

Project Details



Who We Are



YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin is a not for profit, charitable organization, providing services in the community for 120 years. We deliver diverse programs and services to women, men, children and youth throughout St. Thomas and Elgin County. As a multi service organization we support vulnerable youth, adults and families using a person-centred, gender based and trauma-informed approach to reduce poverty and build stability. We know there are underlying barriers that have negative effects on a person's ability to build independence and foster empowerment. We utilize a wrap around approach in our provision of services. We have an exceptional history of responding to the needs of the community and providing quality services. We offer life stabilization and independence programs, housing for youth and adults in 6 facilities for a total of 47 beds, housing-based case management, school age childcare, aquatics and recreation, settlement services, language instruction classes, adult education, food security and poverty intervention programs. We are the community lead on Coordinated Access to Affordable Housing, County-wide Youth Homelessness Protocol, and community planning to address Women and Family homelessness.

With Project Tiny Hope we will expand our housing services to include independent rental units for individuals and families with wrap around supports. Food security programs, financial empowerment and life stabilization programs will be offered on site in addition to one-on-one housing-based case management. We have been serving our community for a long time, evolving, and innovating as our community's needs change and grow. We know what makes a difference and can have a long-lasting impact on building a healthy community. We take pride in creating meaningful change.

Environmental Efficiency



In an ever-changing world and climate, energy efficient construction is of the utmost importance in order to provide sustainable housing. Our tiny homes and program house will be built to Net Zero Ready (NZR) Standard as a minimum standard. These homes will be far more energy efficient, have significantly lower energy usage (lower utility bills) and are far more resilient. Further, these homes are quieter, healthier and more comfortable. The future goal of the project is to explore further reductions in energy use by applying solar panels on site.



Working Together for Our Community



YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin is thrilled to be partnering with Doug Tarry Homes and Sanctuary Homes to create new affordable housing in the downtown core for women, men, youth and families to realize their full potential. Our partners are:

Sanctuary Homes - established in 2014 by a group of concerned Elgin County citizens who were and remain interested in addressing issues of poverty, homelessness, and adequate housing. As a local not for profit, faith-based group they strive to provide affordable, safe housing in a supportive community environment with appropriate community resources to improve and sustain the wellbeing of marginalized populations.

Doug Tarry Homes - providing housing to individuals and families in St. Thomas since 1954. Doug Tarry Homes has spearheaded several philanthropic ventures in an effort to give back to the community and beyond such as the St. Thomas Elevated Park, The Angus McKenzie Trail and Project Tiny Hope. Doug Tarry Homes recognizes the state of urgency to provide residents of St. Thomas-Elgin with more affordable housing options. As a recognized leader in the building industry and a member of several provincial and national decision-making tables Doug Tarry Homes provides expertise, knowledge and innovation.

Housing Stability and Better Outcomes for All



YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin has been providing housing in St. Thomas since 1928. We are trusted and respected. Nationally, the YWCAs are one of Canada's largest providers of women's shelters and affordable housing and here in St. Thomas we are the only provider of youth specific housing for ages 16-24.

The YWCA prides itself on our community collaboration and providing high quality services with fiscal responsibility. We believe that every person deserves a safe place to live and call home and we meet people where they are at. In addition to providing safe and affordable housing throughout 6 communal residences and 5 apartment units, we are proud to offer Intensive Case Management to all residents focusing on housing stability, system navigation and life skill development. We are dedicated to community and system collaboration in an effort to tighten our local safety net and increase housing stability for youth and adults. Our staff are professionally trained housing-based case managers who understand that housing is the foundation to wellness and economic security.



Helping Revitalize the Downtown Core



Project Tiny Hope will extend the ongoing transformation of downtown St. Thomas. Our site on Kains Street is currently at the north end of the Whistlestop Trail, a busy path for all forms of active transportation including walking, cycling and skateboarding. Previously home to Elgin Handles Ltd, the once brownfield property is now fully remediated. There has been a focussed effort for many years to renew the downtown, and the results are starting to show! Spectacular murals now offer depth and beauty along the Trail. Businesses have popped up in once-vacant storefronts, adding much more life to the neighbourhood. Donors who contribute toward Project Tiny Hope will be part of a very significant story for our community. We are building affordable housing, and simultaneously we are continuing the process of transforming the historic and cultural core of St. Thomas!

Workplace Development



We are partnering with Thames Valley District School Board Innovation Team to engage local high school students interested in construction and building trades. We are providing onsite tours, zoom presentations and opportunities for hands on involvement. The YWCA will utilize the community room and teaching kitchen to offer skill building workshops and classes to youth and adults. This new space will allow us to offer an array of programs focused on workforce development for those who are underemployed or unemployed.

Food Security



Too often the choice between buying food and paying rent becomes a daily occurrence for many people in our community. In addition to providing affordable and deeply affordable housing the YWCA will also provide programs on site to build food security. We will have a large communal garden with raised beds for fruits, vegetables and herbs on site. Residents will have access to the community kitchen on the main floor of the apartment building for food security programs, collective kitchens, classes, and congregate events. Gardening on site will provide benefits to psychological health, physical wellbeing and improved food security. Canning and preserving have the opportunity to create entrepreneur adventures with possible connection to the Horton Street Market.



Supporting Women and Youth



During 2018 to 2021 the YWCA conducted a local community project addressing women's homelessness with a gender based lens. Through our community work we gleaned local research data and not surprisingly identified that the top priority identified to prevent and end women's experiences of homelessness is safe and affordable housing with supports. Project Tiny Hope will directly help fill this gap. We will ensure that a minimum of 50% of units are available to women. In the design of Project Tiny Hope we are utilizing a gender based lens to ensure the comfort and safety of women residents when considering construction, design and program areas offered. Twenty eight percent of woman led households are in core housing need and woman led families are the majority of families experiencing homelessness. Families stay stuck in homelessness for longer periods of time so it is critical that we offer 2 bedroom units to accommodate small family groupings. We know that structural and system failures are the primary drivers of women's homelessness and the YWCA is determined to improve systems and structural practices so that we can move the needle on ending women's homelessness.

The YWCA is invested in reducing and preventing youth homelessness through community partnerships and innovation solutions. During 2017, 118 youth accessed the youth homelessness protocol due to experiences of homelessness including sleeping rough, couch surfing and staying in shelters. As indicated in "Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice" (2013) "young people generally are fleeing from households where they have been dependent upon adult caregivers. Youth homelessness is experienced not only as the loss of housing, but also entails relationship breakdown with family, and potentially the loss of friends, other supportive adults, and community. It can mean premature withdrawal from school and an early rush towards independence at a time when these youth may be suffering from the trauma of such losses. Due to these factors and considering their stage of development, the impacts on youth who experience homelessness is greater than adults as it pertains to longer term involvement with the homeless service delivery in his/her life cycle. If a homeless youth is not served well by the human services delivery system, he or she will likely become homeless several times during their lifetime. In fact most homeless adults first experienced homelessness as a teenager. It is often more difficult for a young person to secure a rental unit due to their lack of income, stigma associated to their age, lack of first and last month rent and lack of references as a first time renter. Due to these factors the YWCA takes an intensive approach to supporting young people under the age of 25.

With 4 youth homes currently provided by the YWCA, we still experience wait lists and times when communal living is not an appropriate fit for a young person.

