



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION ONTARIO

TAKING MATTERS INTO OUR OWN HANDS

Community Creativity and Resilience in Action: The Mount Community Centre, Peterborough

February 13, 2023

One of Seniors for Social Action Ontario's mottos is "while others are accepting the things they cannot change, we are changing the things we cannot accept." It appears we are not alone in that.

In Peterborough, a group of people overcame the naysayers who said it couldn't be done and followed their dream "to build a community, a sustainable urban village that is welcoming, open, and inclusive" (The Mount, 2022). Their logo had attached to it the statement "just imagine". That was over ten years ago.

Just as Margaret Mead said "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has", a group of thoughtful, committed citizens in Peterborough decided to change their world.

They undertook a Herculean task of transforming "over 132,000 square feet of buildings on ten acres of land in the heart of the city" (The Mount, 2022). The buildings originally housed the Sisters of St. Joseph in buildings known as Mount St. Joseph, and it had been the Sisters' Motherhouse since 1895. They moved to a new residence in 2009 - the year that the buildings were listed for sale.

These citizens took their determination, courage, and commitment in hand and made the leap – and their dream came true.

The Need for Affordable Housing

Built around pillars of community service, the Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network (PPRN), through 2012 and 2013 established volunteer committees to address the critical need for affordable housing by investigating the possible re-use of restoring the old building for this purpose. Ownership of the property had first been acquired by the PPRN in August of 2013 and was then transferred to the newly created non-profit The Mount Community Centre (TMCC) in December of 2013.

79 bright and beautiful apartments of mixed sizes and rents are anticipated, and there are currently 68 occupied.

Food Security

Recognizing the need to improve food security they developed an innovative food centre with the help of a group of experts in the food business.

Health and Social Services

Recognizing the need for improved health and social services in the area, TMCC initially rented a large space to VON to operate an Adult Day Program for adults living with a disability, dementia, and other cognitive disabilities, which is still running seven years later.

Later, TMCC rented additional space to VON to support their Assisted Living Program offering personal support and assistance with homemaking, security checks, and care coordination for residents of Peterborough and area.

All of this will likely significantly reduce the risk of VON clients ending up institutionalized should they develop health conditions or other infirmities.

Shared Dreams

Shared Dreams for Independent Living was started by a group of 5 families in November 2013 who wanted to ensure their adult children who live with developmental disabilities had a home of their own with friends and neighbors of their choosing. In 2018 they entered into an agreement with the Mount Community Centre for approximately 3400 square feet of space that was renovated into 5 fully accessible private suites that open to a spectacular common space. The Mount Community Centre has been an incredible opportunity for their sons to share in the life of an intentional community, that is, a place where people with various backgrounds are intentionally thought of and included in their community regardless of their socio-economic, cultural, religious, or disability circumstances. It is a place where their sons contribute, participate, and belong. They are enjoying a life of independence, while at the same time are being interdependent with their neighbors. The men moved into their own apartments in December 2021 and are truly living their dream.

Supporting Environmentalism

Being committed to environmentalism, TMCC also rented part of the buildings to the Kawartha Land Trust which is dedicated to “conserving the natural environment and enhancing quality of life in the Kawarthas by protecting properties comprising 3,040 acres of important diverse types of land.”

Arts and Culture

Life is not complete without the arts and cultural activities, and the group wanted to encourage cultural activities by taking over the beautiful former chapel for music, drama, film and other programs. Piano and dance lessons are held there as well as providing practice space for choir groups.

The massive success of their undertaking has created a high level of commitment, courage, and stamina to continue building more possibilities. Perhaps even more importantly, the original naysayers’ hearts and minds have been changed.

Today TMCC stands as a testament to the human spirit. It has lifted up everyone associated with it and given back to its community in important ways. The citizens of Peterborough who undertook this project deserve our support and accolades. They have shown us what creative aging is really about – transforming something old into something new to make the world a better place.

SSAO members who live in communities where there are old buildings that could use some creative renovation – please take note of what is possible.

For more information about The Mount Community Centre, please visit <https://www.themountpeterborough.ca/about-us.html>

Special thanks to Christine Cannon, Parent, and Board President of Shared Dreams, and to Stephen Kylie Chair of The Mount Community Centre Board and Chair of the Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network for their assistance in writing this article.

For more about Stephen Kylie's community activities please see:

<https://ptbopathwayoffame.ca/inductee/stephen-kylie/>

For more about Christine Cannon and Shared Dreams please see:

<https://peterboroughcurrents.ca/housing/shared-dreams/>

Dr. Patricia Spindel is a co-founder of Seniors for Social Action Ontario and author of Changing Communities: A Guide for Social and Community Activists, 2nd Edition. Canadian Scholars Press.

<https://canadianscholars.ca/book/changing-communities-second-edition/>

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