

Social Justice Project in Calgary

Calgary SSVP is pleased to announce that with the support of Theodoric Nowak (Diocese of Calgary) and the full support of Calgary Central Council president Theo van Besouw and vice president David Mayer, we are investigating a new system to support high-risk single moms. The project is called Stage 2 Housing Initiative.

Stage 1 Housing refers to vulnerable persons living in a group home type environment, where they are required to abide by house rules and curfews. They also have access to emotional support by the people running the home, and the support of other members of the house. This provides a sense of community and family, which is badly lacking in their lives. All of the women who enter into Elizabeth House are lacking any kind of family support. Either they have been thrown out of the home due to the unplanned pregnancy, or they were already in high-risk situations, and now find themselves alone and frightened, with nowhere to turn for safety and welcome. Stage 1 housing at Elizabeth House seeks to restore some of that dignity to them.

Stage 2 Housing will involve the new moms moving into an apartment of their own, with SSVP and our partners continuing to provide to missing support and family aspects. Left alone, it would be easy for these highly vulnerable women to slip back into negative patterns in order to cope with the stresses of trying to raise a child alone. We want to help alleviate that stress, not just on a monetary front, but by giving them back the sense of community and no longer being alone.

We are aiming to provide affordable housing for these moms that are most at risk of either being homeless or returning to potentially abusive relationships because they have nowhere else to go. We are teaming up with other lay associations and laying the groundwork to have a committee formed in order to address this very real need to break the cycle of poverty. The idea is with a safe place to raise these children, the moms have a very real chance to get their lives back on track, and provide stability and encouragement for their children, so that they can go on to be happy and contributing members of society, rather than slipping in hopelessness. Other aspects of this initiative may include providing mentors, and opportunities for continuing education. We are also considering counselling services and perhaps support with babysitting to both allow the moms to go back to work, or even just to provide a “sanity break” to the daily struggle of trying to parent alone. Help with writing resumes and practice for job interviews would be real life skills we may be able to

assist with. Ideally, as some of these women make their way through the program and achieve success, they will want to return as mentors to the program.

Another piece of this puzzle with involves raising our profile within the Catholic Church. We have always taken pride in being humble; however we need to let our congregations know more about the work that we do. In many congregations (mine in particular) we are known as “Christmas tree people”, as we try and obtain gifts for our neighbours in need during the holiday season. There is so much more to our Society than just this—we are acting out the call of our Lord to perform the Corporal Acts of Mercy in a real and tangible manner, and this project may be one way we can showcase that to our churches.

Some of the partners we are looking to engage with include Elizabeth House, a stage one housing program for high-risk pregnant women, Calgary Pregnancy Centre and Bishop O’Byrne Housing. At this time SSVP Calgary does work closely with this agency to help our friends in need.

This is going to be challenging, but we are filled with the Holy Spirit and a desire to make a difference here in Calgary. Happily, we have the support of the Calgary Roman Catholic Diocese in our efforts, and this really makes the project seem like something we can turn into a reality. There is not a lot of detail available on the project right now, as we are still working on forming our planning committee, but hopefully at a later time we will have more news to share on how our initiative is going.

Maureen Harrison
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Western Region