

Taking Chances



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Message From Our CEO



To quote the American actor Milton Berle, “If your ship doesn’t come in, swim out and get it.” This is something of the way we are feeling at LOFT these days.

One of the biggest challenges in our work supporting people with complex mental and physical health and addiction challenges is the drastic shortage of affordable supported housing.

This is a system wide problem that will require major system changes. We could wait for others, including government, to solve the problem or, while we wait for that ship to come in, we can also “swim out” and create our own solutions where possible.

If our goal is to provide our clients with the resources they need for recovery, then it is incumbent upon us to watch for opportunities and be willing to take a risk when it makes sense to do so.

That is what happened back in 2012 when LOFT purchased a former nursing home in Bradford West-Willimbury and turned it into supported housing/assisted living for 50 vulnerable seniors. We have also been able to greatly expand our housing and supports for transitional age youth.

Now, as you will read here, LOFT is “swimming out” again with the purchase of a large house near downtown Toronto.

There is risk involved in any new venture, but if we want to be able to provide more and better services to our clients, we need to take some risks. LOFT is truly fortunate to be in the position to do so, thanks in no small part to our wonderful donors.

You give us the resources and the flexibility to do what needs to be done to ensure that the people most in need have access to our unwavering support and care.

Thank you

Terry McCullum

Bell Canada Recognizes Bradford House

Since 2010, the “Bell Let’s Talk” campaign has been inviting Canadians to “join the conversation” and break the silence to combat the stigma around mental illness and mental health.

As well as addressing stigma, Bell Let’s Talk has three more initiatives: workplace health, research and providing better access and better care to people experiencing mental health issues.

This initiative of Bell Canada has clearly struck a chord and a number of high-profile Canadians have become spokespersons: Olympic medalist Clara Hughes, television personalities Howie Mandel and Michael Landsberg, and Mary Walsh, Newfoundland-born comedienne and creator CBC’s ever-popular “This Hour Has 22 Minutes”.

With all the interest and celebrity glamour around the Bell campaign, it was a thrill for residents of Bradford House to learn their program was selected for a grant. The \$20,000 cheque was pretty thrilling, too.

Bradford House is the only program of its kind, serving vulnerable and at-risk older adults and seniors in northern York Region and South Simcoe County. The Bell grant will help Bradford House in its mission to provide better access and better care for seniors in need.



Now that’s a Big Cheque! From left: Lena Demarco Bell Regional Director of Community Investment, Jamie Nightingale Director, Network from Bell’s Barrie office, resident Susan Leroux, Carolyn Donaldson Director of Bradford House, residents Nick Szczukro, and Kathy Dempsey who received the cheque on behalf of Bradford House, James Anok LOFT Board Chair, Debra Walko LOFT Director of Seniors Services, Kristine Wilson Associate Director of Bell Community Investment and, also from Bell’s Barrie office, Finance and IT Director Doug Cheshire.

LOFT Takes An Innovative Approach to Increase Its Housing Options

LOFT has taken steps to address the shortage of mental health supportive housing: existing housing and donor support come together for the purchase of a 25-unit residence in downtown Toronto.

One of the first things you see when you enter LOFT's administrative office, printed right on the front of the reception desk, is a quote from a client: "If you don't have a roof over your head, how do you look after your body and soul?"

Safe shelter is a fundamental human need. It is also a prerequisite for recovery. Mental, physical and emotional health concerns cannot be addressed effectively if you don't have a place to live.

Of course, this is an enormous challenge. There is such a dire shortage of affordable housing, let alone affordable housing that also has support services available.

LOFT is one of the lead agencies in The Access Point; a single portal or point of entry for people looking for mental health supportive housing in Toronto. When The Access Point first opened as Coordinated Access to Supportive Housing, there were about 4,500 mental health supportive housing units in Toronto. All those units were occupied and an additional 4,000 people were registered and waiting to get in.

Now, about 10 years later, the number of housing units has grown to just over 5,000. At the same time, however, the wait list is now more than 9,200. Clearly, something has to be done. Often this is expressed as "The Government has

to do something." We definitely think this is true, but we don't believe this is the only answer. Things can happen without the government as well.

Recently, a large house came up for sale in Toronto's downtown area. A previous owner had renovated to create 25 self-contained living units, each with its own bathroom and kitchenette. It was a perfect configuration for the type of housing LOFT provides.

