

BETHLEHEM'S

HOUSING HEROES



2017 Spring Newsletter

BETHLEHEMHOUSING.CA

Message From Our Executive Director

We believe safe, supportive and affordable housing is fundamental to the health, well-being and resilience of all people. We believe housing is a human right!

There are many definitions of a hero that include long lists of virtues. But one thing is for certain; a hero is not born, a hero is self-made and makes sacrifices of their time, talent, and treasure. We are very pleased to launch our Housing Hero concept to increase awareness, interest, and participation of the community in the issues of housing and homelessness. To us, a Housing Hero is anyone who believes that everyone deserves a home and is ready to join in and support the movement for housing justice!

At Bethlehem we have witnessed many forms of housing heroism. Over 29 years ago, a group of housing hero volunteers came together to come up with a solution for homelessness and built Bethlehem Place, then again in 2005 a new set of heroes built Genesis Court, and again in 2010 built Kenmore Court. All of the housing and homeless serving agencies in Niagara, like Bethlehem, were built and are sustained by heroes known as volunteers, committed Board members, donors, and dedicated compassionate staff. I am honoured to be a part of this community of people who come together and continue to work on solutions, as the need is greater than ever.

Among the pages of our Spring Newsletter you will read about the collaborative activities and programs we are involved in to help deliver on the community's ten-year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan. There are stories and examples of our own Housing Heroes, our frontline staff, past and current Board members, and volunteers. We are excited to tell you about our growth and new developments such as our playground renovation.

In 2017 we will be breaking ground on a new affordable housing development. We are calling on you to help us grow and keep meeting our mission to continue providing affordable housing for the many that need it. **We invite you to be a part of the solution. Be a Housing Hero!**

Lori Beech
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Bethlehem's Housing Heroes

Bethlehem Housing was created by local Housing Heroes that were concerned about the issues of homelessness in Niagara. What started as a grassroots initiative has grown to help over 2,000 families by providing housing and supports to help stabilize their lives.

Today, over 5,500 households – including 2,710 children – are on the wait list for affordable housing in Niagara. This is a 20% increase since 2010. Our work is urgent and the demand is growing!

The cost of rent is rising dramatically at a time when most renters have already devoted up to 55% of their income to rent. Migration, job growth, and the cost of owning a home have raised the demand for rentals, resulting in lower vacancy rates and higher rents.

Bethlehem Housing and Support Services is an active part of the solution and we are inviting the community to join us as we solve this community problem together! **Our vision is to create a Niagara where everyone has a home.**

THANK YOU TO
OUR PAST, PRESENT,
AND FUTURE
VOLUNTEERS.



29 Years of Supportive Housing

Over the last 29 years, thanks to the incredible hard work and support from our volunteers, Bethlehem Housing and Support Services has been able to grow into a leading organization within Niagara that provides affordable housing and support services for men, women, and families in need of stable housing.

"A special thank you to Jo-Anne Thibodeau and Drew Semple who have served on our board since 2011 and will soon be completing their six-year term. Drew Semple has been essential to our past housing developments by sharing his expertise as a retired city planner. Jo-Anne has been a tenacious leader in governance, ethics, and policy development through sharing her expertise as a retired lawyer. We greatly appreciate your contributions to Bethlehem over the years and will miss you both."

- LORI BEECH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dedicated Volunteers Since 1988

Since 1988, over 100 volunteer Board members have contributed their time, wisdom, and leadership to expand our housing and support services and meet the ever increasing needs within our community.



Our Housing Heroes

Our volunteers are integral to the success of Bethlehem Housing and in helping people overcome the obstacles they face. Without the loyal support of our many dedicated volunteers, the growth of our organization would not be possible. Our volunteers are our Housing Heroes!





Ready to Rent

In collaboration with local housing service providers and the Niagara Region, Bethlehem Housing acted as a catalyst in bringing an innovative housing stability and homelessness prevention program to Niagara. In 2016, 28 support workers across Niagara participated in the Ready to Rent Train the Trainer program and became certified community educators. This spring Bethlehem delivered our first Ready to Rent program to our tenants and community members with the goal of supporting people to attain and maintain stable housing.



Housing First

Bethlehem Housing and Support Services assist individuals and families who are chronically and episodically homeless to find independent and permanent housing through our Housing First Program, funded by Niagara Regional Housing and Niagara Region Homelessness Services. The underlying principle of Housing First is that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed. Once the person is housed our Community Support Workers provide client-driven supports to address ongoing housing stability, health and mental health needs, and life skills.

