

## Getting Back on Her Feet

Marillac Place – Kitchener, Ontario

The Outreach Counsellor tripped on the loose floorboard and fell down the stairs. She pulled herself up, discovering that nothing was damaged except her dignity, and knocked on Mary's door.

Mary, like her counsellor a few minutes before, had stumbled a few times in her life. The counsellor reflected on this as Mary opened the door, remembering the homeless young woman who had arrived at Marillac Place several months earlier looking worn out and worried.

She had arrived at the shelter with her belongings, a six-month old baby, and a toddler who was almost 2 years old. Despite her worn out appearance, she also arrived with some goals and the determination to reach them.

She just needed some help and encouragement. She had come to the right place.

Marillac Place in Kitchener provides housing and support services for up to ten pregnant and parenting young women and their children. Staff members at Marillac help the young women set goals and learn how to care for themselves and their children. They receive childcare guidance, educational opportunities, and referrals to other services.

A key part of Marillac's approach is the Outreach service that helps clients make the transition to independent living.

"The Outreach service works to end the cycle of homelessness and poverty," explains Celeste Donkersgoed, Executive Director of Marillac Place. "We help them stay independent after they've left the shelter."

Marillac Place recently received \$35,000 from the Government of Canada's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) to assist them with their Outreach work, funding that helped them provide the help and support Mary needed to get back on her feet.

Mary's first goal was to find permanent housing. The Outreach Counsellor began to work with Mary every day to accomplish a very difficult task, to find a suitable apartment within the \$554 she had available.

Mary found an apartment for herself and children. With some food hampers and a basket of essentials provided by the Outreach Counsellor, Mary moved into her new home.

A few weeks after the move, the Outreach Counsellor went to visit Mary – and fell down the stairs.

In addition to the loose floorboard, there were other problems with the apartment. A dispute had developed between Mary and the landlord. Mary complained that the landlord was entering the apartment unannounced, insisting she take out the garbage for the other tenants, and generally being very rude.

Despite some strong resistance from the landlord, the counsellor was able to advocate for Mary and mediate an agreement between the two. The problems were resolved, the stair was repaired, and Mary started to feel more comfortable and secure in her home.

However, she was still finding it difficult financially.

The counsellor continued to work with Mary to find subsidized daycare. With that in place, Mary was able to find full-time work and end her dependence on social assistance.

It had been a long journey from the entrance of the shelter to a home and full-time work. For Mary that journey included the support and education she received in the shelter, help with her apartment search, dispute resolution services, help finding daycare and assistance in getting a full-time job.

And after that journey was finished there was something both Mary and the counsellor could attest to: we all stumble in life.

Sometimes you just need a little help to get back on your feet.

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<sup>i</sup> The name of the client has been changed to protect privacy.