

## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM AT THE MEETING PLACE

# Women overcome street life and violence

**I**f [you] feel out of place, you won't be here," says Eva about her experience with the Women's Empowerment Program at West Neighbourhood House. "There's a lot of love here and comfort — one thing about women's group is we get close." Fifty-five-year-old Eva has been a long-time Meeting Place participant and more recently has been coming to the Women's Empowerment groups.

This fall, women in the Women's Empowerment Program went on an overnight retreat. Building on the trauma-informed arts therapy offered in weekly groups, participants went for a mindfulness hike in the woods and participated in sessions on coping skills and team-building. "I loved it out there ... I got to take a break from Toronto and smell the fresh air. I didn't want to come

back," says Eva, laughing.

The Women's Empowerment Program is a new part of West Neighbourhood House's longstanding work regarding violence against women. For decades, West Neighbourhood House's Woman Abuse program has supported women and children leaving abusive relationships. Now, staff are finding new ways to address the



Sonia and Eva posed before a women's group session with an Indigenous Elder

significant abuse and violence against street-involved women. This innovation is essential because many underhoused women experience violence, and because violence is a contributing cause of homelessness for many women.

Partnering with Sistering and Florence Booth House, West Neighbourhood House created the Women's Empowerment Program to meet the needs of many women in shelters and drop-in programs across Toronto. It provides a safe space for women to discuss issues they might not feel comfortable exploring in other environments and to build supportive relationships with each other.

For Sonia, who has been coming to the program for a few months and has no close family, the Women's Empowerment Program has become a family to her. "I know it's a safe place to be [and] I get other women's points of view ... we all help one another," says Sonia.

While still in a pilot phase, the Women's Empowerment Program ensures there are more opportunities for women to create their own path, to support each other, and ultimately, to move forward.



At the Women's Empowerment retreat, women set the agenda and explored self-esteem



## SCOTIABANK TORONTO WATERFRONT MARATHON

# We hit a fundraising milestone this year!

**We are thankful** for the 67 runners, walkers, and wheelers who joined us for this year's Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon. No matter how you crossed the finish line, you were part of the work to raise more than \$33,000 this year – so thanks to each and every one of you.

The funds raised will go towards supporting the community work of West Neighbourhood House.

The day would also not have been the same without the dedicated West Neighbourhood House cheering

squad, including our Brazilian dancers and drummers who kept our runners energized as they headed to the finish line. Thanks to all who made the day such a success.



## OUR NEW LOCAL NETWORK CALLS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

**This is a critical moment** in Toronto's housing history. The announcement of the National Housing Strategy, the impending promise of Inclusionary Zoning, and the replacement of the Ontario Municipal Board with the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal mean change is coming.

At the same time, housing unaffordability is pervasive in the West Neighbourhood House community. Rent hikes, low vacancy rates, and "renovictions" affect our program participants, volunteers, neighbours, and staff.

To create more affordable and inclusive neighbourhoods, West Neighbourhood House joined with five other United Way Anchor agencies and the University of Toronto to form the West End Coalition for Housing Justice.

This coalition of academics, policy researchers, and multi-service agencies is working with residents across income levels to build local capacity and develop and test ideas like Community Benefits.

Our goal is to develop a Policy Advocacy Framework and an allied resident voice to negotiate collectively for affordable housing and community goods in large-scale, mixed-use developments proposed for downtown west Toronto.

Currently, three large redevelopment sites in the area present great opportunities to build a more inclusive, mixed-income neighbourhood.

## Stay tuned!

**Our property** at 248 Ossington will need major repair work soon. West Neighbourhood House is considering redeveloping the property instead – hopefully for affordable housing as well as continued neighbourhood-centred work.



## NEIGHBOURS HELPING NEIGHBOURS

# West Lodge residents band together to support neighbours

**F**or years, public health advocates have argued that isolation is a significant health risk. We see the impact of isolation on well-being among all seniors, especially vulnerable ones, and we are exploring and experimenting with new ways of connecting people to each other.

West Neighbourhood House and the Toronto Populations Health Solutions Lab are now collaborating in a project called Neighbours Helping Neighbours to create and deepen social connections between seniors to improve overall health and well-being.

This work is part of West Neighbourhood House's larger efforts to support residents in a Parkdale seniors' building run by Toronto Community Housing. This summer, we once again engaged InWithForward, our long-term social innovation partner, and used ethnographic research to capture

common themes across West Lodge resident experiences.

It showed that many residents in this Parkdale building are not satisfied with the number and quality of relationships in their lives. Rich story profiles of 19 residents, ranging in age from 60 to 96 years-old, conveyed that West Lodge residents have a lot to offer, but because of language barriers, social fears, or mobility issues, they are missing opportunities to build meaningful connections with their peers.

This made us wonder: what if well-connected residents could reach out

to their more isolated peers, acting as "ambassadors" and introducing them to new people and new opportunities for connection? West Neighbourhood House has already identified a number of resident ambassadors in the West Lodge building.

Mary has been living at West Lodge for over 20 years and was already doing small things to try to reach those people most at-risk. "Some people have medical problems and some people don't want to do anything except watch TV," says Mary about some of her more isolated West Lodge neighbours. "We can't force them," she says "[but] we can encourage them."

Neighbours Helping Neighbours provides the tools and supportive infrastructure to extend the work of Mary and her neighbours in building community. With the resources offered by West Neighbourhood House and

Neighbours Helping Neighbours, West Lodge's strongest asset, its residents, can change the way neighbours meet, interact, and live alongside one another, creating healthier and happier lives.



West Lodge resident profiles were complemented by non-traditional data collection.



# Please donate to our Annual Appeal

**We need your help** to continue improving lives of low-income and socially excluded people in downtown west Toronto. With your support, we will work with more than 14,000 community members who benefit from our programs and services. We simply can't support our community without you.

We will continue to work on fixing public policies affecting low-income people and improving the social systems that affect us all. We will also build

bridges between diverse people and perspectives to overcome polarized relationships.

Now, more than ever, we need a cohesive and inclusive community. Please contribute to our Annual Appeal campaign and give West Neighbourhood House the resources needed to change lives. When we work together, our community is stronger.

**To donate, visit [westnh.org/donate](http://westnh.org/donate) or call 416-532-4828.**