



Transitional Age Youth

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LEAP OF FAITH
TOGETHER
LOFT

Community Services

Bringing **Hope** and **Recovery** Home

A Message From Our CEO



We have been having a very productive year here at LOFT. Our recent Annual General Meeting provided us an opportunity to celebrate two very special projects, one for youth and one for seniors.

This issue of Connections is focused on the challenges of those referred to in the social services sector as “transitional age youth”. We want to tell you about some of the special challenges they face, but we also want to tell you about their strength and courage to overcome these challenges.

We were especially inspired by a group of young women clients who challenged us to provide a new housing program to meet their needs, and then accepted our challenge to put their own vision of peer support into action in establishing a totally new housing program. We are excited to share the results of that process in this issue.

We are also excited to announce a totally new supportive housing program for seniors living in the Jane/Finch community. It is just in the process of being implemented.

The AGM also gave us an important moment to acknowledge and thank our donors. Your outstanding support over the past twelve months allowed us to continue to take the leap of faith that makes it possible for us to go out on a limb to provide much needed support to very marginalized clients. We thank you most sincerely.

I hope you will find plenty of opportunities to get out and enjoy this wonderful summer weather, and I look forward to telling you more about our new seniors program in the next issue.

Until next time...

Transitional Age Youth

It often surprises people to learn that, within Ontario’s social services system, youth aged 16 to 24 - often referred to as “transitional age youth”- are one of the most underserved populations. They fall between the cracks; too old for the child welfare system, yet not old enough for adult programs and services.

The basis of the problem is that transitional aged youth are just that – they are in “transition” from childhood to adulthood. Even in high-functioning families, it is understood as a risky time for young people as they face the complex challenges of adolescence and young-adulthood; when they move away from home for the first time and begin to earnest the task of discovering their own identities.

How much more challenging for young people whose backgrounds have not provided them with many advantages and who may already be seen to be “at risk” before they even reach these transitional years? Because, of course, this is also the time when kids are likely to have their first experience with a major mental illness, addiction, homelessness or trouble with the law.

The social services network has not been very successful at responding. During the 1990’s many of the specialized programs specific to this group disappeared in Ontario. The mandate of most youth agencies ends at the age of 18. Although the adult system begins at 16, it has limited resources and expertise at serving transitional aged youth. Only one adult community mental health service in Toronto provides services specifically for this age group.

LOFT has been serving transitional aged youth since it’s very inception

LOFT has been serving transitional aged youth since it’s very inception, through its high support group homes: Beverley Lodge and Etobicoke Girls’ Residence; through Ingles House, the only

post-treatment residence for young women recovering from addiction and wishing to live in an abstinent environment; through Street Outreach Services, the only such program specifically targeting youth involved in prostitution; and through its seven co-op houses, supporting youth in their transition to independence.

Bringing Hope and Recovery Home



Clients Design a New Program

Every winter CEO Terry McCullum sets aside time in his schedule to visit each LOFT program and meet with service users to get their feedback. Over the years, their thoughtful and innovative suggestions have played an important part in shaping LOFT programs.

Terry experienced a truly outstanding example of client initiative and participation this past winter when he visited Ingles House. Ingles serves young women recovering from serious addictions who wish to live in an abstinent environment. All the women Terry met with at Ingles were doing extremely well, but they shared a significant concern. “Where do we go next?”

Government funding limits residence at Ingles House to a maximum of one year (it is the only LOFT program limited in this way), and several of the women would soon be leaving. They all felt they had benefited tremendously from their stay at Ingles and, although they looked forward to complete independence in the future, they felt it was a big step and wished there was a more gradual way.

When Terry asked what this

gradual way would look like, they described a living environment where they would be on their own, without a staff presence, yet still be part of a program. That way, they would be able to be independent, take responsibility for themselves and their home, and continue to support each other. But they would still have access to staff support if they needed it and they could still guarantee themselves an abstinent living environment. They felt this would be the perfect stepping-stone to complete independence.

The young women were asked to put their thoughts on paper, and four days later six women provided a detailed proposal for a co-operative house. Two other LOFT programs offered their support for the project. Etobicoke Girls’ Residence, our other program for young women, offered one of its three co-op houses, and Wilkinson Housing and Support Services, one of our adult programs, provided the support worker.

Six months later, the “new” house is a reality, responding to a clear need and providing a service not available elsewhere.

Ingles House Client

Just over a year ago, I was using drugs and alcohol daily to cope with pain and low self-esteem. I was in trouble with the law, and stayed away from school.