A Home For All

A Home for All is our community's ten-year vision for individuals in Niagara facing homelessness and other housing issues. This plan lays out priorities, goals, and actions to help realize the community's vision. Since 2012, Bethlehem Housing and Support Services has played an active role in the development, implementation, and execution of this plan. Our Executive Director, Program Manager, and Community Support Workers have been working collaboratively with a network of housing service providers and community leaders to enhance support services and address the need for safe, affordable housing in Niagara.

"When people come together it is possible to create positive, significant, and lasting differences in communities."

- LORI BEECH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORKER TEAM

Our Community Support Workers

Bethlehem's Community Support Worker's (CSW) provide in-house and community outreach services for residents and people living in Niagara. When an individual or family reaches out to Bethlehem for help they are connected with a CSW who will provide support, work one-on-one to determine their needs, and help develop personal goals. Our CSW's provide empathy, hope, and understanding to help clients cope with the problems they are facing and to gain the confidence and skills to stabilize their lives.

At Bethlehem, we have a dedicated team of eight CSW's that provide support to over 300 families yearly in Niagara. This dynamic team includes Chuck, Mayra, Yvonne, Rob, Laura A., Laura S., Nicole, and Jena (missing from photo).

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

A BETHLEHEM COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORKER

Mayra's journey as a Community Support Worker (CSW) with Bethlehem Housing and Support Services began three years ago after graduating from the Social Service Worker program at Niagara College. She is one of our team of eight Community Support Workers that provides support services to individuals and families living at Bethlehem Housing or within the community on an outreach basis. The CSW's are an essential part of what makes our organization so successful in helping people overcome their issues related to homelessness, family breakdown, domestic violence, physical disability, and mental health.

Every day Mayra walks alongside her clients by providing advocacy and support. When supporting clients that are dealing with domestic violence she assists with safety concerns, ensuring the well-being of children, and addressing physical and mental wellness. When supporting clients that are facing homelessness she often learns about histories of childhood trauma or abuse, even though initially a client may only be seeking assistance with housing. *"It is important for me to respect my client's boundaries and let them choose what they want to share. In many cases they end up opening up about their past, which helps them to move forward."* Mayra works with the client and the issues they are facing in a way that will make them feel comfortable.

Mayra's caseload consists of individuals and families with a mix of ages, genders, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. Since working with a wide variety of demographics, Mayra finds it very important to understand that one size does not fit all. She says, *"Everyone handles experiences differently. We are all resilient in our own way. If I come in wearing only one hat and I'm unable to be flexible depending on the client's needs, then nobody benefits."*

An important role of our Community Support Workers is building partnerships with other social service organizations and connecting clients to community services. Sometimes Mayra acts as an advocate and supports her clients by accompanying them to meetings with other agencies. *"It's very important for my clients to feel as though they have someone to support and advocate for them. It makes them feel believed in and furthers their motivation."*

While the role of a CSW can bring on its fair share of challenges, for Mayra, it's important to focus on the rewarding moments. One of her most memorable clients was several years her senior. When they first met, the client was quite apprehensive about their age difference and was unsure if Mayra would be able to relate. She was homeless, battled with addictions, and had mental health issues. She had just finished an addiction treatment program when she came to Bethlehem Place.

In the end the client completely bloomed while working with Mayra. She is now out in the community living on her own, has a beautiful apartment, and has reconnected with her children. Mayra received a beautiful letter from her saying that her life would not be where it's at now if she had not been taught to love herself. *"These are the moments that make being a Community Support Worker at Bethlehem so rewarding."*

“ Our Community Support Workers are an invaluable resource to our community, making a difference in people's lives every day.

- CAROLYN FISH, PROGRAM MANAGER

Naturalized Playground

The Bethlehem Place playground is currently being revitalized to create an inclusive, natural environment for our children of all ages and their families to enjoy.

This natural play area will facilitate participation in our Early Learning Centre programs that will enhance development for children and improve the quality of life for families that live at Bethlehem Place and in the surrounding neighbourhood.

The playground is designed with all ages and levels of ability of participants in mind and will include natural features and learning elements built to last a lifetime on natural surfaces and surroundings. Studies show that a well-designed natural playground is the best option for developing children's minds and bodies by fostering optimal play spaces for activity, creativity, and education.

TO VIEW THE COMPLETED PROJECT VISIT
BETHLEHEMHOUSING.CA

This project was made possible because of the support of our project sponsors:



MERRITTON LIONS CLUB
MAY COURT CLUB OF ST. CATHARINES
LAND CARE NIAGARA

IN MEMORY OF DICK HALVERSON AND GLORIA ROONEY

We also wish to acknowledge the contribution of our donors who wish to remain anonymous.



Thank You

This project has been a true community build, thanks to the many volunteers that contributed their time and talent. We would like to thank Brock University staff and faculty, United Way's Day of Caring Program, Niagara College Broadcasting students, and LiUNA Local 837 Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program students.