

**Toronto Seniors
Housing Corporation**

Seniors Speak



Spring 2025

Seniors Speak Spring Issue



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Message from the CEO

Dear Tenants,

Get ready to spring into the Spring 2025 edition of Seniors Speak! With the weather warming up, and the flowers blooming, we have a terrific interview with a tenant who is helping us develop the new Garden Guidelines.

Springtime is a time of renewal. Growing up, I would do my part to keep our family home tidy, especially during spring cleaning. Living in a large building, with shared spaces, I encourage you to do your part to keep the buildings clean.



We certainly have our work cut out for us in 2025 as the requests for activities come pouring in. We held our Annual Building Planning Meetings in the first few months of the year. They went very well, with 72 meetings planned and over 1,000 tenants attending.

The Senior Tenants Advisory Committee (STAC) recruitment was a big success with over 40 applicants. It will be good to hear ideas from the new members, as well as the current ones, at the upcoming May meeting.

National Volunteer Week in Canada was April 27 to May 3. We had a chance to recognize some of the many Tenant Volunteers at the Regional Tenant Volunteers Meetings. We know that so many tenants at Toronto Seniors Housing give up their free time, both formally and informally, to support people in their building and their community. Thank you to all of you for helping to create vibrant communities.

June is a busy month! We will be recognizing Seniors, Pride, and National Indigenous History, as well as celebrating Toronto Seniors Housing's third anniversary.

Inside this issue, we share a story about a volunteer whose life-challenging journey led him to call Toronto Seniors Housing his home. Given that June is Pride month, you will also meet a tenant who shares his story with openness and grace.

Finally, the CEO tours are continuing so look for posters that tell you where I am and when. With 83 buildings, I am slowly but surely getting to each one.

Enjoy the warm weather and I hope to see you soon,



Tom Hunter
Chief Executive Officer



Getting rid of the **negative labels** in life

Negative labels can follow you through life. It is unfair as sometimes you cannot shake them. For fellow tenant, Don Masters, it was a lifelong journey to shake those labels.

“After many misdiagnoses of my mental health, I am finally on the right medication. I am healthy, contributing to my community, and reunited with my family,” he shares.

Don’s uphill journey began in his 30s. He readily admits he made poor choices that resulted in him ending up in jail. To make matters worse, his father, a former police officer, was the Assistant Superintendent of the Whitby jail that he was in. Another time he even managed to escape from a hospital.

With his health declining, Don openly shares that he struggled with depression and anti-social and aggressive behaviour.

A turning point was in 1993 when he was part of a new outreach program at Whitby General Hospital. He won an award for his work with the program.

“We started a breakfast club for patients. Most of them were struggling with mental illness. We believed in them,” he says. “So, we served them food with real silverware. Before this, for safety reasons, they only had plastic utensils. This gave them dignity. I am really proud of that,” Don smiles.



He is grateful to finally have a stable home. Today, he is a quiet, caring Tenant Volunteer. Having lost his wife a few years ago, the doctors say she lived beyond expectations because of his caretaking and the Personal Support Workers.

“There are three words that mean a lot to me. Dignity, respect, and trust,” says Don. “Now that I have a stable home, I have dignity as I contribute to my community. I have self-respect every time I help with activities, and at a nearby foodbank. I have trust when I babysit my seven-year-old grandson as I know my daughter trusts me,” he proudly says.

Life is good. When he is with his grandson, it is all about Paw Patrol cartoons and playing with Spiderman figures. He is inspired by the imagination of his grandchild.

“For many years I was angry but not lost. We cannot do it alone. We all need a community. I no longer have a label on my forehead. But if I did, it would now read ‘happy’! I hope my story will inspire others to get involved,” beams Don.

“We cannot
do it alone.
**We all need a
community”**





Regional Tenant Volunteers Meetings

The Regional Tenant Volunteers Meetings were held this spring. They gave a chance for Tenant Volunteers and staff to discuss programs and initiatives for tenants.

