays and jails." A recent study on the costs of homelessness estimated that it costs \$100,000 per person per year in public funds in the current system. However, officials at City Hall appear ready to move forward on a new and more cost-effective approach that has already enjoyed success in Red Deer, Alberta, Vancouver, British Columbia, and over 30 U.S. districts. Supportive housing is at the centre of the proposed strategy: vulnerable persons are provided with permanent housing, and a suite of necessary support and rehabilitative services, such as psychological care, addiction treatment and

education. What is turning heads about this approach is that its average cost per person per year is much cheaper, around \$15,000.

City Housing Director Russell Mawby is reportedly enthusiastic about the new measures taken by City Officials in getting this program going. Councilors Peggy Feltmate (Kanata-South) and Peter Hume (Alta Vista) are moving forward on implementing the initiative and hope to have a firm plan in place by the end of April.

Tenants enjoy 'A Few of *Their* Favourite Things' at Christmas celebration

With the steady line of tenants filing out of the lounge after dinner a chorus of thanks could be heard under tired singing voices as another successful holiday celebration was capped at Options Bytown this year.

Once again Options Bytown celebrated the holiday season with style as Maria Hawkins, "The Blues Lady of Ottawa," led staff, tenants and volunteers in enthusiastic renditions of *Jingle Bell Rock*, *A Few of My Favourite Things*, *Frosty the Snowman* and a number of other traditional classics at this year's annual Christmas celebrations on December 18th and 20th.

Maria Hawkins' performance isn't the only tradition at the Options Bytown Christmas celebration. Every year volunteers from the community set aside some time from their busy holiday schedules to wrap presents, decorate the lounge with colourful lights and Christmas ornaments and most importantly, to prepare a delicious turkey dinner with all the trimmings.

Cindi Bates, a veteran Christmas volunteer, noted "it really is a joy to see so many people experience Christmas with smiles on their faces. There is always such gratitude from the tenants who appreciate you taking the time to spread a little cheer around the holidays."

Thanks to Roy Comeau, Mai Fen, Lily Vu, Alexa MacAulay, Tammy Murray, Sue Buler, Lynda Laurin, Marsha

Dowd, Peter Sears, Kristine Lankinen, Jeff McLeod, Sandy Jin, and Peter MacIver who pitched in their time at the Gilmour building as well as Cindi Bates, Marie-Josée Kabis, Lynne Fleury, Suzann Moorhead, Roger Moore, Simon Raybould, Isabelle Moser, Kiley Thompson, Marine Cerilli and Andre Roberge for volunteering at the Cumberland building. Great work everyone!



Computer volunteer makes the difference for tenants

The computer resource centre at Options Bytown provides an excellent service for tenants who want to browse the Internet, learn new skills or work on their resumes. However, without the dedication of people like Christian Potvin, a computer enthusiast and volunteer at Options Bytown, the service just wouldn't be the same.

Christian, a dispatcher for the Ottawa Police Department, clearly knows his way around a computer lab and puts that knowledge to good use by volunteering one day a week at the Cumberland residence downtown. Due to time and financial constraints, there just aren't enough resources to staff the computer resource centre full time - for the most part, if Christian isn't there to volunteer his time, the computer room isn't available. "It's only two hours out of my week," he says "but it makes a real

difference for people and that's what I enjoy most about it."

Christian is there to help whoever shows up, usually to shop for groceries online, build resumes, or set up email accounts. So far, Christian notes, the feedback has been very positive from tenants who enjoy having access to the computers. Jeffrey Barclay is one such tenant. A resident at the Cumberland building for over 6 years, he depends on the computers to catch up on the news. "I'm here as soon as the door opens every week," notes Jeffrey, "so I appreciate it when Christian is around."

On behalf of tenants like Jeffrey and everyone at Options Bytown, we would like to take this opportunity to thank Christian for all of his time and effort.



Above: Christian Potvin checking out the Options Bytown website.

Options Bytown would like to acknowledge our Vice President, Holly Solomon, who has recently been appointed to the Immigrant and Refugee Board. Congratulations Holly!

Options Bytown is supported by the City of Ottawa Housing Branch, the Ontario Provincial Homelessness Initiative Fund and the Federal Homelessness Partnership Strategy. We're also very grateful to our supporters throughout the Ottawa community.

As a charitable organization, we welcome donations that will provide an enhanced quality of life for the tenants of Options Bytown. Donations help pay for communal dinners at Christmas and Thanksgiving, summer and winter outings for tenants, and lifeskills training to support tenants in their efforts to set goals and work towards stable, independent living.

Options Bytown

You Are Needed!

- YES! I am interested in volunteering my time at Options Bytown.
- YES! I would like to become a Friend of Options Bytown, enclosed is my donation.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ FAX _____

E-MAIL _____

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