

To: Homes First Society Board of Directors
From: Patricia Mueller, HFS Chief Executive Officer
Subject: HFS Community Development and Outreach Update
Date: April 16, 2019

Recommendation:

That this report be received for information.

Background:

Our past practice has been to review the Community Development and Outreach for the past year and to provide an update and plans for the upcoming year.

The plans that have been developed are based on input from the Community Engagement Coordinators (formerly, the Volunteer Coordinator and the Community Development Coordinator). Because these individuals connect with our neighbourhoods and communities, it was felt that the most effective way moving forward is coordinating efforts to ensure maximum impact. As a given, we have planned activities that enhance neighbourhood connectivity with the goals of improved image, potential volunteers, and opportunities for our residents in the community.

Comments:

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND OUTREACH ANNUAL REVIEW:

Pride Toronto:

Homes First marched in the Pride Parade again in 2018. Activities such as t-shirt decorating were held leading up to the parade but due to very heavy rain the day of the event, only a three residents joined in the march, along with two staff members. Despite our small numbers and wet shoes, participants had a great time and Homes First is registered for the 2019 parade.

Big On Bloor:

Homes First participates annually in the Big on Bloor Festival, and has had a booth at the festival for several years. In 2018, the festival was held for only one day rather than two, but was still very successful. Resident artwork and pink lemonade was sold, with proceeds going back to support the shelter. Several staff and residents from Savards came by the booth to show support and volunteer their time, handing out pamphlets with information about Homes First. Many people thanked us for the work we do. This festival continues to provide an opportunity for Savards and Homes First to create a positive image in the local community.

Strachan House Talent Showcase:

Unfortunately due to construction at Strachan House, the annual Showcase was not held in 2018. The Showcase will be held in October 2019.

Dufferin Park BBQ:

As in past years, the annual All-Site BBQ in Dufferin Grove Park was a big success. Over 30 residents attended, and staff from various sites also joined. We enjoyed food, games like cards and soccer, and were joined by a coordinator from our partner organization Street to Trail to promote the monthly hiking trips.

Gardening Program:

In 2018, we held multiple gardening days at sites such as Meegwetch and Bellevue. Volunteers came to assist in cleaning and weeding the garden, as well as planting flowers to enjoy at a future date. Resident participation in the gardening program is less than in previous years; however we are putting together a plan for residents to oversee sections of their property's garden, to make overall maintenance easier.

Diabetes Prevention Program:

In December 2018, after the completion of a funding period, the Diabetes Prevention program ended. In total, 5 peers received training through Toronto Public Health to run workshops and 35 Homes First residents participated in workshops held at housing properties and shelter sites over 18 months, with many other participants coming to workshops held at external organizations. Due to a waning interest in diabetes health and low participation in weekly sessions, the Community Development Department has decided to retire the Diabetes Prevention Program as a whole. Peers who participated are being supported in finding other peer roles, both internally at Homes First and with other organizations.

Weekly Programs:

With the help of the Volunteer Coordinator, the Community Development Department has set up a variety of weekly programming at sites such as Strachan House, Savards, Meegwetch, and Kennedy. These weekly activities include an art workshop, a sewing class, an after-school program for younger residents to get help with homework and a pet-therapy session with a trained therapy dog. Moving forward, we are hoping to set up more of these weekly programs at more of our properties.

The Arts Market:

In September 2017, Homes First partnered with the Arts Market, a local business, to provide residents with a place to display and sell their work. Many of our clients create art through weekly programs, but most do not have a space to show their pieces. The space at the Arts Market allows for this opportunity, with the bonus of any income through sold art going straight to the resident. Currently, Homes First has five residents whose art is displayed, and one resident has sold his piece. There is a plan to add shelving to our space, so clients who don't focus on painting can display their work. Both Homes First and the Arts Market are excited to continue this partnership in the coming months.

