

Women's shelter given fresh start

Written by Stacey Mastel, on 05-03-2009 00:50

A Calgary women's shelter got a fresh start with help from a new non-profit organization called Elevate last weekend.

The organization's members got together Feb. 28 to paint Gateway Place, a house that will act as a Brenda Strafford women's shelter and hold six Calgary women recovering from violence and abuse.

"[Guests] walk in with their one grocery bag and we make them feel invited and welcome," said Maureen Fraser, volunteer coordinator with Brenda Strafford House. "It is groups like [Elevate] that give them a fresh start."

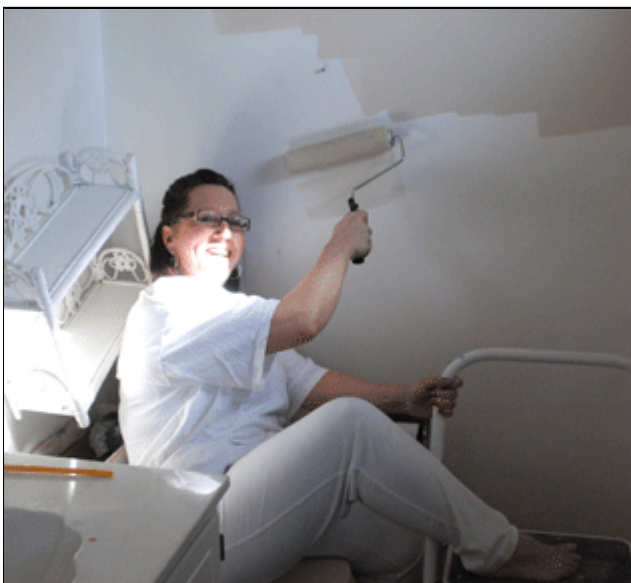
Elevate members could be heard laughing excitedly and chatting from various areas of the house as they rolled on the beige paint. The could be seen crouching on the floor, up on ladders, and even sitting on a toilette to paint the bathroom.



Elevate is a women's only charter group of the Canadian Progress Club and works toward poverty reduction. Similar to a Rotary Club, Elevate was created just under two years ago.

"Our mandate is to help lift families out of poverty," said Karen Cooke, part founder of Elevate and next year's national Canadian Progress Club president. "This is the kind of stuff I love to do, get down and dirty."

Suzanne Ebelher, a board member of Elevate says that getting out and doing things such as painting this women's shelter makes them feel like they are actually doing something to help those in need.



"They [shelter guests] are in this situation because of low self-esteem," Fraser said. "So anything positive to bring them up is great."

Fraser says a lot of women come from good well-off families and when they leave their husband they are left with nothing. The shelter relies completely upon donations and she says something is not always better than nothing.

"If you wouldn't want to use it, then we don't want it," said Fraser when talking about household products being donated. "Let's not insult them."

Cherry Blais, a member of Elevate, gets comfy while painting one of the bathrooms in the Brenda Strafford women's shelter.

The women are allowed to stay at Gateway Place for six months while they achieve goals such as resumes, getting a job, or going back to school. During their stay they pay a monthly rent of \$250.

Photo: Stacey Mastel

“When you get a woman that says she is never going to let [domestic violence] happen to her or her kids again, it is like wow,” Fraser said.

Billy-Joe Kaye is the support worker for Gateway Place and spends 32 hour a week with the women. She says it is amazing to see the women achieve their goals and move into an apartment of their own with the help of the Calgary Housing Company.

“Thanks so much to the volunteers,” Kaye said. “It is overwhelming.” She says that it is women like those in Elevate that can help to mend the lives of women staying at the shelter.

Elevate has 25 members who either met each other through business or personal connections. Recently the group raised over \$55,000 for Aspen’s Empowering Families Initiative.

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