

Charity builds hope for homeless in downtown Toronto



RICHARD LYALL
RESCON

Let me tell you a heart-warming story for the holidays about an incredible charity called St. Clare's Multi-faith Housing Society.

St. Clare's is a charity, landlord and developer — they build, rent out and operate affordable rental housing units for hard-to-house homeless populations, and provide access to support from in-house staff and strong relationships with 18 agencies (see list below).

Their 413 units in five buildings across downtown Toronto house the city's most vulnerable — people who suffer from addiction, mental illness and violence. Some lived for decades on the street, lost ties to their families and have experienced severe trauma.

When RESCON chairman emeritus Phil Rubinoff learned about St. Clare's successful business model from operations manager Andrea Adams — they have been doing this since 2001 — he spearheaded a fundraising effort to help St. Clare's raise \$1 million to build 22 new

apartments for the homeless in downtown Toronto's Kensington Market.

While this \$3.5-million development doesn't eliminate homelessness, it will change 22 lives, giving people permanent homes next December. It's a step in the right direction for the city's efforts to end homelessness.

"We chose to support this project because we believe the construction industry should give back," Rubinoff says. "St. Clare's is a caring and effective organization that we respect, and we know that they have the right leadership to steer this project to success."

The City of Toronto also has proven it sees value in St. Clare's efforts by contributing a \$500,000 capital grant as well as waiving municipal fees and development charges through its Open Door Program.

Toronto Deputy Mayor Ana Bailão, local Councillor Joe Cressy, and MPP Han Dong are among St. Clare's supporters. Bailão, for one, has called St. Clare's "a model that works. Their partnership-based approach has created new opportunities for those seeking a safe, clean, affordable place to call home."

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) agrees. According to Michele McMaster, affordable housing consultant: "CMHC has investigated the St. Clare's operating model, and found it to be replicable and scalable. We are delighted that St. Clare's is inspiring private developers, and we hope to encourage more in the future."

St. Clare's physical assets manager Mohammad Anvari, who provides construction management expertise to the charity/developer, says it's

important that they develop and run each project on their own.

"We believe that we should develop and create physical housing, but also closely monitor and operate it ourselves, to be sure that it provides the service it is intended for," Anvari said. "We have a strictly limited budget, so for that reason we like to be involved in the design and cost control of all aspects of the project."

That includes making the building at least 30 per cent more efficient for electricity,

heat and water use.

"We're a developer, so we have to think about efficiencies," Adams says. "But we need to balance that with careful thought about what is best for our tenants, just like every other non-profit landlord."

"When I hand over the keys to a new tenant, I always say to them, 'Welcome home,' and they are delighted without exception. The apartment units give them privacy and dignity, and that's what they tell us that they want most."

Our industry is proud to be a

part of this incredible development. The private donors, the City of Toronto and St. Clare's are working together to play an integral role in changing the lives of 22 important people.

For more information or to donate, visit www.stclares.ca.

— **Richard Lyall, president of RESCON, has represented the building industry in Ontario since 1991. Contact him @RESCONprez or at media@rescon.com.**

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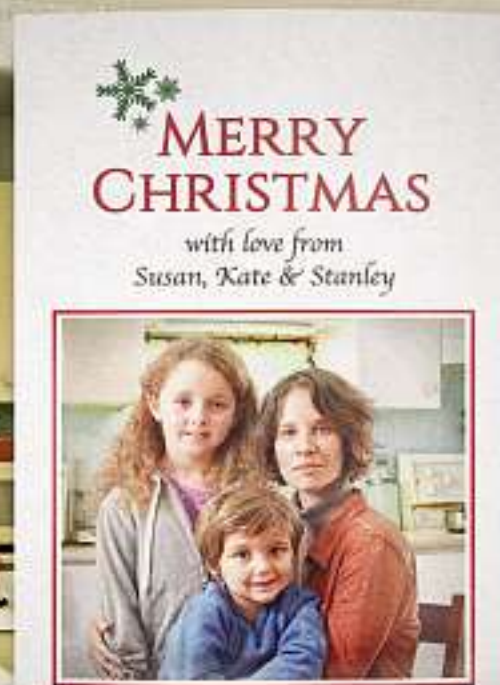
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St. Clare's operations manager Andrea Adams, left, and physical assets manager Mohammad Anvari pose at 25 Leonard Ave., where excavation has begun for a three-storey building that will provide purpose-built rentals for homeless people.

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