

Putting the 'social' in social change

A group of West Neighbourhood House participants and volunteers has come up with a novel way to sustain themselves in the face of the long struggle to achieve social change. They've organized a regular open stage event that brings people together and celebrates local talents and ideas.

Sometimes it is easy to feel disconnected, even in the midst of a bustling neighbourhood. West Neighbourhood House convenes a group called the Community Advisory Group on Social Issues (CAGSI). CAGSI's mandate is to support low-income people in our neighbourhood so they can contribute to improved public policy.

The members leading CAGSI are program participants and/or volunteers in a wide variety of our programs. Recently, group members expressed they had become discouraged by governments' inaction about their deteriorating quality of life. In spite of numerous government commitments and consultations to address growing income inequality, members of CAGSI aren't seeing much progress.

In an effort to sustain themselves in the slow march of social economic reform, the group wanted to find a way to re-energize and put the "social" in social change. They decided to organize an open stage event to

celebrate all the talents and potential of our community, to re-inspire and find hope in our collective ability to make a difference. Stage@West was born.

CAGSI organized and hosted the first Stage@West on February 20. Singers, poets and even a magician took the stage to share their talents and passions in a friendly and inclusive environment. An audience member at the inaugural Stage@West reflected "I don't know

what made me step in here, but now I feel really pumped for the whole weekend!"

Stage@West will be a recurring event at the House. Creating an event to showcase creativity and bring people together is revitalizing the work that CAGSI does and is providing a outlet for the entire community to connect with new people who want to be part of something bigger than themselves.

Check our website westnh.org, to see when the next Stage@West is scheduled. The event is always free and family-friendly – we hope to see you there in the audience or on stage.

Local performers shared their talents with the Stage@West crowd



We get by with a little help from our friends

At West Neighbourhood House we like making friends! Over the past few months, we have developed partnerships with very generous businesses and organizations resulting in exciting opportunities and increased supports for participants.

Friends with wheels

We have partnered with AutoShare, the Toronto car-sharing service, which is donating much-needed vehicles to our Meals on Wheels program. Now volunteers without vehicles of their own can help us to deliver meals throughout our community using AutoShare cars and enjoy free AutoShare memberships as a result of their volunteer commitment.

Artsy friends

Through the Special Delivery Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) program—a program that reaches out to youth in under-served local communities who may not otherwise have access to the film festival experience—our Newcomer Youth Program took part in a filmmaking workshop using professional equipment with the help of expert facilitators.

Outdoorsy friends

Another collaborator with our Newcomer Youth program is the Aston Family Foundation. For the second year in a row, they sent our Newcomer Youth

group to Haliburton for a weekend of outdoor adventuring. The youth went dogsledding, snowshoeing and spent a weekend outside of the city—all opportunities we would not have been able to provide without their support.

Brave friends

Officers at 11 Division went above and beyond the call of duty by “sleeping rough” outside one evening to gather donations of warm winter clothing and raise awareness of homelessness during their Warm4Winter campaign. Lead by Superintendent/fundraiser extraordinaire, Heinz Kuck, the officers gathered a huge amount of

warm clothing, which they donated to members of our Meeting Place drop-in at Queen and Bathurst.

Brainy friends

Our children and youth programs are benefitting from a collaboration with Optimus Consulting, a firm that is helping us to re-structure how we collect fees for our programs, allowing staff to focus more on programming and less on spreadsheets.

To all of our friends and partners in the neighbourhood, thanks for thinking of us, thanks for working with us, and thanks being a part of West Neighbourhood House. We're stronger because of you.



Right:
Superintendent
Kuck dropping
off donations
at The Meeting
Place.

Above:
Newcomer
youth getting
some fresh air
via dogsled.

Giving the city input on poverty reduction

On February 18, the City of Toronto convened a public consultation in Parkdale about a proposed Poverty Reduction Strategy for the City.

Over 30 participants of West Neighbourhood House programs and more than 120 residents attended, providing direction on priorities and principles the City needs to consider in the areas of child care, food security, housing, employment and income, transportation and access to services (including services provided by neighbourhood centres).

