



Nina Gorka of the YWCA at the new Davenport Women's Shelter  
Photo: CJ BAEK

## New women's shelter opens in the Annex

Helping our most vulnerable means looking beyond the number of beds

by Jessica Wei

On the last week of January, a new women's shelter opened up at 348 Davenport Rd., adding 56 beds to a system that desperately needs them.

On the day of the shelter open house, the temperature had dropped to a piercing -21 degrees.

The previous week, two homeless women had been found dead: One was discovered in a donation bin at Bloor Street and Dovercourt Road. The other was run over by a garbage truck while she was sleeping on a grate in an alleyway downtown. In a city where homelessness has become an unignorable issue, women's shelters in particular are in a unique position of need – for beds and also for gender-specific community programs.

“Women experience homelessness in a very different way. They experience violence in different ways,” said Nina Gorka, the director of shelters, girls and family programs at the YWCA, which manages the shelter. “Women are often less comfortable accessing co-ed shelters, so they're looking for spaces where they feel safe, and often those are dedicated women-only spaces.”

At press time, the City of Toronto's Daily Shelter Census showed an overnight occupancy rate of 99 per cent for women's shelters and 100 per cent for family shelters.

**“Women experience homelessness in a very different way.”**

Women represented 42 per cent of respondents to the city's 2018 Street Needs Census, but occupy only 29 per cent of single adult drop-in centres (men made up 67 per cent). Transgender, gender nonconforming and two-spirit identifying respondents each represented one per cent of total census respondents.

Dr. Barbara Landau, a lawyer and family mediator who attended the shelter's open house, was one of the people who lobbied for it to open. Based on first impressions, she was pleased with the new shelter, which was previously a hastily pulled together emergency respite centre. She was particularly impressed by the staff and the programming.

“You're going to need connections for health care, for mental health care, for retraining, helping people to get into the employment market,” said Landau. “You're going to need to think beyond the six months.”

Gorka's team is currently looking into running workshops around topics like housing searches, self-esteem and harm reduction.

The pet-friendly shelter welcomes women and people who identify as transgender and gender non-binary of over 16 years of age. They expect to be at capacity by the end of February.

**Update: Davenport shelter opened Jan 23 and was at capacity by mid-February**

Access to safe, affordable housing is a human right.

## YWCA Toronto Shelter and Housing programs

As one of the largest providers of housing targeted to women and their families in Canada, YWCA Toronto shelters and houses nearly 1,700 women and children annually through:

- 2 violence against women shelters
- 2 shelters for homeless women
- 547 units of permanent housing

### EMERGENCY SHELTER FROM VIOLENCE

YWCA Toronto provides immediate safety and free shelter for women and their children fleeing abuse. Through two sites, we provide on-site trauma and mental health support, addictions counselling, parent support, and employment counselling. We also provide necessities upon arrival and throughout their stay.

#### YWCA Toronto Arise Shelter

A 27-bed emergency shelter for women, with or without children, who are fleeing abusive relationships. Arise provides a safe and supportive shelter environment, providing women and their children a space to move forward after leaving an abusive relationship.

#### YWCA Toronto Women's Shelter

The shelter provides a safe refuge to women and their children fleeing violence. The shelter offers emergency space for ten families and can house up to 33 people.

### HOMELESS SHELTER

YWCA Toronto operates two free shelters for homeless women and people who identify as transgender and gender non-binary and are over 16 years of age and in immediate crisis. We help them get out of crisis and move on to independence and safety.

#### 1st Stop Woodlawn Shelter

The shelter provides space for 62 youth and adults, and includes 12 transitional beds for those who need additional support transitioning from shelter towards independent housing. The building is shared with 72 permanent housing tenants.

#### Davenport Shelter

A newly opened (Jan 2019) pet-friendly emergency shelter run by YWCA Toronto. This shelter currently houses 55 beds and will soon expand to 80.

### PERMANENT HOUSING

YWCA Toronto provides safe, affordable and permanent homes for single women and women with children who are homeless or fleeing violence. In addition to a safe place to live, we offer community programs and support to help women and families heal and grow.

#### Pape Avenue Apartments

A 77-unit rent-g geared-to-income apartment building for single women and women with children.

#### Bergamot Apartments

A 68-unit affordable apartment building for single women and women with children. It also offers 64 affordable childcare spots to the community.

#### 1st Stop Woodlawn Residence

Provides 72 private rental rooms for long-term accommodation. The building also houses a shelter for women and transitional housing for women who require additional support.

#### Elm Centre

Includes 300 units of permanent housing for three different residents groups: 165 affordable rental units, 50 units for Indigenous women and their families (including 10 women-led families fleeing violence), and 85 units for women with mental health and substance use needs.



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87 Elm Street, Toronto, ON M5G 0A8  
416.961.8100 | ywca-toronto.org

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