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A safe place to stay

Central Park housing development to serve women, children facing gender-based violence



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The University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation (UWCRC) found a gap in Winnipeg's transitional housing chain — one that exists among women and children who face gender-based violence.

Its new project, Benard House, hopes to help fill that need by the summer of 2024.

In July, the UWCRC and its community developer arm, UWCRC 2.0, will break ground on an 11-unit, 28-bedroom second-stage transitional housing project in Central Park for Indigenous and newcomer women and children experiencing gender-based violence.

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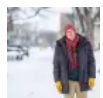
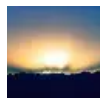


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The UWCRC 2.0 requested that the development's address remain anonymous for safety reasons.

In total, the building will dwell five two-bedroom and six three-bedroom units — all for no more than 30 per cent of a tenant's annual household income — for a struggling segment of the population.

"Every day, there's headlines about housing shortages and affordable housing shortages in our city. And, in particular, there's an acute need for gender-based violence housing," said Jeremy Read, CEO of UWCRC 2.0.

"Outside of the immediate shelter and emergency needs, there's a need for filling a gap."

Indeed, a Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment by the City of Winnipeg in 2020 estimates there are just 113 transitional housing units that offer programs for women in the city.

What's more, is the study revealed the Centennial-Downtown area has a disproportionate number of households that require core housing, making up 30 per cent of the needy families in the city. Newly minted immigrants represent 38 per cent of the disadvantaged population in the area, and 22 per cent are Indigenous.

"There was a capacity need in the community to work on these kinds of infrastructure projects," Read said.

"We recognized that there was a need to assist organizations but also that we could play a role in helping to develop social infrastructure, and in many cases, housing infrastructure in the community."

Residents will dwell in one of two buildings designed by Bridgman Architecture. The first will be built from the ground up and house eight units, while the remaining three units will be in a neighbouring historical building. The existing establishment, while vacant, currently holds a commercial-use occupancy permit and was most recently an office space.

Its original purpose was for residential and that will be reinstated through

the Benard House.

Three operating partners will offer tenants wrap-around support and assistance throughout their stay. Family Dynamics, a non-profit counselling service, will be the primary organization to provide 24-hour support on and off-site. Ikwe Widdjiitiwin Inc., which runs its own emergency shelter for women experiencing gender-based violence, will offer service in the native tongues of some residents and provide family and gender-based counselling.

Finally, New Journey Housing will be a resource for immigrants.

Read estimates the initiative will cost a little more than \$300,000. The Jubilee Fund has spotted them with \$100,000 in funding.

“The need for transitional housing of this type is so critical, not just across the country, but specifically in Winnipeg,” said Peter Cantelon, executive director for Jubilee Fund. “So when we saw the initiative that (UWCRC 2.0) was doing, it was something that we were definitely interested in.

“One of the reasons for that is because our mandate as a non-profit is to provide financial and lending assistance to organizations and individuals that are doing something to help reduce poverty. The financial burden on folks transitioning into a new culture is significant because they have so many other services that they require and so many obstacles to potential success.”

Jubilee Fund’s funding will be available to UWCRC 2.0 in the form of a line of credit, which gives the organization money upfront, rather than typical grants, which will send money after the project’s completion.

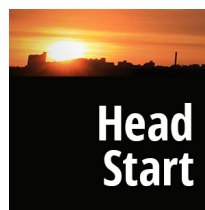
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In UWCRC’s case, they will be able to access \$100,000 immediately to help complete the project, then cover any outstanding costs through other grants and operational revenue. Cantelon said there are no restrictions on what UWCRC can use the \$100,000 fund for, so long as it pertains to this project.

“If we can do something by partnering with (UWCRC 2.0) on this to make their lives easier, it helps. It’s one more thing that will reduce the potential of someone slipping into a poverty circumstance.”

Read said most shelters are about a three-month stay for women and children experiencing gender-based violence. Being second-stage

transitional housing, Benard House will allow a two-year tenancy, to ensure families are out of the immediate context of violence and beginning to re-establish themselves.

“The longer-term objective, of course, is to help them set up for success so they’re not re-entering a situation of violence,” Read said.

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