There is no government funding program operating at the moment for new housing acquisition, but this house was too good to pass up. The Board of Directors decided that the ability to move ahead did not need to rest solely with government. We could make this happen on our own.

The decision was made to sell two smaller LOFT-owned houses. We would give up 14 bedrooms in shared houses, in exchange for 25 self-contained units in an excellent location. Seemed like a good trade. We are excited to begin to integrate this new property into our programs, where we anticipate it will serve both adult and youth clients.

LOFT is truly fortunate to be able to take this kind of initiative. This is possible, in no small part, because donor support provides extra stability beyond our annual government grants. These additional resources give LOFT the flexibility to take special initiatives, including the purchase of this new and better housing. We will need to take on a small mortgage, but the support of our donors gives us the courage to take a "Leap of Faith Together" (LOFT).



Conga line fun at last summer's Annual Seniors Garden Party!

New Opportunity Opens Up at Jane and Finch for LOFT Youth Services

When they think about at-risk youth in Toronto, many people's minds go immediately to a couple of specific neighbourhoods, including Jane and Finch. LOFT knows the neighbourhood well, although until now our work there has been with at-risk seniors, not youth.

In 2007, LOFT launched its first program in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood. The area was much in the news at the time for youth and gang violence, but our work was focussed on a less publicized but equally pressing need: seniors with complex challenges including mental illness, addiction, chronic physical health issues, social isolation, cultural dislocation and poverty.

Since then, LOFT's staff team has worked hard to support their clients, connect with the community, develop relationships and prove the positive impact of LOFT's work.

During that same period, our Transitional Age Youth (TAY) Program was growing and developing expertise in working with young people 16 to 26 with co-occurring mental health and addiction issues. In 2014, the TAY program even received the Eva's Award to End Youth Homelessness. Presented by Eva's Initiatives, Virgin Unite and the Sprott Foundation, the award recognized our innovative and holistic approach to improving the life prospects for youth with complex challenges.

Our community and hospital partners became aware of our youth work and identified to us the need for youth-oriented mental health and addiction support at Jane and Finch. So we began to look for an opportunity to expand our TAY Program to serve youth in this high-needs neighbourhood.

Now, the opportunity has arrived! We will be able to tell you more in future issues of Connections, but for now funding is beginning to fall into place and initial meetings are scheduled. The LOFT TAY Program is going to Jane and Finch.

LOFT Staff Receive Accolades From a Sister Agency

Kay Roeslein, Program Director at McEwan Housing and Support Services, was please and moved when she received the following email from PASAN, a community partner of McEwan, praising the work of McEwan staff members in supporting PASAN clients.

Kay, I just wanted to tell you how wonderful McEwan Support Services, especially the Service Coordination Project, are with our clients. You have amazing workers that are compassionate, non-judgmental, they work with a holistic, client centered approach. I could say that there is not a better program for PASAN's clients in the city. I could not thank you enough for all you do. I value and appreciate you all immensely.

Dora Londono
Community Housing & Re-Integration Coordinator,
PASAN

PASAN – Prisoners with HIV/AIDS Support Action Network links with McEwan in supporting ex-prisoners with HIV and Hepatitis C. PASAN is a partner in the McEwan Service Coordination Program (now called Positive Service Coordination), a program offering intensive, coordinated, comprehensive support and service to HIV+ men and women with serious mental health issues including cognitive impairment and dementia, severe addictions, complex physical health challenges, and extensive histories of homelessness.



Kay Roeslein

The Spirit of Agriculture Supports the Spirit of Hope at Bradford House

When LOFT purchased Bradford House it was a moment of truth. Seniors in the area were at risk and in need of support, but there were no government funding programs for new housing. LOFT took a risk, investing funds previously donated and set aside for such a purpose, and asking a long-time donor to take a mortgage. The risk has been rewarded and there is now a home for 50 seniors who are receiving the specialized care they need.

The building itself has been around for a long time and in need of repairs and upgrades. As we continue our fundraising efforts for this work, area businesses are pitching in to help, including Farm Credit Canada, through the FCC AgriSpirit Fund.



Photo credit: Sean Bingley, Relationship Management Associate with the Thornton, Ontario office of Farm Credit Canada, presents the FCC AgriSpirit cheque for \$10,000 to Bradford House resident Kathy Dempsey, with FCC Relationship Manager Christine Bevan and Anne Keen, another resident who enjoyed warm windows through the winter.