Hiking Trips:

In May 2018, Homes First held its first hiking trip in partnership with Street to Trail. The first trip was a huge success with 7 participants joining from 3 Homes First sites. Hikes have been held once a month since, with a break for the winter months (December –

February), and additional hikes were held for Homes First properties such as Kennedy. We will continue to plan hikes for spring, summer and fall 2019 and if possible, an overnight camping trip.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND OUTREACH 2019-2020 PLAN:

This year, Community Development is focused on creating meaningful programming for residents, whether they want to lead workshops, volunteer in their community or just find significance in a weekly art program. We will continue to recruit and set up peer leaders in various roles across the organization, explore new ideas for community building, and present residents with external opportunities for personal growth and development.

In addition to our ongoing weekly programs, we are planning the following activities:

MAY:

- Begin to prepare our gardens by weeding and planting at several of our sites, with the help of external volunteers.
- A hiking trip with Street to Trail will be planned.

JUNE:

- We will march in the annual Pride Parade on June 23, with small events leading up to this date.
- Continued care of our gardens.
- A volunteer group is planned to help at Strachan in mid-June.
- A hiking trip with Street to Trail will be planned.

JULY:

- Big on Bloor is being held on July 20; we will offer spots to residents who would like to sell their crafts/artwork, as well as sell lemonade with proceeds going to the Savards Shelter.
- A hiking trip with Street to Trail will be planned.

AUGUST:

- Our annual, all-site barbeque at Dufferin Grove Park will be held.
- Outreach will begin for this year's Showcase, including seeking participants and donors for the event.
- A hiking trip with Street to Trail will be planned.

SEPTEMBER:

- Recruitment of residents to be in our Talent Showcase.
- We will look into a small ceremony for the recipients of the Wanda's Arts Award.
- A hiking trip with Street to Trail will be planned.

OCTOBER:

- The Homes First Showcase, a combination of a talent and fashion show will be hosted at Strachan House. All residents will be encouraged to participate.
- We will be asking residents, staff, and volunteers to participate in a fall cleanup by raking leaves and helping prepare our gardens for winter.

- A hiking trip with Street to Trail will be planned.

NOVEMBER:

- We will hold our second Homes First Holiday Kickoff, and explore the possibility of watching the Santa Claus Parade live.
- The beginning of preparations for the Kensington Market Winter Solstice Parade by planning workshops leading up the parade and advertising to residents.
- A hiking trip with Street to Trail will be planned.

DECEMBER:

- The Winter Solstice Parade in Kensington Market, This event has become an annual tradition for Homes First.

IN DEVELOPMENT:

Arts Programs/Wellness Programs:

Currently we have 10 weekly programs, ranging from after school help to pet therapy. We will conduct surveys and work with staff to determine what kind of programming residents are interested in, and work with the Volunteer Coordinator to recruit volunteers to run these programs. Examples of our most popular art programs are yoga and meditation at Sheila Miller and Meegwetch, Zumba at Kennedy and board games at Shuter.

Educational/Skill-Based Programs:

- After school homework help at Meegwetch.
- Knitting workshops at Kennedy.
- Sewing workshop at Savards.

2018-2019 PARTNERSHIPS:

Queen West Community Health Centre:

Queen West has been a partner since August 2015. Queen West has delivered monthly harm reduction workshops at Strachan and Savards for the writing program, and a resident of Strachan is a peer-leader in Queen West's harm reduction program. We will continue this partnership with the harm reduction peer and look for more ways to increase the work done with them.

Arts Market:

We will continue to work with the Arts Market to provide gallery space for resident artists and promote their work via Homes First and Arts Market channels.

The Works:

The current Harm Reduction Program has partnered with The Works to provide all harm reduction supplies for the program, which includes literature, condoms, drug kits and more. Homes First will continue to work with The Works to provide harm reduction supports to peer leaders in the program and resident participants.

Street to Trail:

Street to Trail is a non-profit organization that provides hiking day-trips and overnight camping trips to those facing poverty, homelessness, and housing instability. Homes First partnered with Street to Trail in April 2018 and so far, 10 hiking trips have been held. Homes First will continue working with Street to Trail over the warmer months to plan more trips and opportunities for residents.