

Creating a place to call home

<http://www.beyondhousing.ca>

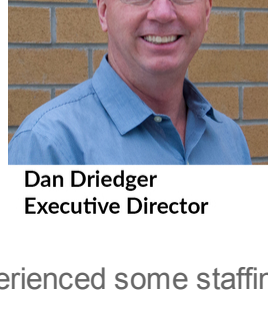
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Spring Newsletter 2023

Dear Friends,

Spring is one of my favourite times of year. I always find the transition from winter hibernation to new growth both energizing and exciting. It has also been a season of transition for us at Beyond Housing. We have moved to using our new name (although MennoHomes still feels easier to say sometimes...). We are now enjoying spring construction weather rather than winter conditions. The tenant application process will begin soon which will result in all sorts of transitions for people in our community who need access to quality affordable housing. And we've experienced some staffing transitions to help better support our existing tenants.



Dan Driedger
Executive Director

While transitions and change can often be accompanied by uncertainty and stress, we also know from experience that these are just part of the journey as we grow and respond more fully to the need for affordable housing. Our hope is that you find the updates included in this newsletter, signs of new growth that are exciting and bring hope to the challenge of creating a place to call home for people in our community with low incomes. With over 7,500 households now on the waiting list, there is much work to do. Thank you for your financial support and overall encouragement that makes this work possible.

Dan Driedger

Executive Director

DONATE NOW

Out Spok'n Bike-a-thon June 10th

There are just under two months to go until our 2023 Out-Spok'n Bike-a-thon! This year, we will again be hosting a hybrid version of this event. You are welcome to join us on June 10th in Elmira for the traditional ride on the Kissing Bridge Trail, to take part in the early morning 60km ride, or to participate remotely at a location and time that is convenient for you. Click the image below to register or to sponsor someone who has already registered.

All donations for this year's event will go towards our Sprucelawn Apartments for Seniors Project in St. Jacobs.



Sprucelawn Update

Construction of our new 28 suite addition to Sprucelawn Apartments for Seniors in St. Jacobs has continued to move forward. Completion is anticipated by the end of summer 2023. We are very excited to have winter-weather construction behind us. The tenant application process will be underway by the end of April. We have already received over 100 expressions of interest for a limited number of apartments. While we will not be able to say yes to everyone, it is important to remember that for those whose applications are approved, the positive impact will be immediate and life changing.



To make this \$10.8 million project possible as well as sustainable long-term, a \$2 million fundraising campaign was launched in 2022 under the leadership of Laverne Brubacher, our capital campaign chair. To date, gifts and pledges from people like you have raised almost \$1.5 million. Thank you! This project has not been immune to the impact of construction inflation. We anticipate that a total of \$1 million is still required to ensure the financial viability of this much-needed affordable seniors housing. Your gifts will make a difference. **Please contact Laverne Brubacher or Dan Driedger to learn more about how you can become involved. 226-476-2535 or sprucelawn@beyondhousing.ca**

CLICK HERE
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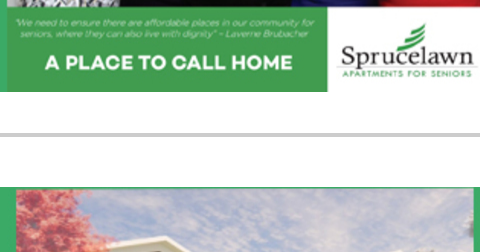
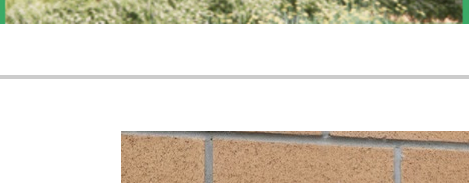


Photo Gallery



Welcome, Taylor!

Beyond Housing welcomed Taylor Martin to the new role of Operations Manager in April. We are thrilled to have Taylor join us. He has experience as a property manager as well as an advocate for tenants helping them find and retain housing. Taylor will be providing leadership for our expanding Program Team as they support tenants, as well as working with our property managers to ensure the ongoing maintenance of our properties and relationships with tenants continue to align with our overall goals and values. **Welcome Taylor.**



Annual General Meeting Update

Despite a snowstorm, we were able to host our Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Wednesday January 25th at 544 Bridgeport Road East, Kitchener. There were 70 guests in attendance. This was the first AGM since 2020 we were able to host in person, and it was wonderful to see so many familiar faces again along with some new ones.



