



A Prisoner Behind an Unlocked Door

Metro Non-Profit Housing Association – Halifax, Nova Scotia

Ed was frantic. He was late for the performance but he couldn't leave his room.

He couldn't leave because just outside his door in the hallway of his rooming house were the young people who had recently beat him up. They were out there selling drugs.

Ed was an elderly man with an alcohol problem who lived in an unsafe rooming house without locks and security in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. He was frequently assaulted and victimized.

One of the few things he enjoyed was playing in the Shining Lights Choir, a group organized by the Metro Non-Profit Housing Association (MNPFA). He sang and played the drums that he had found in the garbage.

And today, in a place that had no locks, he was a prisoner - a prisoner of crime, addiction and fear.

"We felt so bad for him," says Carol Charlebois, Executive Director of MNPFA. "We knew something must be wrong because it was very unusual for him to miss a performance."

Carol can tell you a lot of stories about people like Ed, people who have nowhere to live or live in unsafe and substandard accommodations.

But the MNPFA is working to address the situation. They have partnered with the Creighton Gerrish Development Association, a community organization formed to develop under-utilized space in Halifax's north end. Together, they've mobilized community resources such as the Rotary Club Halifax Northwest and obtained over \$1.4 million from the federal Homelessness Initiative.

With all of this in place, they built a 19-unit, long-term housing facility for hard-to-house people with multiple needs.

One of the first tenants of the new facility was Ed. He now has a safe and secure place to live. He also has a supportive place because of the programs and services offered through the Housing Support Centre, located on the main floor of the building.

"The reason we can offer the services that we do is because of the SCPI [Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative] funding from the federal government," explains Carol. "We operate like we have a mortgage even though we don't."

This means that the funding from the Homelessness Initiative allowed them to build the building. The money they collect in rent, which is topped up by the provincial Housing Services, doesn't go to paying the interest on a mortgage. Instead, they use the money to provide a network of supports to residents and people who come in to their centre.

"We can have over a hundred people come into a drop-in centre in one morning," says Carol. "Other agencies that we work with tell us we're having a very positive effect on our client's health."

Take Ed for instance. He no longer drinks anywhere near as much as he used to. The Shining Lights Choir provides him with drums to play. He has safe housing and access to medical and mental health care.

Most importantly to the affable man who was so often assaulted and victimized, Ed is no longer trapped and afraid.

Ed is no longer a prisoner.

ⁱ Name of client changed to protect privacy.