

David Petkau, Director of Community Engagement

One desire that we all share – regardless of our heritage, beliefs, background or other attributes that define us – is for a place we feel at “home.”

I don't think that this is by accident. In the Genesis account of creation, the first thing that God gave human beings was a *home*. The Garden of Eden was not only a place to live, but a place to belong. This theme of finding “home” continues throughout the pages of Judeo-Christian scripture. We read of the epic journey of the Israelites as they sought a land to call “home.” God's desire is that,

“My people will live in peaceful dwelling places,
in secure homes,
in undisturbed places of rest.” (*Isaiah 32:18, NIV*)

The metaphor of building our house on a “firm foundation” reminds us of how to establish our lives on truth, and a heavenly home is said to be prepared with “many rooms” (John 14:2). These all point to the reality that we are destined and designed to live and thrive in community, where we experience *home*: a place where we belong; a space that is peaceful, secure, and restful.

We work closely with many people who need, at times, support in order to obtain and maintain ‘home’. Chances are, many of us need support in maintaining the place we call home as well – but for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, these support people are often paid professionals. We struggle with the tension between recognizing a supported group living residence as someone's home but also a Christian Horizons workplace. It's important that we work in this tension. We must not get too comfortable in someone else's home as professionals. This is *their* home, *their* community, and (hopefully!) *their* place of peace, security, and rest – regardless of who pays the bills or has to comply with fire and building codes.

It's important that we continue to push for models of housing where people experience increased ownership and autonomy in their space. Yet housing continues to be financially or physically inaccessible for so many people! This is why Christian Horizons champions and supports affordable housing projects. These projects have, as their primary goal, a vision of “home” as a peaceful, secure, and restful *place of your own*.

Affordable housing is part of bringing community to life in a way that is within reach of everybody. It offers not just a token reduction in cost, but is practically affordable based on the ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) shelter allowance. This allows a person that chooses our supports to be able to lease a home for themselves.

Our projects offer diverse levels of affordability to encourage a mixed and diverse community of tenants. Unlike many building projects that only meet minimum expectations for accessibility, physical barriers have been dealt with through thoughtful design from the start. These homes offer spaces where people, in community, can come together and grow. Our prayer is that affordable housing will offer places of peace, security, and rest – places where people can build the relationships that are meaningful to them. In turn, finding “home” will serve as a firm foundation to support every other aspect of people’s lives and personal development in their community.

Making the Connection

- When you think of “home,” what are the images and feelings that come to your mind?
- How have current or past homes helped you realize your potential, growth and future?
- How can Christian Horizons better navigate the tension between “home” and “workplace” when providing supports?