



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-geared to income permanent housing, but also a variety of on-site support services to individuals at risk of homelessness who suffer from mental illness and other chronic health conditions, substance abuse, multiple barriers to employment and multiple barriers to housing stability.

Housing in Ottawa: Strong vital signs need continued observation

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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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Recently, the Community Foundation of Ottawa released a report measuring the health and well-being of our community. The Vital Signs report provides an “annual check-up” of our city measuring a number of factors that affect quality of life including: income, safety, health, learning, community involvement, arts and culture, the environment, work, belonging and leadership, transportation and of course, housing.

There have been a number of positive developments in housing over the past few years despite the fact that the average cost of homes has increased by 6.3%. Some of these trends include declining numbers of people on social housing waiting lists, fewer people newly housed in social housing and slightly fewer people accessing homeless shelters.

While the report also highlights some encouraging news for supportive housing, including the addition of some 20 supportive housing spaces in 2007, there remain ongoing challenges in obtaining an appropriate balance of effective support services and the number of clients appropriately housed in supportive housing units in this City. In addition, the overall city-wide waiting list for supportive housing remains at 2000 individuals.

Notwithstanding all of this, a looming recession and an atmosphere of fiscal restraint at City Hall drew members of the community, including Options Bytown, to recent public budget consultations. Ottawa heard a clear message that now was not the time for complacency and that more needs to be done to sustain a vibrant housing sector in Ottawa.

Student Volunteers to Run Fun Group Activities for Personal Growth

Options Bytown will be offering tenants and clients a new way to stay healthy and to learn new skills, thanks to the generosity of a team of Master’s students in Applied Sports Psychology at the University of Ottawa. The team plans to launch a new service at Options Bytown in December, called, “Finding Your Best: From Patterns to Passions.”

Student volunteers will be identifying some of the everyday challenges faced by Options Bytown tenants and then designing fun activities to help teach skills that will contribute to overcoming life’s challenges. Some of those everyday challenges are: relieving stress and achieving relaxation, making healthy choices, setting realistic goals and planning to achieve them, and taking charge of one’s emotions, thoughts and behaviours.

As volunteer, Kevin Brophy explained “When life happens we all need help getting back on track and finding connections to our passions again. We love what we do; helping people find the joy in their lives and the means to overcome the obstacles in their way.”

Left to right: U of O students, Emily Boudreau, Kevin Brophy and Danika Smith



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Thanksgiving 2008 at Options Bytown: A tenants perspective

By Bré a tenant at 380 Cumberland

Everyone gets very excited at Thanksgiving. We have our dinner prepared for us. This year Nortel volunteered to come over as part of the United Way Day of Caring. I donated the use of my oven, as did some other tenants, to roast five turkeys.

Around noon four employees of Nortel showed up at my door with a trolley and a fully stuffed turkey all wrapped in foil. They put it in the oven and said, "we will be back in two hours." I sat and babysat the turkey. But after the first hour you could smell stuffing all the way down the hallways. Truly delectable.

We browned the turkey and timed each temperature reading with a meat thermometer. Then the volunteer said, "Supper at 5:00, be there." I couldn't believe that supper was in half an hour.

I took my plate and went down to the tenants' lounge to get in line and I was thrilled that everyone was there, joking and smiling and just so grateful for this special event. One long table had the turkeys, ready to serve,

followed by a honey glazed ham, stuffing, along with our favourite soft drinks. Cranberry sauce beckoned us to the tables. When we finished our supper the "pièce de résistance" was pie a la mode.

We thanked the Nortel employees who welcomed us back for seconds. We sat and thanked our maker for the staff who put this event together. Our special Nortel guests really did a marvellous job and I was speechless over the stuffing because it was a difficult traditional recipe. Nortel really did more than I could imagine. Thank-you Nortel! A lot of hard work went into this successful event!



Raising Volunteer Hours and Community Spirit: The Ottawa Timeraiser

On November 15th, Options Bytown volunteers and residents joined with other local community organizations as part of Ottawa's first "Timeraiser." Held at the Canadian War Museum, the Timeraiser provided Options Bytown with an ideal opportunity to recruit new volunteers in a number of capacities.

The Timeraiser asked potential volun-



teers to commit to a certain number of hours of volunteer work for the organizations they were interested in. In exchange, they were given the opportunity to bid on works of art which were crafted by local artists. The event resulted in over 7,000 hours of volunteer time pledged to community organizations and over 14,000 raised for local artists.

With over 400 people in attendance, the Timeraiser provided a great opportunity for Options Bytown to get out into the community and promote our organization. The Options Bytown table was swamped with requests for information and interested volunteers! Luckily, volunteers for the event, Brodie Berrigan, Kathy Lambton and Larry Magnan were well-equipped to deal with the crush of enthusiasm.

More than a dozen people expressed an interest in volunteering for our organization. These volunteers could be serving as board members or assisting Options Bytown with its programming and operations. Many volunteered to lend a hand serving Christmas dinner to our residents on December 12 (Gilmour) and December 16 (Cumberland). Others will be working with our residents to help increase their computer skills, build a sustainable community garden and mend and sew their own clothes.

All in all, the Timeraiser was a fabulous success for local organizations like Options Bytown, hundreds of new volunteers and the community as a whole.

Left: Kathy Lambton and Larry Magnan

Few issues have galvanized our community like King Edward Avenue

Running through the heart of Lower-town, what divides the community physically has brought it together philosophically.

Over the decades, community opposition to heavy trucks has been central to efforts to improve the safety of the roadway, as injuries and deaths have been sustained by pedestrians, cyclists and drivers due to collisions and accidents with trucks. Sharp turns at Rideau and at Cumberland streets are hazardous for the drivers and for those waiting on the corners, and precious little has been done to mitigate the problems. But trucks are not the only problem.

Between 30,000 and 50,000 cars use King Edward each day, most commuting between home and work. The majority of these vehicles carry only one person. Dozens of bus routes from Gatineau begin their routes on King Edward, and park, frequently idling, along the roadway and on adjacent

streets while waiting for their assigned time to begin their routes.

The City of Ottawa has stated, in numerous policy documents and planning blueprints, that it is committed to increasing the density of our city by encouraging people to live in the core. It has, on paper, embraced a pedestrian and cyclist-friendly model of development, though in practice, has continued to enable the car culture. The "revitalization" of King Edward has cost almost \$30 million so far, and has only made it easier for more cars and trucks to zip through the neighbourhood more quickly and conveniently.

What can be done?

To date, efforts have been spearheaded by the King Edward Avenue Task Force and the Lowertown Community Association to have these and other concerns addressed by the various levels of government with

responsibility for the corridor, but these efforts, to a large degree, have been ignored. These groups represent local residents, but do not necessarily encompass the broader concerns of the community. We must create an alliance of all the affected individuals, institutions, and groups who use the roadway or live, work, or spend time in the vicinity. Every voice counts, and without broad support, we will never convince the City that we mean business when we say we need change. The people, united, will never be divided - not even by King Edward Avenue.

By Angela Rickman, President of the Lowertown Community Association

Options Bytown would like to extend our best wishes to you and your family over the holidays.

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 _____

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