Checking in with West NH members after the event, most people felt positive about the meeting and were pleased with the direction the City's initiative was taking. Among the ideas that stuck with members were: the commitment to marginalized communities to be a part of the solution to poverty, the potential for government to provide leadership in removing barriers, and investing in the community's capacity.

In listening to our members in line with the past work of West NH on income security, we developed key points the City should consider in their Poverty Reduction Strategy. We urge the City to:

- Provide funding to stabilize and expand Financial Advocacy and Problem-Solving (FAPS) programs



Parkdale-High Park Councillor Gord Perks visiting with some West NH participants.

that put money in people's pockets and help them to build their financial capacity.

- Address the serious problems with the insufficient number and generally poor quality of affordable housing, especially in light of recent "rental gentrification".
- Act immediately on good ideas or opportunities that are already in deliberation so that community members can see changes in their daily life and do not feel "consultation fatigue".

We appreciate and support the City's leadership in developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy and are pleased to contribute our voice to this conversation. To read our suggestions in full detail visit westnh.org/povertyreduction.

■ Thank you, volunteers!

April is Volunteer Month, a time to reflect on the invaluable contribution our volunteers make to this organization every single day. From our volunteer tutors to our Meals on Wheels drivers and everyone in between, we cannot thank you enough. Are you interested in becoming a volunteer? Call 416-532-4828 or email volunteers@westnh.org.

■ Scoff 'N' Scuff Fundraiser for Music School

On May 2 at 7:30 pm, join us for this Newfoundland kitchen party and support the Music School. Tickets are: Adults – \$20 in advance (\$25 at the door), Students and Seniors – \$10 in advance (\$15 at the door). Get your tickets at 248 Ossington reception or by calling Sherry Squires at 416-532-2428 ext. 127. This is a licensed event.

■ Sign up for a Music School Program

Spots are available in our Music School for individual lessons for all ages (voice or instrument) as well as for our After-School Opera Program (ages 7–12). Contact Sherry Squires at 416-532-2428 ext. 127 for more information.

■ Run with us and support the House!

Join our team this year at the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon on October 18th and help raise money for the House! If you are interested in running or walking for the House and having your entry fee waived, contact Kaleigh: 416-532-7586 ext 215 / kaleighwi@westnh.org. Want to run the marathon with us while in costume? The best costume wins additional funds for the House, so use your imagination.

■ You're invited to our AGM

Our Annual General Meeting is on June 23. The Sir James Woods Award for Community Development will be awarded and we'll reflect on the past year.

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‘Enhanced’ care for frail local seniors

The goal of our Adult Day Services (ADS) programs has always been to provide care to vulnerable seniors, allowing them to remain in their communities longer and avoid entry into nursing homes and extended stays in hospital.

Two years ago, our Adult Day Services programs received funding from the Toronto Central Health Integration Network (LHIN) to expand and serve participants with higher needs. This was a great step forward, allowing us to take on more participants in our Adult Day Services programs as well as having access to the resources to care for them.

What does needing “enhanced” care mean?

Someone needing enhanced care could need assistance with feeding, have mobility problems, or have difficult behaviour. In most enhanced care cases an individual requires greater one-on-one care, which requires more staff.

Through this expansion, our seniors get more access on-site to nurses and other health care professionals. Also, our hours have extended allowing greater flexibility for caregivers.

Caregiver support

Another new and valuable part of the Adult Day Services programs has developed recently – a caregivers support group called CARERS. This program, for caregivers who have loved ones with dementia in our ADS programs, provides practical skills and emotional support to better manage their day-to-day experiences as they provide care. The program was



Men in the CARERS group with members of our Adult Day Services staff.

developed at Mt. Sinai Hospital who has provided training to our staff.

From the perspectives of both the program facilitators and the participants, the program is proving to be a valuable support system for those caring for loved-ones with dementia. One participant in the support group appreciated hearing the experiences of other caregivers. “The group really helped us to see the situation and the disease of Alzheimer’s with more clarity and in turn made us more adaptable and more tolerant,” he said.

We are pleased that we are able to offer services to more enhanced care participants as well as their caregivers as we watch the demand for these programs grow.

Please consider becoming a West NH donor!

- www.westnh.org/donate
- info@westnh.org or call
- 416-532-4828

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