Finally, I realized that I was only hurting myself and my loved ones around me. I called my drug counselor, who helped me get into detox. From there, she also helped me into Ingles House, a program of LOFT Community Services.

Today, I am clean and sober (I just celebrated my nine month anniversary), I attend school full-time, and am involved in extracurricular sports. I also work part-time.

I have finished my community service, and will finish my probation in August.

I have an amazing relationship with my family, and they are very proud of all that I have achieved.

The most important thing is that I now have good self-esteem, and am proud of myself and my accomplishments.

LEAP OF FAITH TOGETHER

Wendy and Dwayne

My life took a tragic turn and I lost everything I had earned. Everyone turned against me. They are blind and cannot see. Then I found myself in women’s shelters and the men who live here at Loft, found themselves in men’s shelters. God saw us and brought us together. LOFT is a gift for us to treasure. LOFT has given us kindness and pleasure to heal our souls that were asunder. LOFT gave us a bed, food, council and care. We thank you for your care and comfort in our despair.

If it was not for LOFT and the programs they offer which we need, we would not be able to put our lives back together. We have been downed by spouses and family. LOFT picked us up and gave us back our self-esteem and a reason to live. If I had stayed on the street it surely would have ended my existence. We want to live and LOFT gave us that opportunity. We thank you and may LOFT be blessed over and over. When you want for nothing, do not put anyone down who doesn’t have because maybe one day it could happen to you. We believe and give thanks for this second chance. Also for the support workers, the workshops and the understanding that means so much. We all come from different walks of life but in the end we are all the same. We are extremely thankful for the support that we receive and we do not judge one another here. Our lives have been very hard and nothing has come easy.

LOFT has given us a chance to restore and without this help we don’t know where we would be. LOFT has saved a thousand souls and the support workers work very hard with us to help us restore what has been lost. I used to see people begging in the streets and I always gave them something. Because I said to myself that something must have happened to them. I never yelled at them and said get a job. Mental illness can happen to anyone. Maybe you have experienced mental illness like us and have had family and spouses sending you walking out the door. Again, we thank LOFT who healed our broken spirits and broken hearts. They continue to offer unselfishly the support that we need.

Please, before the Angel of Death comes for you, be kind to a soul that would never hurt another, but has been hurt by so many others.

God Bless,
Wendy P and Dwayne M

Youth CO-OPS -The Program that “Doesn’t Make Sense”

Imagine five young people sharing a house – guys in their late teens and early twenties, say. Imagine what their house looks like; pizza boxes, dirty socks... We’ll, we can tell you, because **that** house is **ours!** It’s neat and clean – not spotless – but pretty darn good! The lawn is mowed. In winter the sidewalks are kept clear, and sometimes the neighbours’ sidewalks are cleared as well.

but virtually unheard of for transitional age youth.

After all, who would imagine it could work? Five young people living together sounds pretty risky, let alone five young people coping with the kinds of challenges LOFT clients regularly face.

It doesn’t make sense! But it does work!

Over fifteen years ago, LOFT opened its first co-op house for young men from Beverley Lodge.

Now there are seven: three for young men, three for young women and one co-ed house where clients of Street Outreach Services can take a break from the street and refocus

It doesn’t make sense! But it does work!

their lives.

Just one more example of a leap of faith that paid off.

Residents take responsibility for themselves, their house and each other. There is minimal staff support – each resident has a case worker they see periodically, and a Co-op Co-ordinator visits regularly and facilitates house meetings. The model relies on peer support; the powerful notion of being accountable to others who have shared some of your experiences. The co-op house model is fairly wide spread in the adult supportive housing world,

Bringing Hope and Recovery Home

Kind Words from the Minister



Several weeks ago, while he was still Ontario's Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, George Smitherman (third from the right) visited a housing site of our Mental Health and Justice Initiative. Afterward, he sent a letter to the staff and residents, saying:

"We were very impressed with the community you have created and the work you do with individuals who have had extensive contact with the criminal justice system. The feeling in your community says it all – you've created a warm, safe place that feels like home, and you should all be very proud. Your dedication to those in need is admirable and your efforts are inspirational."

(Mr. Smitherman, who is also Deputy Premier, was recently appointed Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.)

LOFT Goes to Jane and Finch

We are pleased to announce our newest program for seniors, which will take us into a new part of the city for LOFT, the Jane/Finch neighbourhood. It will involve some exciting new partnerships with Downsview Services for Seniors, Jane/Finch Community & Family Centre, Humber River Hospital and Toronto Community Housing Corporation. The program will be similar to our College View and Dunn Avenue programs, providing support to seniors living in large public housing apartment buildings, enabling them to continue to live independently in the community. In the usual LOFT style, the program will place a strong emphasis on developing a community of mutual support among our clients.

