
CONDOLENCE MOTION

Moved by: Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam

Seconded by: Councillor Mike Layton

The Mayor and Members of Toronto City Council are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Peggy Birnberg on February 8, 2013.

Peggy is survived by her devoted and caring partner Kate Crossey. Loving mother to Amy, Suzanne (Norman) and Emma. Proud grandmother to Jarod, Danielle and Tyler. Loving sister and sister-in-law to Jane, Carole and Howard, and loving aunt to her nieces and nephews. Special thanks to Peggy's caregiver Mavill. Since emigrating from New York City over 30 years ago, Peggy spent her years in Social Services and ended her career as Executive Director of Houselink Community Homes.

According to Joy Connelly, a housing activist who writes the "Opening the Window" blog:

"minutes after the news that Peggy Birnberg had died last Friday morning, the emailed tributes began to circulate. Friends and colleagues called her strong, thoughtful, compassionate and fair – "a force," "a gentle but insistent advocate," a teacher, mentor and leader...

For 19 years, Peggy was the Executive Director of Houselink Community Homes, Ontario's second largest supportive housing provider, and home to 400 people (in Toronto). Houselink was launched in 1977 by a band of trail-blazing activists. They looked at the stalled lives of people living in mental institutions, and the money poured into keeping them there, and asked, "What if we used that same money in a way that actually made lives better?"

They started buying houses that would offer a secure, permanent home, and a place for people to support each other. By the time Peggy was hired in 1991, Houselink owned homes for 200 people, and the concept of supportive housing had spread across North America...

Under her leadership Houselink revamped its mission, consolidated its operations and tripled its funding base. It embraced the recovery movement, expanded employment opportunities for members, established a food program, developed new properties, and introduced Families Moving Forward, education bursaries and a rainy day fund for members. In 2001, Houselink won the ONPHA Award for Excellence.

Those who have worked with Peggy have described her as a "powerhouse", a mentor to others, wise, graceful and many will miss her contagious laughter.

The City Clerk is requested to convey, on behalf of the Members of Toronto City Council, our sincere sympathy to the family and friends of Peggy Birnberg.

February 20, 2013