

Sistering in the Neighbourhood: An Update

You may be familiar with Sistering, a 24-hour drop-in centre for women, near the corner of Dovercourt and Bloor.

Why do women go to Sistering?

HOUSING CRISIS

There has been a city-wide 40% increase in the demand for shelter and drop-in services over the past 18 months.

LACK OF WOMEN'S BEDS

Toronto's women's shelters have been at 99% capacity for over a year, meaning women are often turned away.

A KNOWN ENTITY

Hospitals, including CAMH, police units and Toronto shelters send women to Sistering in taxis and transport ambulances. Some of the women arrive in gurneys, still wearing hospital gowns.

LOW BARRIER

Unlike most shelters, women are welcome to bring pets and personal belongings into Sistering, and are not required to sign in at the door.

With a trauma-informed approach, staff build trust with women as they interact with the space and its opportunities.

FOOD AND AUTONOMY

Three meals a day, personal care items, social events, housing referrals, professional medical and psychiatric care, harm reduction kits, employment assistance, a craft and textiles studio and more are available at Sistering.

A SAFE PLACE

Without a place to go, many of Sistering's participants are at risk of violence and further trauma.

“ There is nowhere else in the city for me to go.
- Sistering participant

About Sistering:

Sistering has operated for over 35 years and is one of only two low-barrier drop-in centres for women in Toronto. In November 2015, the Bloor St. location extended its hours to 24/7 in response to a local woman being sexually assaulted twice in one night.

Women who come to Sistering are:

- marginalized and often living in extreme poverty
- homeless or precariously housed
- facing severe mental and physical health issues
- wrestling with substance use
- victims of extreme violence and trauma

Sistering is NOT:
• A shelter.
• A safe injection site.

A lack of Toronto shelter beds means:

Sistering is forced to provide overnight space, even with no beds. There are only 12 reclining chairs and otherwise, women sleep on the floor on yoga mats.

A lack of outdoor space means:

Sistering participants gather in the small sidewalk space in front of the building.

What Sistering has done in response:

STAFF OUT FRONT

Assigned staff and peer workers wearing purple Sistering lanyards (and from now will wear identifiable hats) to supervise the sidewalk area afternoons and evenings. They work to defuse difficult situations and encourage women to walk around the block for their cigarette breaks.

MORE SPACE

Explored every other avenue for outdoor space, including the back alley and rooftop, and found they are not possible.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

Made improvements to the front entrance, including a sheltered seating area, creating additional space for passers-by.

IDENTIFICATION

Added the Sistering logo and office phone number to the front window for the community to recognize and use if needed.

A NEW SPACE

Applied to run a low-barrier women's shelter at Davenport and Avenue Rd, already approved by the city. With support from the community, this space would alleviate current pressures on the Bloor St. location.

What you can do:

LEARN MORE

Visit Sistering's website (sistering.org) to find out more about the organization and ways to support it.

EXPRESS YOUR CONCERN FOR TORONTO'S HOUSING CRISIS

Reach out to the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing at minister.mah@ontario.ca.

SUPPORT A NEW SPACE

Email Toronto's Policy Development Officer, Stephanie Bell, at ssharfp@toronto.ca to voice your support for Sistering's bid to run the new women's shelter on Davenport Rd by Monday, October 1, 2018.

Sincerely,

The Sistering Community Advisory Council
sistering.org/contact-us/sistering-community-advisory-council