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION NIGHT!



Last month, LOFT volunteers were invited to celebrate a special night at LOFT St. Anne's Place. We were celebrating them!

In the last fiscal year, our wonderful volunteers put in almost 13,000 hours - that's the equivalent to 7 full-time staff members!

We are so thankful and lucky to have people who are willing to contribute their time and talent to help us.

There is a special spirit in rural communities, and LOFT has certainly seen it in Bradford-West Gwillimbury. From the day it opened, our Bradford House program has been welcomed and supported by the Bradford community. Local businesses have reached out to help, as have service clubs, church groups and private individuals.

Last Fall, Bradford House residents had a visit from Sean Bingley and Christine Bevan from the Thornton, Ontario office of Farm Credit Canada. They came to deliver a cheque for \$10,000 from the FCC AgriSpirit Fund to assist with building repairs and upgrades.

Since 1959, Farm Credit Canada (or Farm Credit Corporation as it was first known) has been helping to finance farming enterprises across Canada, as well as the small and medium sized businesses closely related to, or dependent on, farming.

The FCC AgriSpirit Fund provides grants that enhance the quality of life in rural Canada by supporting capital campaigns in communities under 150,000 population.

At Bradford House, the grant came just in time to help replace old, leaky windows. Single panes and rotting frames - gone! New thermal windows now keep the residents warm and our heating costs under control.



LOFT Foundation Builders - our Monthly Donor Program – Benefits the Promise of Unwavering Support.

The path to recovery is rarely short. LOFT aims to provide sustained support for each client's journey – this is our promise of "unwavering support and hope". Our ability to offer this kind of sustained support is greatly benefited by the sustained and steady financial resources provided by our monthly donors, the LOFT Foundation Builders.

For someone with mental health and addiction issues, the path to recovery is rarely straight and easy. Each person's journey has its ups and downs, and twists and turns along the way, and for most people it takes time.

That is why LOFT promises unwavering support. We know the path can be long and we pledge to be there for our clients.

When donors also feel that long-term commitment, monthly giving can be an effective way to show it.

Shayne Hutton had been a donor for several years before she joined the LOFT Board of Directors in 2001. As a Board member she had a close-up view of the impact of charitable donations and was inspired to become a monthly donor. Even though her board term ended a couple of years ago, her monthly giving continues.

Recently, Shayne explained: "I have a strong sense of social responsibility and being a monthly donor makes it easy for me to do what I think is important. If I had to remember to send in regular cheques, it might not happen. This way, having it all set up, I don't have to

worry. Even if I go on vacation I know the donations will just continue." Then she laughed, "There is also a little extra benefit that I get points every month on my credit card."

Becoming involved in our programs is a life changing experience for a client. For some, it is a life saving experience. The sustained support provided by our monthly donors helps make our pledge of "unwavering support" a reality.

For more information on the Foundation Builders monthly giving program, call 416-979-1994, ext 227, or go to <http://www.loftcs.org/support-loft/ways-to-give/> and click on Monthly Giving.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

The newsletter you are currently reading was brought to you in part by a volunteer! We rely on our team of volunteers to assemble every mailing we send out. Our volunteers save us from paying thousands of dollars a year for mail house services.

LOFT has 8-10 mailings a year. Each mailing takes place on weekday morning at our administrative office in downtown Toronto. You can volunteer for as many, or as few, as you like.

If you would like to help, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator Ted Krawchuk at 416-979-1994 ext. 244 or Amy Tran at ext. 233.

Wondrous Dreams by Tali

Tali is a client of the Crosslinks Outreach and Services Network in York Region.

Who said that dreams were as clear as the clear blue ocean on a beautiful, joyous day? Who said that life must be suspended until such time that a bouquet of epiphanies smell so good that perfection appeared to be near? Whoever did, fooled himself.

I had many hopes and dreams, and I still do. I can create a long list, and I shall mention at least some of them, but that is not the point. One needs to come to the realization that it is not the dreams that matter, but rather the hopes that come along for the ride. In other words, it must be understood that whenever there is a dream – no matter what dream – there is a spark of hope.

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Connections is published quarterly by LOFT Community Services.

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Charitable registration #13058-6605-RR001

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