

Friends Housing Inc.

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Friends Family Communique - Issue #14 (August 2021)

Activities Update

COVID restrictions continue to impact activities. We continue with existing activities - including movies, colouring, crafts and puzzles, all in the Common Room. The Common Room continues to be open during regular Friends Housing hours but restrictions have loosened up a bit so now 5 residents + 2 staff are allowed in the room at any given time.

Efforts continue to be made to encourage residents to get outside (eg. for walks). Unfortunately, no residents were interested in gardening this year so the garden spaces were offered to the townhouse residents. We hope to begin having outings again very soon (current restrictions still only allow for 2 residents + the driver in the van at any one time). Assiniboine Park Zoo will likely be our first destination.

Our first “adapted” big group activity in the building in a long time took place on July 1 when residents were invited to come to the Common Room to claim their ice cream cone to enjoy back in their apartment or outside! We are hopeful a residents’ barbecue will be possible yet this year.

For more information, contact Crystal Phillips, Mental Health Director at 204-832-2254 (ph) or friendshousing.cp@gmail.com (email).

Board Update

Future Funding: Our efforts to secure future funding for Friends Housing, after July 2024, continue. We met with representatives of the Manitoba Rent Assist program, which supports tenants directly to pay rent. This program will NOT help our residents because they are primarily supported now by Employment and Income Assistance. (Rent Assist is for people not on EIA.) Our Manitoba Housing contact advised what levels of increased support our tenants could get from EIA if our rent rates were no longer subsidized by them. Though these higher support rates would help replace our “missing funding” after 2024, we need to work for more.

We then met with the provincial Residential Tenancies Branch to learn how to best manage technical aspects of the end of our agreement should we need to change to market rents with tenant supports coming from elsewhere.

And this fall we intend to meet with Audrey Gordon, Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery to present our case for continued funding from the province to sustain Friends Housing into the future.

Board-Tenant Relations: We want to initiate a closer relationship between residents of Friends Housing and the members of the Board of Directors. In the past, a member of the Tenant Association has attended board meetings to update members on activities of the tenants, and express concerns of tenants to the board. We would like to reinstate this process as soon as public health rules allow us to meet in person, which we hope will be in the fall. Prior to that, the board will work to renew interest in the Tenant Association which has waned in recent years. To that end, when rules allow, we will call a meeting of tenants in the Common Room to talk about reinvigorating the Tenant Association and/or creating whatever other communication process residents might like to see.

2021 Annual General Meeting: It will be held around the end of October as usual but the format is uncertain at this point. We hope to be able to hold the meeting at the church next door where we can have a large group with some distancing, but we are unable to confirm this now. A notice of the meeting will be sent to residents and families by mid-September.

For more information, contact John Gosselin, Board Chair at 204-488-1237 (ph) or jgosseli@mymts.net (email).

Friends Housing Building

Office Hours: Our Summer Hours, ie. Monday to Friday - 8am to 3pm (Crystal) and 8am to 2pm (Dana) will continue up to the Labour Day weekend. As of Tuesday, September 7, we revert back to regular office hours, ie. Monday to Friday - 9am to 4pm (Crystal) and 9am to 3pm (Dana).

Building Renovations: The office renovations are complete. The ventilation system upgrade has been delayed until the second week of August due to problems getting all the required electrical parts.

Building Maintenance: Reg LeClaire continues to perform the caretaker duties, on a temporary basis until the end of August when a permanent caretaker will be sought.

Annual Apartment Inspections: All suites were inspected on July 29. Crystal attended the inspections with Dennis Trochim, Murdoch Management this year to provide the Board with another perspective on the condition of suites. The results will serve as the basis for planning a renovation schedule that we hope will satisfy residents, while taking into account our current funding limitations.

Friends Housing Profile* - Tribute to Ed McCready (1924-2020)

An important player in Friends Housing's early history, **Ed McCready**, sadly passed away on November 19, 2020. His story and impact is still being felt today - especially three provinces over, ie. in Nanaimo, BC. And thanks to his being a "meticulous record keeper" (no surprise given his work career in bookkeeping, accounting and business education), Ed's story can be told - in some of his own words.

It begins in Winnipeg where Ed was born and raised. In his mid-teens, seeing firsthand how his newly widowed mother raised three boys - two of whom had schizophrenia - and how social assistance helped with health/medical-related needs and even putting food on the family table left an indelible impression on him. "In my retirement, I am trying to give back to society to show appreciation for the care given my family" (Daily Free Press, Nanaimo, February 1993).

And true to his word, so he did. After retiring in 1979, he helped establish the Manitoba Schizophrenia Society... and then, in the mid-1980s, Grace Housing Co-operative (Friends Housing's former name). Working alongside other founding members including Helga Berger and Zivey Feldman, he learned much and contributed where he could to help get the project underway.

Then, in 1987, Ed and his wife Inge moved to Nanaimo, BC. There, finding the same unmet need, they set about to change that. Armed with knowledge and experience gained in Winnipeg, Ed was instrumental in establishing the Nanaimo Friends of Schizophrenia (FOS) Non-Profit Housing Society and served as its Vice President for more than a decade. "Without a dollar in the bank - we purchased an apartment building which can house up to 20 people. We wanted to show the extent of caring felt by parents of those afflicted with mental illness" (Daily Free Press, Nanaimo, February 1993). Note: A "takeaway" for Ed from his Winnipeg experience was that by buying an existing apartment building on the assurances of individuals vs. the government, the Society could provide housing relatively quickly AND determine the type and level of care/support provided. (It was in fact Ed and fellow board member, Roger Mathews who guaranteed the bank loan that enabled the purchase of the building.)

Though the "model" was - and still is - somewhat different from that of Friends Housing, there are similarities, including the overall goal (ie. to provide housing for those with serious mental health issues) and the close proximity to a hospital/health centre offering mental health services. Indeed, the influence and impact of the "Winnipeg group" had spread!

Correspondence between Ed and other groups in BC show a man willing to offer advice and help to others wanting to set up similar housing in their communities. And in talking to those who knew Ed (including Doris Rumsey, founding President of the Nanaimo FOS Non-Profit Housing Society and Mona MacLeod, its longtime Administrator), words used to describe Ed include: forward thinking... creative... very hands on with residents, helping them where he could... strong-willed... well spoken - and lest we forget - a meticulous document keeper!

I end with Ed's own words from back in 1993, words that still resonate today: "I only hope that with dedication and persistence, what has been started will flourish for many years. We just need more people that care, to work for the good of the community."

Addendum: Today, the Nanaimo FOS Non-Profit Housing Society has two apartment buildings - the original one at 1191 Seafield Crescent which opened in 1993... and a second one in the downtown area which opened in 2009. Together, these buildings house 33 Nanaimo residents... AND the 15 bankers' boxes of the now historical documentation that Ed thoughtfully left from "the early years!"

Thank you... Andy McCready (Ed's son), Inge McCready (Ed's wife), Doris Rumsey and Mona MacLeod for providing information for this article.

* Friends Housing Profile is an ongoing series featuring Board members, staff, other volunteers and others who play - or have played - an important role in Friends Housing.

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