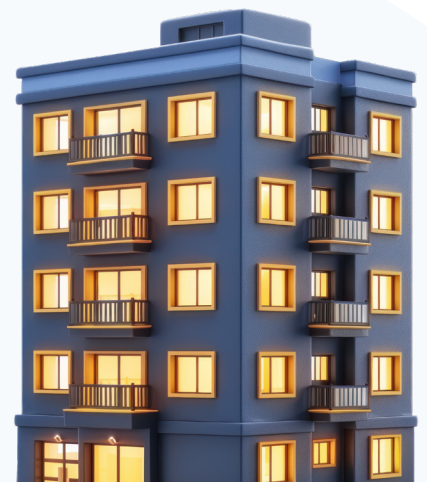
Chief Executive Officer, Tom Hunter, also introduced the new Director of Engagement, Partnerships, and Communications, Deanna Veltri, at the meetings.



Annual Building Planning Meetings

Thank you to all who attended the Annual Building Planning Meetings. All 72 meetings went very well. Community Services Coordinators (CSCs) will now work with Tenant Volunteers to develop the Community Activities Fund (CAF) applications with a focus on the priorities identified by tenants in each building.

Staff are looking at moving this planning to the fall for events happening the following year. This gives more time to complete CAF applications, including the minimum 30-day processing time, so events can start in January 2026.



Garden Guidelines are being developed

More and more Toronto Seniors Housing tenants want to garden.

To make it fair for everyone, TSHC is working with tenants to create new Garden Guidelines. This will make the approach the same in all buildings and give more tenants a chance to garden.

Tenants who wish to garden will need to sign a code of conduct form to make sure everyone understands the guidelines. A gardening committee will also be set up in each building to handle any misunderstandings. This will make gardening fair and fun for everyone. More news to come!



New learning and development sessions for Tenant Volunteers



As part of the Annual Building Planning Meetings, CSCs set up learning sessions on how to complete a CAF application. Coming soon, Tenant Volunteers will be able to take sessions to learn more about the Tenant Volunteer Code of Conduct and Community Connect+.

Great STAC recruitment turnout

Thank you to all the tenants who applied to be on the Senior Tenants Advisory Committee (STAC). We are happy with the enthusiasm to take part. Over 40 tenants applied by the late February deadline and interviews were completed in April.

STAC had many accomplishments in 2024. We look forward to having new members joining the committee in May, alongside current members, as this important work continues.



Leadership changes

A new role for Arlene heading up strategic partnerships

For the past two years, I have held the role of Interim Director, Engagement, Partnerships, and Communications, at TSHC. Taking on this role was challenging as I had not worked as a staff person in a corporation for over 30 years.



Thanks to all the tenants and staff who have been patient with me as I listened, learned, and acted with your voices guiding me. Over the past two years I have listened to and heard many voices.

This helped us to build a foundation of trust and respect. Relationships can only grow at the speed of trust. I hope that the respect, trust, and listening we started to work on together continues and thrives.

Helping to set a foundation for the next stage of TSHC's growth has been a highlight in my career.

There is a new Director now and I am confident that the work we started will

continue under the new leadership. I will stay on to support the strategic partnership work at TSHC on a part-time basis, supporting Tom.

I believe that the best is yet to come.

To have played a small part in this story thus far has been a privilege,

Arlene

Looking forward to joining the team!

Hello everyone,

I am so pleased to be stepping into the role of Director, Engagement, Partnerships, and Communications, with Toronto Seniors Housing. I am very excited to carry on the amazing work that Arlene has done in her time with the organization.

In many ways, it is like coming home. A few years ago, I worked for Toronto Community Housing. I worked on projects with the Seniors Housing Unit, so I am familiar with collaborating with seniors, staff, and tenant volunteers. I look forward to being part of Toronto Seniors Housing and working with seniors again.

