

# Beach community's welcome of homeless shelter for women has been heart-warming, says YWCA Toronto



The site of the former Days Inn Hotel on Queen Street East began operating as a YWCA emergency homeless shelter for women earlier this May. Photo by Alan Shackleton.

By ALAN SHACKLETON

For the most part, the Beach community has welcomed the opening of the YWCA's emergency shelter for homeless women earlier this month at the site of the former Days Inn Hotel.

Located at 1684 Queen St. E. just west of Kingston Road, the shelter opened on May 4.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Toronto needed to provide accommodations for homeless people that would help stop the spread of the virus.

The former YWCA emergency shelter for homeless women in the Davenport and Dupont area is being renovated to provide more space between residents, and the hotel site was available on short notice because it had just closed on April 1.

The Days Inn hotel site has been leased by the city for 12 months, and the shelter is operated by the YWCA Toronto. At present, the shelter at the hotel is providing beds for 45 homeless women over the age of 16.

Ashley Brown, Interim Director of Shelters and Girls Family Programs for the YWCA Toronto said the surrounding community has been "extremely welcoming" to the shelter and the women staying there.

“There have been a number of neighbours who have stopped by the shelter to make inquiries about how the shelter staff and residents are doing and that have generously offered their assistance through donations and/or volunteer efforts,” said Brown who until recently had been the shelter’s manager.

“The outpouring of support by the surrounding community has been really heart-warming and we are grateful for the responsiveness from our neighbours.”

She said people in the community have been offering food and other donations to the shelter as it deals with the COVID-19 crisis and keeping people safe.

“This is a really challenging time for so many people and our surrounding community members have been offering everything from fresh baked goods, to linens, to hygiene supplies and clothing,” said Brown. “The primary message we have been receiving is that this community cares and wants to do what they can to support YWCA Toronto staff and its shelter residents.”

Beaches-East York Councillor Brad Bradford agreed that the shelter has settled into the community relatively well in its first few weeks of operation.

“Every community, organization, business and individual is being asked to step up during this pandemic and this is the East End doing its part,” said Bradford.

However, both Brown and Bradford acknowledge there has been concern expressed by some area residents about the shelter.

Some residents said they were surprised that the shelter opened so suddenly and they had not been informed about it in advance.

“We have also received feedback from some neighbours that this temporary transition was surprising to them and they want to make sure that their concerns and needs are also heard,” said Brown. “Positive working relationships with our community members are very important to YWCA Toronto and we are committed to working collaboratively with our neighbours in ways that ensure that everyone’s needs and concerns are heard.”

Bradford said he has talked with Heather McGregor, CEO of the YWCA Toronto, about the shelter and its relations with and impact on the community.

“It’s important to build these relationships so things go smoothly in the community,” he said, adding that his office has received some emails from residents concerned about the shelter’s impact.

“One of those concerns did talk about substance use and an individual who wasn’t well. It’s hard to say whether that’s related to the shelter but of course I am monitoring it closely and making sure that the shelter and surrounding community organizations are aware of it,” said Bradford.

Beach Metro News also received an email from a nearby resident last week citing concerns about increased drug use in the area since the shelter opened. The email included a photo of a woman who appeared to be passed out in a stairwell leading to a parking structure in the area.

The resident said that in the last two weeks he had seen “an increase in drug activity, alcohol use on the street and in Orchard Park (which is directly north the shelter site)...I am hoping that the YWCA will respond with assurances of increased security to alleviate worries regarding the safety of our families and the security of our property.”

Brown said these concerns are being taken seriously by the shelter.



“Issues related to substance use is a growing concern across many communities in Toronto and the GTA. In many ways, the impacts of COVID-19 have made it even more challenging for individuals to access important resources and services that they need and rely on. These are very valid concerns and the Shelter Manager and Community Liaison Worker are very open and willing to work closely with our communities’ members in whatever way we can to address these concerns,” she said.

Brown pointed out the hotel site is great improvement from the dormitory style of the YWCA shelter at Davenport and Dupont as it provides separate rooms and bathrooms which helps with safe distancing and hygiene issues.

“These amenities have allowed participants to access a clean and private space that supports the necessary social distancing measures needed to increase staff and resident safety,” she said.



Brown added the shelter’s residents are also very pleased with the rooms at the shelter and the neighbourhood’s proximity to needed services.

“Without a doubt the feedback on the building and the neighbourhood has been really positive. Shelter residents have been very appreciative to have access to spaces that afford them privacy, safety and access to staff support,” she said. “The neighbourhood is also centrally located to important resources like the East End Community Health Centre, and access to health care for many of our participants is really key.”

Once the 12-month lease is up at the shelter, it is expected that those staying there will re-locate back to the YWCA’s renovated facility at Davenport and Dupont.

The site of the Days Inn Hotel on Queen Street East is slated for future development as a six-storey, 110-unit residential building is being proposed for the location.

Anyone with questions or concerns about the shelter can contact the YWCA Toronto by email at [info@ywcatoronto.org](mailto:info@ywcatoronto.org)

· (<https://drpeterscode.com/add-messages-footers-ads-to-bottom-of-every-post-and-page.php>)

***Did you enjoy this article? If so, you may consider becoming a **Voluntary Subscriber*****  
*(<https://www.beachmetro.com/donations/subscribe-beach-metro-news/>) to the Beach Metro Community News and help us continue providing the community with more local content such as this. For over 40 years, our staff have worked hard to be the eyes and ears in your community, inform you of upcoming events, and let you know what and who’s making a difference. We cover the big stories as well as the little things that often matter the most. **CLICK HERE***  
*(<https://www.beachmetro.com/donations/subscribe-beach-metro-news/>) to support Beach Metro News.*