

Transition House: A Home Built on Hope

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 11, 2020

PEMBROKE - Thanks to the generosity of a private donor and the support of several community organizations, Renfrew County now has a safe and welcoming shelter for homeless individuals who are in need of supportive short-term housing.

Spearheaded by The Grind, Transition House is also benefiting from much needed funding provided by Mental Health Services of Renfrew County (MHSRC), an essential service within the local healthcare system. Administered by the Pembroke Regional Hospital (PRH), MHSRC offers a broad range of publicly available health services supporting wellness and recovery for Renfrew County residents ages 16 years and older, who are living with mental illness and addictions.

“The timing couldn’t have been better in having the capacity to contribute funds towards establishing this much needed resource,” said Sabine Mersmann, Vice-President of Clinical and Supportive Services/Partnerships and Integration at the Pembroke Regional Hospital. “In return, we now have access to a second dedicated crisis bed, 365 days of the year, right here in Pembroke.”

Thanks to \$1.1 million in new funding which MHSRC received in 2019, PRH was able to donate \$100,000 in building materials to help restore the century-old home. This combined federal and provincial investment was specifically ear-marked for enhanced crisis response and mental health programming, including increased access to temporary crisis housing as part of Ontario’s Safe Beds program.

Safe Beds is a provincial initiative that offers an alternative to hospitalization for those in a crisis situation. The goal is to provide a stabilizing and therapeutic environment where individuals can stay — on a short-term basis — in order to work through a mental health or addiction crisis.

“When we looked at the various time-sensitive services we provide, emergency housing was a missing piece,” said MHSRC Director Mireille Delorme. “So we feel very fortunate to have had the means to collaborate with The Grind when it was needed most.”

Indeed, the timing couldn’t have been better. Through its work with the homeless, The Grind’s Board of Directors was keenly aware of the desperate need for more supportive housing in Renfrew County to help those dealing with mental health and addiction issues who desire change.

Studies show that when supportive housing is in place, the at-risk and homeless can better focus on overcoming their issues, thereby greatly increasing their chances of success.

“Otherwise, they’re often at the mercy of conditions beyond their control,” said David Studham, a dedicated volunteer with The Grind. “We see it every day. There’s a dire

shortage of affordable housing locally, yet our clients want to be able to access safe and supportive living space near family and friends.”

MHSRC Supervisor Cheryl Summers agrees. “Typically, if a client needs help in a crisis situation, we send them to Ottawa or North Bay because of a lack of safe shelter in Renfrew County. But they often return almost overnight, because they want to be in their home community.”

For those fortunate to get a room at Transition House, it means a warm bed and safe shelter in a shared environment, for periods of one night to three months. While there, each resident is partnered with a MHSRC case worker and linked to various community based support networks, with a goal to stabilize their situation and map a road to recovery.

Hope for the Homeless

The Grind was bequeathed the home in 2018 by the estate of Aleida Sluyter, a long-time resident of Pembroke. While the structure was sound, the Victorian-era home required a major renovation to meet the needs of its new residents.

“We started with nothing, and took a leap of faith,” said David Studham. “There are a lot of kind hearts in our community,” he added.

Thanks to the generosity of MHSRC, local contractors and volunteers, the reconstruction was completed in just over a year, and Transition House welcomed its first residents on May 1st. In that time, countless volunteer hours were invested by so many.

Early on, students and teachers from Algonquin College stepped up to fundraise and invest free labour. Connie Poupore’s Office Administration Executive Program raised \$12,000 to contribute to the cause under the banner of *Hope for the Homeless*.

When construction started, Professor Adam Johns and his students from Carpentry and Renovation Techniques spent two weeks onsite helping with demolition, insulation and drywall. They also assisted the volunteer plumbing and electrical crews.

“It was a great opportunity for our students to work on a real job site,” said Mr. Johns. “At the same time, we got to demonstrate the skills and training offered at Algonquin College Pembroke. It was a win-win.”

The three-story home in downtown Pembroke, features three client bedrooms plus one crisis suite, as well as a full kitchen, plus dining and living areas. A second, larger suite is equipped with a kitchenette and washroom. The house has been totally renovated and is newly furnished.

According to The Grind’s Executive Director Jerry Novack, several local businesses stepped up and contributed. “We especially want to thank Sharon Godin and the team at Wade Construction, and Bob & Mark’s Custom Cabinetry for their generous donations of labour and materials.”

Members of the community also supported the project by participating in *The Coldest Night of the Year*, a family-friendly walk that was held in Pembroke last February. Almost \$40,000 was raised to help the hungry, homeless and hurting people of Renfrew County; half of those funds went to Transition House.

“At The Grind we like to say we sell hope,” said Mr. Studham. “Transition House is here so we can help our homeless break the cycle. Wellness is indeed within reach.”

Anyone seeking mental health and addictions support and information is asked to call Mental Health Services of Renfrew County or the Crisis Line, or visit their websites:

- 1-800-991-7711, extension 8006 or local (613) 732-8770, extension 8006
- Crisis Line: 1-866-966-0991
- www.Crisisline.ca
- www.pembrokeregionalhospital.ca

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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