Letter to Beverley Lodge

Dear Staff & residents of Beverley Lodge,

I am writing this letter in gratitude and appreciation of the assistance I received from Beverley Lodge to change my life around. It has been several years since I lived at Beverley.

At age 16, I had very low self esteem and low self worth. I had few if any friends, I was below average in school, I could not join sports because I could not make the cut. In my daily life I felt extremely isolated as I sought to avoid the abuses of my peers. I felt invisible and undervalued. I got into big arguments with my parents. I would skip up to three periods of school each day that progressed until I would not go to school at all.

I spent a year living with my grandparents but, the emotional scarring of my youth made me unable to seek social relationships. The fights and arguments with my parents peaked where I would release all my anger and frustration on them. As a result one day we had a particularly bad argument and my parents called the police as I refused to leave home, as I had no place to go. It was not until I moved into Beverley Lodge that I re-entered high school. I continued to live there for approx two years and eventually moved into [a LOFT co-op house] where I lived for an additional year. I got a job to make my rent payments and continued to go to high school where I excelled both socially and academically. I continue to have contact with friends from high school to this day.

I feel some of the greatest benefits I received were living with others, having a structured environment, receiving encouragement to pursue education and work, and to set long term goals. Today I have completed a two year college program with honors and one year of a university H.BSc. program. I now have a full time job as a Primary Care Flight Paramedic and have moved to Sudbury. I have high self esteem and worth.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart to [the staff] without whom I can not say which direction my life might have taken but, because of their involvement my life has turned out for the best.

Sincerely,

(a former client)

Rescue and Merit Award

Repairs are nearly complete from last year's fire at John Gibson House, and the displaced residents are looking forward to moving back into their rooms. In the meantime, two John Gibson House staff, Wesley Gordon and Janice McIntosh, were recognized at the Toronto Fire Services annual Rescue and Merit awards ceremony, for their quick action in evacuating the house and keeping all the clients safe.

LOFT's 2008 AGM

LOFT hosted a capacity crowd to its 2008 AGM on June 24th in the beautiful ballroom at St. Lawrence Hall in downtown Toronto. Staff and clients from all thirteen LOFT programs joined Board members and donors in celebrating the achievements of the past twelve months.

Guests were treated to a show of art works and crafts created by clients. More than twenty clients provided work for the show, that included oil and watercolour paintings, wood carvings, hand knitting, stained glass, photography, jewellery, origami and much more.

All the participating artists had their names placed in a draw, and five lucky winners will see a main stage production at the Shaw Festival this summer, thanks to LOFT supporter Richard Falconer.

The true highlight of the evening, however, was a presentation given by three young women from Ingles House describing a new peer support housing program they designed. They talked about their process and what motivated them. Their excitement that LOFT has now implemented the program they designed was evident and moving to everyone.



Client Art Exhibit



Program Design Team



David Thornton and Terry McCullum
Board Chair CEO

New Website

If you have ever visited our website, you will be familiar with its calm and friendly look, the program descriptions with pictures of the properties, including some of our wonderful heritage buildings. It has served us well for more than a decade – but it's time for a change.

We have been working on a dynamic new website that we hope will do an even better job of portraying the face and character of LOFT. The new website will "go live" some time this summer, so keep checking at:

www.loftcs.org.

We will be interested to hear what you think of it.

We hope you like it!

The Gift That Keeps On Giving

Have you thought about including LOFT in your Will?

A Bequest to LOFT's investment fund will generate a steady stream of income for years to come.

For more information contact the Development Office:

416-979-1994, ext. 227
or email: jcorbett@loftcs.org

Special Friends from Newmarket

Crosslinks Housing & Support Services, our program serving York Region, has a special friend in the Newmarket Lioness Club. This past December, the Club surpassed themselves with a gift that helped Crosslinks provide a festive Holiday meal for its clients and ensured that every client there received a gift. Like all LOFT programs, Crosslinks is only able to continue to provide our clients with the basic things in life that most of us take for granted because of the thoughtful and generous support of donors like the Newmarket Lioness Club. From the bottom of our hearts, "Thank You".

LOFT NEEDS YOUR HELP

Please consider making a donation in order to help those in need.

Donations can be made online at www.loftcs.org by phone or mailed to:

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