

Thank You



2020 Spring Newsletter

BETHLEHEMHOUSING.CA

CLIENT STORY

MY EVER SHRINKING WORLD

A few weeks ago, I packed up all my belongings and moved from the apartment where I resided for almost 4 years. It was my safe place in the world, a place that sheltered me through many of life's storms and became the center of my ever shrinking world.

On June 1, 2020 I took the bold step forward to move my belongings to a new place to create a new home at North Church Court. I was the very first resident to move into the building. When I opened the doors to my new apartment I felt a sense of peace and hope that this place would begin to open up the world for me again.

In my late teens and early twenties my world was big. I served in the military and travelled to many places around the world. Then in my late twenties, after experiencing a few personal traumas, I began to manifest debilitating anxiety disorders including obsessive compulsive disorder and agoraphobia. I no longer felt safe and my world began to shrink.

Stepping outside of my home to do any activity became more and more difficult. I would instantly go from feeling calm to feeling panic. My palms would start sweating, my heart would start pounding, my stomach would turn, my lungs would constrict and each breath became harder and harder to catch. My body became my worst enemy and I could not control it. The only thing I could control was my escape. So I would retreat back into my home and find refuge in the place that kept my world small and safe.

I sought medical care and was prescribed a medication to help manage my anxiety disorders. It was around this time, about 15 years ago, that I found housing with Bethlehem Housing at Genesis Court. It was a perfect situation for me and provided me with opportunities to meet new people and to begin expanding my world. I have always been a handy man and was able to use my skills through a part-time job doing maintenance and repairs at Bethlehem Place. It was an experience that I really enjoyed! But then I developed diabetes and my eyesight began to fail me, I began to lose my coordination and I couldn't do the job anymore.

Having to rely on disability income, it became difficult for me to continue to afford my rent and have enough money to live on. I was offered a housing subsidy that would provide me with more money for my basic living needs. In order to access the subsidy I was required to move from Genesis Court to a bachelor apartment inside a house with a few other apartments. It was during this time that the anxiety medication I was taking, for almost 20 years, was no longer working for me. I had to go off my medication completely before I could switch over to a new medication. This sent me on a downward spiral for almost 8 months and my world began to shrink again.

With the support of Rob, Bethlehem's Community Support Worker, and the new medication I began to start expanding my world again. Rob took the time to get to know me, he listened to me, understood my fears and supported me to achieve my goals one step at a time. We have a very trusting relationship. He is gentle with me and he pushes me but never to the point of panic. Over the past few years, Rob has supported me on my daily walks and when he senses that I am starting to get taken over by anxiety we stop and breathe deeply, get grounded and then he encourages me to take one more step.

My current goal is focusing on extending my walking distances in opposite ways. It might not seem like much to you, but for me it is a big deal. I try at least once or twice a day to get out for a walk on my own. I practice the skills that Rob taught me and try hard to walk a few steps further. Some days are better than others.

Bethlehem has been a big part of my life and I am grateful for the housing and supports that have been provided to me over the years. I really like my new apartment and I am happy to be surrounded by people that I can become friends with. It has been less than one month since I have lived at North Church Court and my world has already begun to expand.

***"The truth is, its not me its him. He is the one that picks up the fight every day.
I am just there to offer support and help him to reach his goals."***

- ROB CAMMAERT, COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORKER

Welcome to North Church Court

We are thrilled to announce that our much-anticipated affordable housing building at 111 Church Street in downtown St Catharines has opened its doors offering individuals and families in Niagara a safe, supportive and affordable place to call home.

After more than five years of complicated hard work and steadfast leadership, the vision to provide affordable housing in our community and the commitment of all involved, has finally become a reality. We are grateful to have had such a dedicated team of partners and staff working on this project that is so important to many people in our community.

Support services provide the most vulnerable in our community with the essential supports needed to maintain their housing stability and quality of life. During these extraordinary times we have worked hard to ensure the safety of everyone at Bethlehem and to continue to provide support services for our residents and outreach clients.

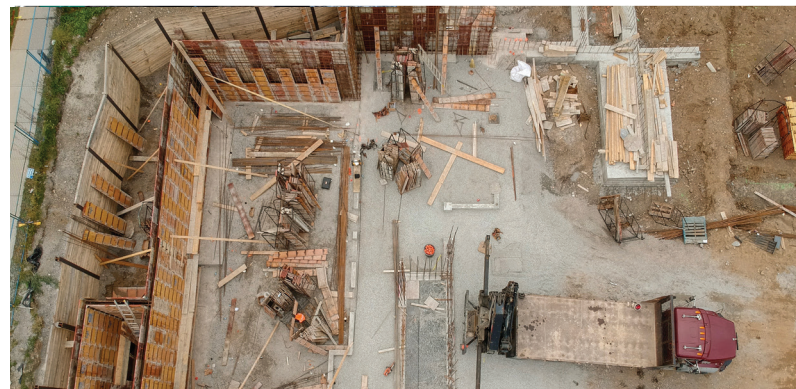
Because of you, our community of supporters, we welcomed 127 families to their new home, many of whom have endured tremendous hardships and made many sacrifices while they patiently waited for construction to be completed. Now they have a comfortable, healthy and safe space to call home.