In my past work in the public, private, and non-profit sectors, I have focused on affordable housing, policy improvement, and business strategy.

In this role, I will continue the great work by the organization to strengthen tenant engagement, build strategic partnerships, and ensure clear, effective communications.

I look forward to joining tenants, staff, and partners to improve the quality of life for seniors!



Deanna Veltri

TSHC - Director, Engagement, Partnerships, and Communications





Your community at a glance!





Taking time to 'smell the roses'



If ever there was a champion to speak of the health benefits of gardening, there is no one with a 'greener thumb' than Ingrid Collins. As a long-time Tenant Volunteer, Ingrid's joy of gardening cannot be debated.

Ingrid was part of the Tenant Circle that got six large standing planters for the rooftop of her building.

"There are all sorts of studies that show how gardening, being outdoors and surrounded by flowers and nature, has a calming effect," shares Ingrid. "It makes me so happy to see my neighbours, especially those who tend to keep to themselves and stay in their homes, sitting beside the flowers and smiling."

Being a volunteer comes naturally to Ingrid. Besides being a Tenant Volunteer, she sits on the newly formed Garden Guidelines Working Group. Their task is to simplify gardening in TSHC buildings so that everyone has a fair chance to take part and have fun.

Ingrid believes in fairness. She also believes in compassion and putting yourself in the shoes of others to understand what a person is going through.



She learned this the hard way. She was a single mom and raised her son by herself. Due to an error by her landlord, she even experienced homelessness, so she knows what it is to struggle.

“It wasn’t an easy life. I also had to walk away from friends and family as they battled alcoholism and drug addiction. Now having come out from the other side of a tough life, it is about resilience. And of course, enjoying the gardens!” she happily remarks.



“I am helping to make sure the gardens continue to thrive. I know they are an important social connection for tenants,”

Many studies show that gardening has similar good effects on your body, mind, and soul as regular exercise. Studies also say that people who garden may have a stronger immune system as they age and feel less stressed.

“By sitting on the new Garden Guidelines Working Group, I am helping to make sure the gardens continue to thrive. I know they are an important social connection for tenants,” she says.

Gardens support a sense of well-being and harmony. Simply put, gardening gets you moving. It is like going to the gym right outside your window. Or in this case, the rooftop.

Good weather and good actions



Enjoying the spring weather safely

Opening your windows this spring? To stay safe, windows should only be opened slightly, such as the width of your hand. Make sure there is nothing under the window that a child or pet can climb on - it takes very little weight to push through a screen.

Balcony safety

Your balcony is not meant to have temporary walls and screens because they are fire hazards. Please do not throw anything off your balcony, including cigarettes. Use a proper ashtray and make sure all smoking materials are put out.

Call CSU after calling 9-1-1

If you call 9-1-1 for an emergency, please also call the Community Safety Unit (CSU). Our records are not linked with the Toronto Police Service. It is important that the CSU is aware of emergencies so they can prioritize their efforts to keep everyone safe.

Thank you for your honesty!

A huge thank you to tenant Roslyn Welcome! She found an envelope of money in the lobby of her building and told CSU Special Constable, Troy Lalor, about it. The money was returned to its owner safe and sound. Thanks, Roslyn, for your honesty and kindness.



Protect our community



Suspect fraud or wrongdoing by TSHC staff, tenants, vendors, or contractors?

You can report concerns in private without worry, by:



1-866-781-7956 (24 hours a day/7 days a week)



Mitratesh Syntrio, PO Box 11017, Toronto, ON M1E 1N0



Submit by using the secure online form and choosing Toronto Community Housing Corporation as the organization name: **bit.ly/3ERMU5i**

Fraud delays repairs and reduces funding for programs.

