



OWN Housing Literacy Series

“What Really Works in Creating Affordable Housing?”

May 17, 2011

Woodgreen Community Housing, WoodGreen Community Services

Ulli Groppler, Manager of Community Development and Housing with Woodgreen Community Housing was our special guest speaker on May 17, 2011. We chose Woodgreen because in 2010 the City of Toronto named WoodGreen an “Affordable Housing Champion.”

WoodGreen Community Services, a United Way member agency, is one of the largest social service providers in Toronto, serving 37,000 clients each year from 23 locations in Toronto’s East End. WoodGreen enhances self-sufficiency, promotes well-being and reduces poverty through innovative solutions to critical social needs. It provides affordable housing, employment, and support for newcomers to Canada, low-income people, seniors living independently, and frail seniors. It also offers child-care services as well as mental health and developmental programs. Woodgreen Community Housing provides integrated, transitional and supportive housing, as well as affordable rental housing. Through its nine programming divisions, with a staff of 600 and 1000 volunteers, it manages 700 rental units and provides homes for 1000 residents. Ulli, who has many years experience in non-profit housing, said it’s “complex and layered.” You need knowledge, lots of work, partnerships, money, operations, and capital income to achieve success.

Funding for social housing comes mostly from the Federal and Provincial Governments and is organized through the City of Toronto. Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) is Toronto’s largest provider of social housing, with 164,000 tenants. RGI (Rent Geared to Income) is legislated and managed by the City of Toronto (SHRA: Social Housing Reform Act). Rent is calculated at 30% of gross income, including subsidies for a recipient of Ontario Works (Welfare) according to a scale (\$85.00 for singles), and for a recipient of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) according to a scale (\$109.00 for singles). This scale amount goes up according to the number of people renting a unit. TCHC now has a waiting list of 65,000 people; many will have to wait years before they get offered a RGI unit. Nonprofit organizations (communities or churches) also provide social/affordable rental housing and receive funding from governments through the City, but they manage their own properties. Rental co-ops and non-profits receive government support. They have their own boards and usually hire property managers. Many offer a percentage of RGI units, with the subsidies “topped-up” by welfare funds.

Woodgreen Community Housing rents units as RGI, which is calculated as 30% of gross income. Additional funds come from government sources through the City and from donations from charities such as the United Way or the WoodGreen Foundation. Some private landlords also provide affordable rental units, but their “affordable” rents are usually only 10% below the average market rent. TCHC and co-ops offer single occupancy units, while some private non-profits offer shared units. All rentals fall under the Residential Tenancy Act and the Human Rights Code.





Of special interest to OWN was WoodGreen's takeover three years ago of Ray McCleary Towers at 444 Logan, an independent living seniors building of 159 units. Bachelors rent for \$648 and one-bedrooms for \$779; bachelors are always available, with a short waiting list for the one-bedroom units. Some restrictions apply. For all other buildings of WoodGreen Community Housing, applicants are chosen from WoodGreen Community Services clients, and referred to housing by the different departments of WoodGreen Services. WoodGreen also has a Housing Help Centre, called Info Link, which may refer someone to WoodGreen's units.

Ulli explained that the City is looking for projects that involve partnerships and are designed to promote specific mandates that meet special community needs. A new proposal has a greater chance of success if it offers innovative solutions to current problems such as job loss, thereby qualifying it for different grants.

Ulli's detailed presentation of Woodgreen's varied buildings and services was followed by a lively and informative question and answer period. We were very pleased to have Ulli Groppler share her knowledge with us and we all look forward to learning much more about building and managing affordable housing from her.

For more information on WoodGreen, please see their excellent web site at: www.woodgreen.org