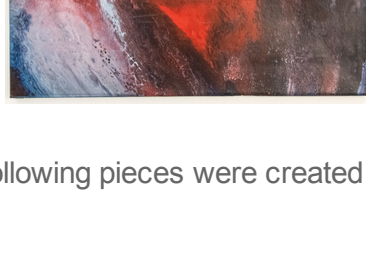
With the business portion of the meeting handled in an efficient manner, the balance of the AGM was dedicated to updates on current projects, looking ahead to new opportunities, an update on our re-branding process, and learning directly from a current tenant, Sharla Mabee, how access to affordable housing had positively changed the "story" of her life.

For those unable to attend, the AGM was recorded and is available for viewing on our YouTube channel here: <https://youtu.be/Y7eSXu759og>

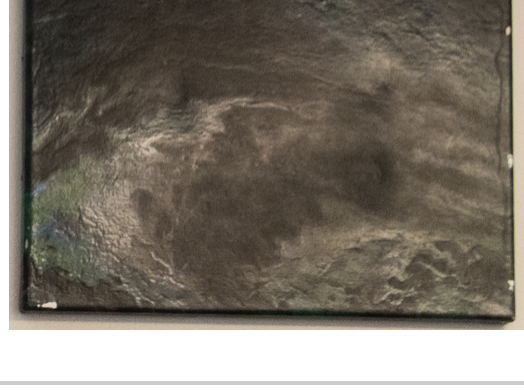
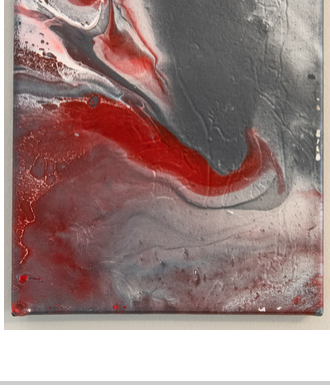
View the 2022-2023 Annual Report [here](#).

Art from 544 Bridgeport

Life is sometimes hard. Things go wrong, in life and in love and in business and in friendship and in health and in all other ways that life can go wrong. And when things get tough, this is what you should do. Make good art. — *Neil Gaiman (author)*



Tenants can also be artists. The Community Room at 544 Bridgeport now includes an art display with contributions from tenants in the building. The display will be updated regularly. The following pieces were created by Bill Rutnan.



Tenant Story - Sharla Mabee

The highlight of our AGM was to hear firsthand how access to affordable housing can literally change the direction of someone's life. We all know it's true but there is nothing more powerful than learning the impact affordable housing can have on someone's life than hearing about it directly from them, in their own words. That's why we were honoured to have Sharla Mabee consent to providing us with a glimpse into her life during an open conversation at our AGM.



Immediately upon meeting Sharla, she started to break down the stereotypes that many of us still hold, possibly subconsciously, about who needs affordable housing. She was smiling and upbeat even as she shared some of her difficult history. As a child, Sharla and her mother found themselves unable to keep the home she had grown up in due to a breakup of her mother's marriage. They lived together in a municipally operated affordable housing project, relying on food banks to help bridge the shortfall in their income.

For Sharla, housing has been a struggle for most of her life. The experience of losing her family home impacted her so deeply she never felt she would have a place to call home, one that was just hers, that no one could take away from her. The overriding sense that she could never relax or feel safe led to much stress and trauma in her life. Sharla suffered from depression as a result of how she had grown up, yet this just felt normal for her.

When Sharla was old enough to move out and be on her own, she was quick to do so. But living on her own with a low income was difficult. Having to pay market rent eventually forced her to return to live with her mother. She felt defeated and trapped. When she was able to, she moved out again. Unfortunately, she found herself in an abusive relationship which led her to turn to alcohol to cope. Being able to leave and live on her own didn't seem like a viable option but with the encouragement of her mother, she submitted an application to become a tenant at 544 Bridgeport. It felt like winning a lottery when she received the confirmation that her application had been approved; it had seemed impossible.

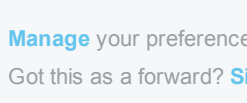
While the challenges in her life didn't disappear immediately upon moving in, having an affordable place she could call her own did create the environment for positive change to take root. With a steady job, an abusive relationship behind her, and a newfound clarity that came with sobriety, Sharla has been able to discover who she really is and direct her life as she wants. Sharla continues to be deeply appreciative for the opportunity that was made available to her. Her story may have some trauma and some sad parts, but it is being re-written thanks to the generous support of our community.

In her closing comments, Sharla reminded everyone that having these opportunities to have a safe and secure home really does change your life for the better. **Thank you!**

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