

City Homeless Centre Reopens With its Compassion Intact

Donors enabled Sanctuary to hang on to building

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For Dawn Golden, a newly reopened centre for Toronto's downtown poor and homeless is more than a place to get a free meal.

The 33-year-old, who once called the street home, has found a family at Sanctuary.

"(The staff) has become my family," she says.

Lieutenant-Governor Hilary Weston, who cut the ribbon on the renovated building yesterday, agrees there is something more to the facility.

"The one feature of this building that cannot be renovated is its compassion," said Weston. "That compassion is demonstrated in Sanctuary's programs and the work of (the staff)."

In 1999, the owners decided to sell the building, so Sanctuary pastoral director Greg Paul and seven outreach workers began a fundraising campaign, hoping to buy the property.

The old Central Gospel Hall at 25 Charles St. E., near Yonge St., had operated as a drop-in centre for downtown homeless people for 10 years.

"The owners were asking \$500,000 for the building, about half of its value," said Paul, who ministers to the physical and spiritual needs of the more than 250 people who use the centre each month.

The group raised \$750,000 in 10 1/2 months.

Sanctuary does not receive government funding for its outreach programs which include free meals, showering facilities, first aid treatment and spiritual counselling.

And sanctuary is not a homeless shelter, says Paul. The sex workers and homeless who stop in during the day must return to the streets by 10 p.m.

Golden is one of those who hear Sanctuary's door being bolted behind her each night.

She has a place now, but her monthly disability cheque only covers the rent. "Without the food I get at Sanctuary, I really couldn't make it."

To Sanctuary staff, Golden and the others they serve aren't nameless faces.

"It's been my life-long dream to learn how to play the piano," said Golden, beaming a beautiful smile. "They're teaching me."

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