

SISTERING

January 18, 2017

To Mayor Tory and Members of Council:

In November of 2015, Sistering established a 24/7 Drop In space for women who are marginalized, homeless, and transient and have issues with mental health and addictions. This Drop In, along with a similar site located at the Adelaide Resource Centre and operated by Fred Victor, is the result of community advocacy to address the profound need for improved access to safe spaces for homeless women and trans people throughout the day and night.

Advocacy for women and trans Drop Ins began after a homeless woman, with nowhere else to go, slept on steps at Dundas and Sherbourne. In the same night, she was assaulted by two different men.

At this time the women's shelter system was running at 99-100% capacity. Despite repeated attempts many women were unable to access basic shelter or safety due to lack of low barrier resources, beds and safe, affordable housing.

The City of Toronto consulted with women living on the street, in shelters or in unsafe housing, who would access a 24/7 drop in. They also consulted other service providers. Overwhelmingly both groups talked about the need for a low barrier, harm reduction and trauma informed space 24/7.

Our 24/7 Drop In supports participants who are resistant to, or are fearful of, accessing other limited, existing services because of the discrimination and abuse they have experienced. Since we opened 24/7, police increasingly drop off women fleeing domestic violence and who have no place to go. Hospitals discharge women with complex health issues and send them to us because they have no homes to return to.

Services at Sistering, are available under one roof and most are provided daily including meals, crisis intervention and harm reduction. Doctors, psychiatrists, a counsellor and settlement worker provide services on different days Monday through Friday. Community Support Workers 24/7 provide practical and emotional support. We have recently started an evening medical and counselling clinic to assist women who use our services in the evening and overnight.

Sistering's 24/7 Drop In supports some of Toronto's most marginalized and vulnerable citizens.



We save lives. It is that simple.

We provide safe haven – a place to sleep, even if that means on a yoga mat on the floor, instead of on steps and sidewalks and dark and dangerous parks and alleys.

We keep at-risk women safe and warm and fed in the winter, and safe and cool and fed in the heat of summer.

We provide Harm Reduction support and supplies, so women don't contract HIV or Hep C or die of an overdose.

We provide medical and psychiatric care for women who cannot access other services, keeping them out of emergency rooms.

We support access to housing, help navigating the social services system, skills training and more, helping these women gain confidence and take control of their lives.

Toronto is a rich and powerful city. But not every citizen shares in the prosperity. Shelters are full. Safe and affordable housing is unavailable. Nutritious food is beyond reach.

Surely we have a responsibility to ensure that all women are respected, valued and provided with the life essentials that are their right as human beings.

Our 35 years of experience means we see the impact of poverty and homelessness on women's lives, day in and day out. Our 24/7 Drop In supports and programs are critical to protecting the health and welfare of our most vulnerable population, ensuring they are not ignored, overlooked or left to die.

Sincerely,



Patricia O'Connell
Executive Director
Sistering: A Woman's Place



Anne Chappelle
Co-Chair
Sistering Board of Directors

Background:

Sistering supports and programs:

Provide a comprehensive, seamless service 24/7

- Integrate day and evening programming through monthly program calendars
- End-of-shift staff meetings
- Robust internal referral process
- Welcome brochure detailing services and programs in English, Spanish and Mandarin

Mitigate the impacts of poverty by supporting women to meet their basic needs

- Three hot meals, soup and sandwiches overnight
- Showers and laundry
- Clothing, household items
- Computers, telephones, mailing address

Provide responsive and intentional programming

- Crisis intervention and trauma-informed counselling, in-person and by phone
- Harm reduction support and supplies
- Support groups in multiple languages
- Onsite access to doctors, psychiatrist, nurse
- Onsite access to Settlement Worker, immigration lawyer
- Ongoing needs assessment and evaluation to ensure responsive programming
- Social recreational programming

Link women to appropriate community services

- Information, referral and accompaniment to social assistance, legal aid, doctors, and other appointments
- Trauma-informed counselling and referrals
- Help navigating income support, health care, mental health, criminal justice and immigration systems

Provide housing access and stabilization supports

- Information, access, referrals to housing help
- Community resource mapping
- Budgeting
- Income support

- Eviction prevention
- Assistance applying for subsidized or market-rent housing
- Housing outreach, case management and personal advocacy
- Support to live in affordable housing
- In partnership, self-contained apartments in four locations

Work in partnership to provide and support regular Drop In programs

- Develop partnerships for new programming
- Maintain existing partnerships to provide services such as vet clinic, trauma counselling and support groups, meal preparation

With the opening of the 24/7 Drop In the demand for services has increased significantly. We have surpassed our targets. In 2015/2016 more than 2,300 women visited Sistering – 40-plus women stayed overnight each night – which clearly indicates that our Drop In program is critical to meeting the needs of the target we serve: Toronto's poor, marginalized, homeless and precariously-housed women.

- 105,000+ meals served - 92% of participants accessed at least one meal
- 8,232 toiletries distributed
- 3,852 clothing and housing donations distributed
- 54% of participants access the showers
- 56% of participants use the computer or phones
- 18,000 letters, emails, phone calls and accompaniments made on behalf of participants
- 12% participants accessed crisis intervention and trauma-informed counselling
- 5,637 participants engaged in social recreational events and programs
- 84% of participants noted that Sistering provides the opportunity for socializing
- 62% of participants attended programs
- 600 visits to the onsite general practitioners
- 4,862 referrals
- 15 intensive eviction prevention
- 228 accompaniments