

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Social supports revitalize neighbourhood

By **STEPHEN SWEET**
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In an area with a bad reputation, one set of properties is slowly starting to change attitudes around.

The San Romanoway revitalization program is an initiative that looks to increase safety as well as provide cultural and social enrichment programs for adults and children, has made a difference in one community.

The properties just north of Finch Avenue West and east of Jane Street were targeted by a study that broke down some of the area's most significant problems.

"Looking at the survey, there was a definite need to look at social issues that were causing such ill within the neighbourhood," said Stephnie Payne, the program's associate director.

"We looked and decided that there needed to be some social support programs in here to give residents a sense of belonging and a sense of ownership."

Beginning modestly with a recreation centre in the basement of one building, the program continued to grow, thanks to government grants and hard work.

"We've got various supports in place," Payne said. "We have an in-house social worker that does individual, group, and domestic violence counselling."

"We also have an active senior program with 68 seniors weekly, as well as a breakfast and after-school program for the children, including a four-food-group meal prepared in-house for dinner."

Getting the younger generations to find alternative sources of entertainment and stay out of trouble is an integral part of the program's social aspect.

"We have a youth program that is driven and led by youths," Payne said. "It gets the kids engaged in activities and staying out of the stairwells or from participating in anti-social behaviour."

"They're provided a space where they've got a recording studio, as well as a lounge with a television and Xbox."

As of right now, there are no vacancies at 25 San Romanoway, an absolute rarity in this area.

"What we do has to make business sense, and in the case of this project, it does," said Robert Weiman, vice-president of corporate development for Greenwin Property Manage-

ment, the company that is in charge of the building.

"There is very little turnover in this building, and with no vacancy, we don't have to reduce our rents for our building in order to fill it."

According to Weiman, normal vacancy rates usually hover around six per cent, but in that area, it can be much higher. This positive situation is a benefit for both the property managers and clients alike.

"The building is able to run with lower operating costs," Weiman said. "When that happens, it makes for a greater return on the investment for the owner, and as a result, ownership value goes up."

Weiman believes that this in turn has helped to lead to a sense of pride for those who reside at 25 San Romanoway, as they take advantage of the programs available to them while living at such a desirable location.

"It's really interesting to go there and see it or walk through the building," Weiman said. "You see the cleanliness of the building. There's no graffiti, no vandalism."

That acts as a major reason why the building is the lone one in that area to have gained certification status from the Fair Rental Policy Organization, having passed several necessary hurdles of quality living in order to do so.

Things have improved greatly in the San Romanoway area.

"The issue of gang-related violence, we don't see it here anymore," Payne said. "We don't see drugs being dealt openly like we did before."

"People are not scared anymore."



Greenwin's San Romanoway

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