



CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

PROJECT PROFILE

The Working Centre

Kitchener, Ontario

A commercial building stood vacant and neglected in downtown Kitchener, Ontario, throughout the 1990s.

Meanwhile, the Working Centre, a volunteer community services organization, was looking for space for a temporary shelter for lower-income people and for an employment resource and learning centre. The Centre was looking for room to provide computer training courses, a crafts shop and crafts work area.

In 1999, the Working Centre purchased the 9,000-square-foot building located in Kitchener's downtown, at 43 Queen Street South.

The Affordable Housing Solution

In 2001, the Working Centre opened as a mixed-use building combining production and commercial space on the first two floors with affordable housing. Two three-bedroom apartments on the third floor provide emergency and temporary shelter for lower-income people.

Highlights

A community-based volunteer organization was able to leverage volunteer labour, local donations and modest municipal assistance into a number of multi-purpose buildings, including transitional housing.

Client Group: Women and men in transition from a crisis to permanent housing.

Developer: The Working Centre

Number of units: 21

Tenure: Rental

Who was involved? The Working Centre, Region of Waterloo, volunteers and community donors

The loft-like apartments, which include two bathrooms, living, dining and kitchen areas, can accommodate six people. Each person has their own bedroom, but the remaining facilities are shared.

The main floor houses the Queen Street Commons Café, a place for music, meetings, art, and affordable food. On the second floor is the bike shop, Recycle Cycles, which in 2007 repaired or refurbished close to 3,300 bikes. Fifty volunteers operate the shop five days a week. The second floor also has an arts space that

combines a sewing space with the making of soap, paper and herbal products as well as rug weaving. Many of the crafts are sold through the café.

The building was purchased for \$159,000. Two factors were crucial for ensuring the housing portion was affordable. First, the Region of Waterloo provided a grant of \$60,000 (\$10,000 per accommodation space for a person). Second, a small crew that combined paid workers and volunteers renovated the building over a two-year period.

This effort attracted the support of local companies, organizations, churches and professionals, who together donated time, money and supplies. Tenants pay the operating costs of the building with their rents of \$360 per month each. The rents are geared to the amounts permitted by the Province of Ontario's social assistance scales. No additional operating subsidy is required.

The housing is not meant to be permanent, but to be a transition from a time of crisis to a more stable and long-term situation. The Working Centre serves women and men in transition – between jobs, from a difficult relationship, in recovery from addictions, or otherwise needing a temporary place to live. The Centre also provides support to the residents as they make the transition to permanent housing.

CMHC Contact

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Additional Information

The Working Centre

<http://www.theworkingcentre.org/>

Residents must be able to live independently and agree to the following:

- Be alcohol and drug free
- Smoke outside only
- Agree to meet guests in the ground-floor café rather than in the housing units
- Share responsibility for cleaning
- Have or develop a transition plan
- Meet with a housing support person once a week

The Working Centre, with support from private and corporate donors, has opened a community kitchen called Maurita's Kitchen across the road from the 43 Queen St. S. site.

In addition to providing food for the Café, Maurita's Kitchen is linked with a community bake oven, the Whole Food Box project, which brings locally grown fresh fruit and vegetables to the downtown and the Youth Skills Link program, which offers hands-on training and mentoring for at-risk youth.

The Working Centre has been able to replicate the success of its model of patient acquisition and renovation of property, relatively small government assistance and motivated donors and volunteers. Since 2001, it has been able to purchase three more properties (two within a block of the original building) and create a total of 21 housing units. Rents in these buildings are also geared to the government of Ontario's social assistance scales.