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SUPPORTING SOCIAL PURPOSE R.E. DEVELOPMENT

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A training program provided by the Infrastructure Institute at the University of Toronto's School of Cities provides assistance and advice for non-profit organizations that are seeking to redevelop their existing properties. Inspired by research conducted by the Institute, the objective of the program, organizers say, is to provide valuable support at the pre-development stage for non-profits that lack the necessary institutional expertise to redevelop their land holdings.

Since September, non-profit organizations from across Southern Ontario have taken part in the Infrastructure Institute's Social Purpose Real Estate (SPRE) Accelerator Program, meeting on a bi-weekly basis to participate in workshops and receive mentoring to hone their ideas for redeveloping their properties. The six-month program will culminate in March 2023, with a 'pitch night' where program participants will have an opportunity to engage directly with potential sponsors and development partners on their redevelopment proposals.

Infrastructure Institute

director and University of Toronto geography and planning professor Matti Siemiatycki says the SPRE program is intended to encourage non-profits to develop the spaces where they offer their services to better fit their social purpose and to provide these organizations with the know-how to successfully redevelop their existing properties to improve upon service delivery.

"The focus is to try to support groups that have an incredible social mission and in many cases are providing

great public services to their communities to help build spaces fit-for-purpose that meet [service-delivery] goals for their current users," Siemiatycki told NRU.

"In this moment where there's a housing crisis and a need for organizations to be able to rebuild and expand services they already provide, we saw an opportunity to develop this program that would enable non-profit groups to engage in social purpose real estate."

Since it was initially launched as a series of online

workshops two years ago, the SPRE program has grown from providing basic advice to non-profits interested in pursuing redevelopment projects to providing more focused training for 'organizational readiness'. The accelerator component represents the latest stage of development for SPRE and focuses on getting program participants that are around 70 per cent of the way to developing their vision even closer to the stage of implementation, focusing on meatier subjects such as creating pro forma financial statements and providing one-on-one mentorship.

"We've built this familiarity with our [SPRE] programming and a bit of an ecosystem that has helped us to gain awareness

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Infographic showing the model for the Social Purpose Real Estate (SPRE) Accelerator Program offered by the Infrastructure Institute at the University of Toronto's School of Cities. The program provides support for non-profit organizations that are seeking to redevelop their land holdings to expand social services and add housing. As part of SPRE, program participants are partnered with industry mentors and potential sponsors and partners to make their vision for redevelopment a reality.

SOURCE: INFRASTRUCTURE INSTITUTE/UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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and attention about what we're doing," Siemiatycki said.

While seeking to expand their existing facilities, SPRE accelerator participants are also exploring how they might find opportunities to include other land-uses such as affordable housing development within their project proposals, program lead for the Infrastructure Institute **Alix Aylen** said.

"We wanted to not just focus on one land approach to social purpose real estate, but really invite organizations that are working on a variety of projects into the space," Aylen told *NRU*.

As part of the program, SPRE participants are partnered with industry experts to navigate the often-rocky terrain of pre-development, such as understanding the nuances of municipal official planning and zoning requirements and locating government funding sources such as those provided through organizations like the **Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)**.

"We're trying to connect organizations to the people and the resources that they need so that they can say, 'Okay, this is the approach that we're taking with our funding or concept

visuals, and now we have people we can go to who can help further develop those aspects,'" Aylen said.

Located at 43 Christie Street, the **Christie Refugee Welcome Centre** is a 76-bed emergency shelter for refugee claimants that is based out of three converted properties which were originally built in the 1920s. Established in 1989 by World Vision Canada, the refugee welcome centre became independent in 2007. Approximately half of the shelter's clients are children and beyond providing housing, the Welcome Centre offers dedicated after-school programs and other initiatives that

focus on the needs of refugee families. Because the site was not purpose-built to be a shelter, it lacks amenities like private washrooms and is not accessible.

In addition to the three properties which house the shelter as well as staff offices and a kitchen and dining area, the site includes a large surface parking lot, which could be redeveloped to expand service offerings as well as to provide additional housing, **Christie Refugee Welcome Centre** donor development and operations specialist **Manny Wong** said.

"We know that there are long waiting lists in Toronto for refugee families to not only find a shelter bed but also [to find] transitional housing which is hugely lacking," Wong told *NRU*. "So, we know there's an opportunity to do more to help meet that need."

Wong admits that prior to taking part in SPRE, the refugee shelter staff and its board of directors were 'newbies' to

redevelopment. He says taking part in the program has been an eye-opening experience.

"The SPRE program has been great, from the resources they're able to provide to the connections to experts in the industry who are able to help us with all the different pieces," Wong said.

Through its involvement with SPRE, Wong says shelter staff and refugee welcome centre board members are gaining more confidence that their 'pie in the sky' idea for redevelopment can become a reality.

"It's given us confidence," Wong said. "Without that guidance [provided by SPRE], you're fumbling around in the dark and learning as you go. But now, we're confident we can do this."

"I see it almost like a big jigsaw puzzle," Wong added. "Eventually it's all going to come together." 🌟



Photograph of the Christie Refugee Welcome Centre, an emergency shelter for refugee claimants which operates out of three converted properties at 43 Christie Street. Staff members from the Centre have enrolled in the Social Purpose Real Estate Accelerator Program to pursue options for the redevelopment of their site to expand the number of beds it can accommodate, improve and modernize shelter facilities as well as build new housing.

SOURCE: CHRISTIE REFUGEE WELCOME CENTRE