Thank you for helping us get to the finish line with this new building and for sharing our vision to provide stable affordable housing and support services that contribute to a vibrant, caring and inclusive Niagara where everyone has a home.

With Gratitude,

Lou Beech

2017 - 2018 Ground Breaking & Laying the Foundation



A Unique Partnership

Inspired by a shared vision to provide a solution to the affordable housing crisis in Niagara, North Church Court has become a reality because of a unique partnership between FirstOntario Credit Union, Penn Terra Group Limited and Bethlehem Housing and Support Services, along with the support of municipal and regional governments, and local community agencies.

“This is a story about how an innovative partnership, pure will, perseverance and passionate commitment made the probability of almost impossible... happen.”

- LORI BEECH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF BETHLEHEM HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

“It’s our responsibility as a credit union, to invest our profits in the needs of the communities where our Members and neighbours live and work. We recognized there was a need for affordable housing in the Niagara Region so we came together in partnership to help provide a homegrown solution and make the dreams of this secure, family-friendly community development a reality.”

- LLOYD SMITH, CEO OF FIRSTONTARIO CREDIT UNION

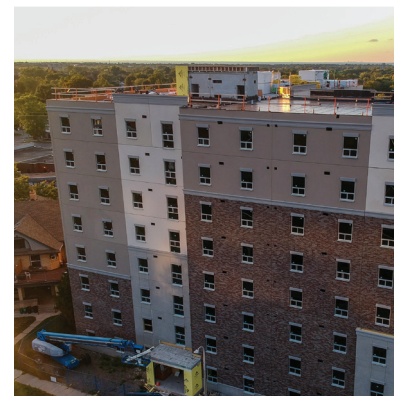
“The new North Church Court building shows that there is a way to make a meaningful contribution in our community. Our dynamic team developed a replicable model to address problems identified with affordable housing in the past, without compromising on the dual goals of quality and affordability. Hopefully many more units will be built in the near future.”

- SUNIL BAHADOORSINGH, FOUNDER AND CEO OF PENN TERRA GROUP LIMITED

“North Church Court is one of the first major builds for affordable housing in the downtown community in roughly a decade. The City’s Planning Department has worked very closely with the developers. The staff really believe in this project. It fits with our housing action plan, which identifies the need for social and affordable housing in our community.”

- MAYOR WALTER SENDZIK, CITY OF ST. CATHARINES

2019 - 2020 Building Construction to Completion



Your Support Makes A Difference

You're Moving Families Forward

Permanent Supportive Housing

Support services combined with affordable housing are critical to helping people break the cycles of poverty and homelessness. On-site housing support services are essential to assist people who are disadvantaged to establish themselves in stable housing and become more self-sufficient.

Many of our tenants are dealing with issues related to poverty, physical disability, mental health, domestic violence and family breakdown.

In 2019, our tenants self-identified that they are living with mental illness (69%), addiction issues (38%) and physical disabilities (18%).



You're Preventing Evictions and Homelessness

Housing and Prevention Services

Mobile Community Support Workers assist people in the community who are at risk or currently experiencing homelessness to find appropriate housing, maintain housing stability and connect clients to support services in the community.

In 2019, 94% of clients were successfully housed.

Housing Services supports tenants that live in Bethlehem buildings to maintain successful tenancies by providing education resources and information. This contributes to an increase in knowledge of tenant rights and responsibilities, as well as a decrease in conflicts, tenancy violations, damage to units, rent arrears and evictions through an eviction prevention approach.

Our eviction rate has reduced from 5% in 2015 to 0% in 2019.



You're Providing Sanctuary for Families in Crisis

Transitional Housing - Bethlehem Place

Bethlehem Place is a one year transitional housing program open to men, women and their children with a focus on families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

During their stay residents are given support through individual meetings with a support worker, support groups and a wide range of life skills workshops including; healthy relationships, self-esteem, grief and loss, coping strategies, Rent Smart, Triple P Parenting, etc.

In 2019, 45 families lived at Bethlehem Place and an additional 33 families who graduated from our program received ongoing transitional support while living in the community.



TOGETHER WE'RE BUILDING A FOUNDATION



People Facing
Social and Economic
Hardship in Niagara have Stable
Housing and Improved Quality of Life

Personal Resiliency and Well-being

PEOPLE HAVE HEALTHY WAYS
OF COPING WITH LIFE'S
ADVERSITIES AND CHALLENGES.



Community Connections and Social Integration

PEOPLE HAVE SOCIAL SUPPORT
NETWORKS AND OPPORTUNITY TO
PARTICIPATE IN THE COMMUNITY.



Financial Empowerment

PEOPLE HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE,
SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE TO MANAGE
THEIR FINANCIAL RESOURCES.



Strong and Stable Families

PARENTS/CAREGIVERS HAVE POSITIVE
PARENTING SKILLS AND SUPPORT
HEALTHY CHILD DEVELOPMENT.



Stable Housing

BUILDS A FOUNDATION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES TO GROW

