

## John Gibson House Looking Forward



All LOFT programs are constantly under review to ensure that they are staying abreast of the changing needs of the day, and are ready and able to change and grow as those needs evolve.

The John Gibson House program has developed over the years from a residence for homeless men to specialized high-support housing for older adults and seniors whose mental health issues prevent them from living on their own. Even the building has seen changes. Built 112 years ago as a women's college, it was a retirement home for nearly fifty years before becoming John Gibson House.

Now, it is time for both the program and its building to evolve again.

With years of experience serving the vulnerable and homeless elderly, the Gibson program was perfectly positioned to respond when government funders began to identify the role of so-called ALC seniors in contributing to hospital overcrowding.

The Stepping Stone Project is proving that even elders with serious mental health issues in combination with complex physical health and addiction challenges, can thrive and enjoy the quality of life that is only available in a community setting, and at a fraction of the cost of institutionalization.

The Stepping Stone Project is a success – unfortunately, the building presents some problems.

The only entrance that does not involve stairs is a small door at the side of the building off the driveway. There is only one elevator. Rooms are cramped and doorways and hallways are narrow. There are no barrier free showers or baths. Washrooms are so small anyone using a walker has to back in.

So even as we show that people with complex challenges do not need to be institutionalized, we are facing the possibility of having to turn people away, not because of the severity of their mental health issues, but because we cannot accommodate their modest mobility limitations.

An architectural plan has been developed that preserves the historic building, replaces a later wing and makes the whole building barrier free and walker/wheelchair accessible. It also provides more accessible dining and communal space, and replaces the ancient and inadequate kitchen.

All we need now is a bit of luck, some government funding and some help from our friends, and John Gibson House will be much improved and ready for the next 112 years!

### Mavis is what society calls a "bag lady."

She has lived on the streets for more than 30 years and has been in an out of mental health facilities. She does not really understand her schizophrenia, or what it means, but is a pleasant when she is well. Her only support comes from family members outside of the city who visit a couple times per year.

When Mavis first came to The Stepping Stone Project, staff could not entice her to go further than the front lobby at John Gibson House, let alone to allow herself to be helped. Even after two months, she does not sleep in her bed, only on couches around the house.

However, LOFT staff members are seeing some changes. Mavis has started doing her own laundry. She has also started to bathe herself about once a week with the help of staff. (She simply refused to shower for the first few weeks.) Most of the time, Mavis is quite pleasant with staff and residents, but just like everyone, she has her ups and downs. Someone who has known her for thirty years commented that she has never seen Mavis stay in one place for this long.

The Stepping Stone staff are now very hopeful that Mavis will be able to make a successful transition to permanent housing within LOFT. She still may not sleep in a bed, but she will be off the street after thirty years.

## ALC & Stepping Stone

The term “Alternative Level of Care” or ALC, refers to hospital patients who have completed their care, but remain in hospital while waiting for a place in long-term care, rehabilitation, complex continuing care or home care. In the meantime, they contribute to bed shortages and wait times in hospital.

A recent report indicated there are between 451 and 629 such individuals in Toronto hospital beds on any given day, 283 of whom have been in hospital for 30 days or more. The ALC problem is significant.

LOFT has – at least part of – the answer.

For two years The Stepping Stone Project has been assisting older adult and senior ALC patients to leave hospital and return to the community. Stepping Stone serves psycho-geriatric patients who are poor and have no family or friends to support them, who may have been homeless when hospitalized or have lost their housing while in hospital.

Unable to pay for services, their only housing choice may be to join the long

waiting lists for a subsidized long-term care bed, even though they do not need such a high level of care. If mental health (other than age-related dementias) or addiction issues are prominent, they may even be ineligible for long-term care.

One for the first people to benefit from LOFT’s transitional services had been hospitalized since 1995! These seniors really do become trapped in hospital.

After a few months in the Stepping Stone community reintegration program at John Gibson House, clients are ready to move on. Some are able to return to complete independence, others do best in one of LOFT’s seniors supportive housing programs, and some become permanent residents of John Gibson House.

By providing intensive support in a community setting, Stepping Stone is helping 36 seniors a year to escape from the trap and recover their independence, dignity and quality of life. As a result, 36 hospital beds are now free for people in need.

## A Program Evolution

John Gibson House is one of the oldest of LOFT programs and is located in one of the oldest of LOFT buildings. Although it only became a LOFT program in 1960, its roots stretch back nearly 90 years and the building dates from 1899.

In the early 1920’s, Rev. John Elias Gibson, Rector of the Church of the Ascension, formed a community drop-in centre near the corner of Richmond and Simcoe Streets for unemployed, immigrant and homeless men. It quickly became a residence for 50 men. As he aged, Rev. Gibson became concerned that his life’s work be continued and in 1958 he gave the program to the Anglican Diocese of Toronto.

The Diocese turned to LOFT (then called Anglican Houses Association) and in 1960, Rev. Gibson’s housing program was added to LOFT and renamed the Church of the Good Samaritan. In 1983 the program, affectionately known as “Good Sam” moved to its present location in Trinity-Bellwoods Park, the original campus of Trinity College.

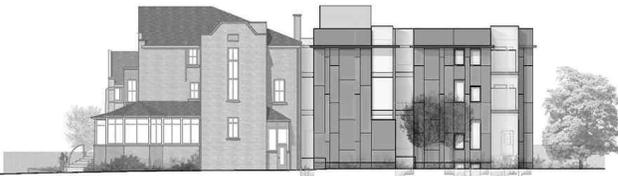
This new home was designed by the early Toronto architect Eden Smith, and built in 1899 to house St. Hilda’s College, the women’s college affiliated with Trinity. When Trinity and St. Hilda’s moved to the U of T Queen’s Park Campus in 1925, St. Hilda’s building became a residence for the elderly known as Strachan House.

At about the same time, Good Sam began to recognize that the majority of its residents were experiencing mental health and substance abuse issues, so this is where its services became focussed. In 1993, Good Sam was renamed John Gibson House in honour of its founder, and broadened its mandate to include women.

Program supports were enabling residents to remain in the house as they aged rather than moving into nursing homes, so in the late 1990’s the program adopted its current mandate of service to people aged 55 and over, with mental and physical health challenges and/or substance abuse issues.

And so it remains – at least until societal needs change again.

## John Gibson Addition



East Facing View



North Facing View



North East View



West Facing View

Drawing: Stantec Architecture Ltd.

LEAP OF FAITH  
TOGETHER