What to report:

- Falsely reporting income or household information
- Misuse of community funds
- Tenants subletting units

What not to report:

- Maintenance issues, such as leaks or pests; **instead** contact the Tenant Support Centre (416-945-0800)
- Safety concerns, such as noise or trespassing; **instead** contact the Community Safety Unit (416-921-2323)

For more information, please visit our website

TorontoSeniorsHousing.ca/Report-Fraud



A lifetime of joy and creativity

For tenant John Hodgson, creativity has been part of his world whether he wanted it to be or not! His love of music, art, and entertainment weaved itself through his life even though most of his career was in the corporate world. Born in Scotland, John took an opportunity in his early 20s that brought him to Canada.

“I’m a trained chef, worked in food service management and human resources, but kept getting pulled into music and fashion projects,” he muses. “It’s like the universe knew better!”

He now spends his time as a Tenant Volunteer. His building is full of fellow artists that are eager to give back. Their “Tuesday coffee socials” are such a hit that other Tenant Circles have picked up the idea.

“I am on the board of directors for the International Peace Gardens organization to promote peace and nature on a global scale. I’m also developing a documentary on the birth of the Gay Village,” John proudly shares.

The project is close to John’s heart. Having come out as gay as a young man, John was lucky as he was accepted with open arms by his family.



“I was incredibly fortunate to have gone through life knowing that my being gay was simply part of who I am. For many people who frequented the Gay Village, there was nowhere else to go to safely express themselves. It was a protected community in a time of violence and hate,” he knowingly says.

In the early 1970s, the Gay Village was a refuge for artisans, musicians, and people of all races and cultures and free of persecution because of one’s sexuality.

“Today, we generally take feeling safe for granted.

However, even now there is a growing and deeply-

seated hatred targeting our community members in many

forms. This includes the erosion of our long-fought battle for human rights, to counter hate speech, homophobia, anti-trans behaviour, and the list goes on,” John opens up. “It is critically important to feel safe in your home, in your neighbourhood, and even in your own skin. That’s what Toronto Seniors Housing does for tenants. It makes you feel safe. Shouldn’t we all have that right?”

**“It is critically
important to feel
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and even in your
own skin.”**



Thank you to all volunteers!

THANK
YOU!

National Volunteer Week was April 27 to May 3. This year's theme was Volunteers Make Waves, looking at the power, impact, and importance of both personal and group volunteer efforts.

We know that the Tenant Volunteers at Toronto Seniors Housing build community, make connections, and improve the quality of life for other tenants. We thanked many of these dedicated Tenant Volunteers at the Regional Tenant Volunteers Meetings.

We also know that many seniors find other ways to help their neighbours and communities, both in formal ways with organizations, and in their everyday actions. However you choose to volunteer, we say thank you!



Want advice on aging?

Some TSHC tenants volunteer with WoodGreen's Seniors Advisory Council and have started a podcast called Students of Aging (bit.ly/3GK3fJS). It shares the amazing stories and experiences of seniors as they age. These interesting talks show the diversity of activities and interests of older people - using technology, dealing with change, and finding joy at every stage of life.

You can search Students of Aging online or listen to it on Spotify and Apple podcasts.



Seniors Speak is available in many languages

Call **416-945-0800** to request this document in an alternate language or format.

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Want to be featured in an upcoming newsletter? Prefer to get Seniors Speak in your email inbox? Contact us at **SeniorsSpeak@TorontoSeniorsHousing.ca**.

Get in touch

You can call these numbers 24 hours a day, seven days a week, or reach us via email at **Support@TorontoSeniorsHousing.ca**.

Tenant Support Centre: 416-945-0800

Community Safety Unit: 416-921-2323

Crime Stoppers: 416-222-8477

Acknowledgements

Toronto Seniors Housing values the diversity of our city and the tenants we support. We also acknowledge the history, both positive and negative, that has led to this rich variety of people living together in Toronto.

Please visit **TorontoSeniorsHousing.ca/Acknowledgements** for Toronto Seniors Housing's Land and African Ancestral Acknowledgements.