



CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

PROJECT PROFILE

590 Grosvenor Street

London, Ontario



After sitting empty for nearly a decade, a former church in London, Ontario, is once again fulfilling a community need – this time for affordable and accessible housing. The former Church of the Redeemer has been converted into housing tailored to encouraging independent living for single adults with a developmental disability. The \$2.5 million private-sector project, a partnership between Riverstone Developments and the Alice Saddy Association, received assistance from the City of London Affordable Housing Program and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

Highlights

A former church in London, Ontario, has been converted into affordable, safe and accessible housing with individualized supports, allowing 16 single adults with developmental and physical disabilities to live more independently in the community.

Client Group: Adults with developmental disabilities

Developer: Riverstone Developments, Inc.

Number of Units: 12

Tenure: Rental

Who was involved? Riverstone Developments, Inc. Alice Saddy Association, City of London, CMHC, Decade Group Inc. and Union Gas Limited.

The Affordable Housing Solution

Alice Saddy is a non-profit agency that provides services to adults with developmental disabilities in the London / Middlesex region. The Association teamed up with private developer, David Nelms of Riverstone Development. Nelms worked with the City of London who provided funding through its Affordable Housing Program for the conversion.

“Some of the people we support were in less than stellar accommodations,” explained Alice Saddy executive director Ken

MacLellan. “They were having to live in places simply because they were affordable, but the housing didn’t allow them to function very well because it didn’t meet their need for such things as accessibility.”

Seeing an increased need for supports for individuals who were living in single apartments throughout the city, the association opted for smaller apartment buildings, where support staff could serve more than one person. In the past five years, the agency and the private developer have worked together to build 24 units in three buildings, including the

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12 units in the former church.

The building's previous owner, condominium developer Decade Group Inc., had halted plans, realizing its condos would be priced too high for the area. "I approached them in 2009, and they liked our idea so much they waited a year for us to arrange for financial support," said Nelms. "In that regard, it was a real community-based project. They believed in what we were doing and hung in with us, even turning down other offers."

The City of London provided \$1.75 million under its Affordable Housing Program. Riverstone and Alice Saddy contributed \$460,000, which included a generous donation to Alice Saddy from Decade Group.

The project also received Seed Funding from CMHC to assess feasibility and perform an environmental assessment. "CMHC was very supportive," said MacLellan. "There were a few times when we thought the project wasn't going to work out, but they encouraged us to keep going forward; the staff in the regional office are very passionate about affordable housing."

The building has unique features designed to enhance tenant safety and accessibility, including a central computer system that controls heating, lighting, security cameras, fire alarms and, if necessary, even individual appliances such as a stove accidentally left on by a tenant. The building was also designed with financial sustainability in mind, using higher-grade insulation and lighting, as well as a hot-water system fed by solar panels, to save on operating costs over the long term. The building is energy-producing as well as energy-efficient: more than 50 solar panels on the roof generate electrical power that is fed back into the grid.

CMHC Contact

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http://www.cmhc.ca/en/corp/cous/cous_023.cfm

The tenants took possession in February 2011. Rents for the one- and two-bedroom units are set at rates affordable to a person living on a fixed disability allowance, and support staff is provided by the Alice Saddy Association based on tenants' individual needs. A 20-year lease agreement with Riverstone Developments allows the association to utilize the building for tenants it believes are the most suitable.

John Brown is one of the current tenants. Before moving to 590 Grosvenor, Brown lived in a smaller but more expensive and less accessible apartment. "I have a scooter that I drive around, and it's easier to get it in and out of this building," said Brown. "This building is also closer to banks and stores."

Brown is also now much closer to the Alice Saddy drop-in centre, just a 10-minute scooter drive away. Soon, he may not have to drive to the centre at all. "With the completion of these 12 units, we have caught up with our need to provide affordable housing," said MacLellan, "so we are now raising funds to renovate the basement of 590 Grosvenor to house the drop-in centre and other programs we currently run off-site in rented premises."

The housing project has the community's full support. "The building had stood empty so long it was starting to become a blight," said Nelms. "The neighbours were happy to see it not only being maintained again but also going to accommodation for additional community members."