



In October, we sat down with Caitlin Chevreau and Andrew Genge to talk about what “support” means in Indwell. Caitlin has worked in Apartment Supports at Indwell’s Perkins Centre in Hamilton since 2012. Andrew is now Program Manager at Harvey Woods Lofts after working as Assistant Program Manager at Blossom Park, Indwell’s group home in Woodstock.

Indwell: First of all, describe your tenants and residents.

C: There isn’t a typical tenant – they’re from 20 years old to 65 or even older. They’re from many different backgrounds. The common thread is that they’ve all had difficulty keeping housing in the past, whether for financial reasons or mental health breakdown or a combination.

A: It’s very hard to generalize: some are from supportive families who want their adult child to experience independence, others have come from the shelter system, lodging homes, or low quality or unaffordable apartments. All share a drive to gain independence, whether it be for the first time or to regain it, to ‘find’ themselves again.

For both of you, “support” is part of your job. But support means different things to different people. What is support in your context?

A: The short answer is that we support people who want to live independently. I find I most support people by

giving them the confidence or the ability to advocate for themselves.

C: Sometimes I say I’m mid-way between a landlord and a social worker. All apartment tenants live independently. They cook their meals, clean their apartments, and manage their own medications. We’re supporting them in being able to maintain that lifestyle. Within that, one of the biggest things I do is help tenants problem solve whether it’s maintenance, something with their mental health, or issues between tenants.

Indwell builds community. There can be a lot of challenges when tenants arrive in community. “How do I live with other people? Now that I have a stable place to live, how do I keep myself stably housed?” After time, it moves on to: “How do I thrive in this place where I live? How do I build a life outside of this as well? How do I find volunteer opportunities or go back to school?” We help with all of these questions.

A: For the group home, our support is a bit more hands-on. We administer medication and provide all the meals – that can be a big chunk of what people struggle with. With those tasks out of the way, there’s more opportunity to learn skills, be it budgeting, hygiene, or personal skills like conflict resolution.

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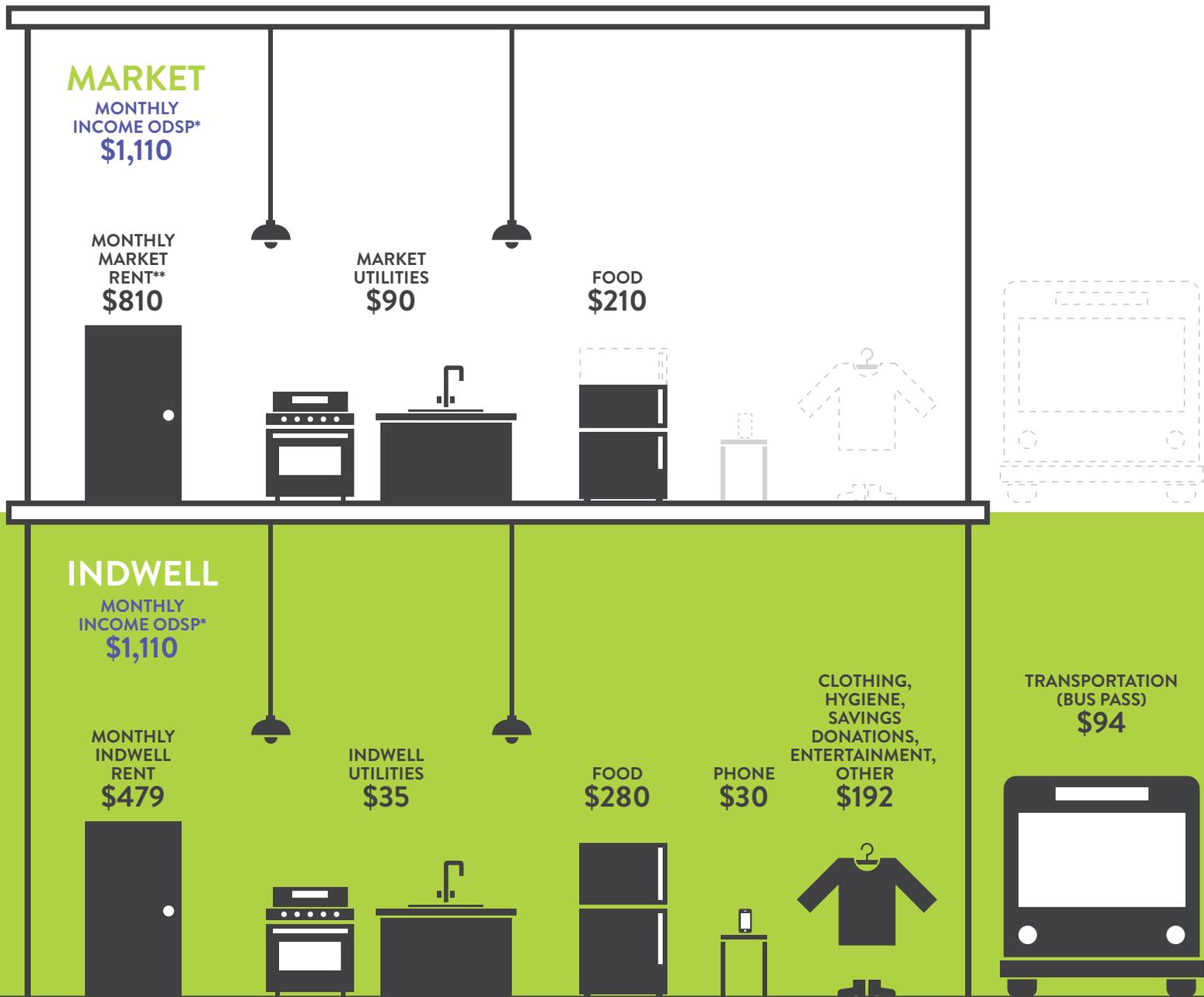
THE DIFFERENCE AFFORDABILITY MAKES

Indwell helps people who are living in poverty due to the effects of permanent disability. Nearly all our tenants live on ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program). This funding requires extensive proof and medical diagnosis that the disability is permanent.

However, the ODSP allowance is far below the actual costs of living. With Indwell's help, our tenants no

longer "go without" basic essential items. Indwell tenants can afford to eat, meet their basic requirements of clothing and hygiene, and get around the city. This is a permanent solution that usually keeps people out of crisis and removes dependence on emergency services like foodbanks, soup kitchens and clothes closets.

To keep rents affordable for our tenants, Indwell seeks partners to give generously through donations, grants and volunteers. Go to the back page to begin giving, to increase your giving, or to get more information about donating or volunteering.



*ODSP = Ontario Disability Support Program

** CMHC Average Market Rent, April 2015, Hamilton ON

Can you tell a story about when you were able to make a difference in someone's life?

A: This tenant had a supportive family and community contacts, but lacked the self-efficacy to live independently. She allowed herself to be tied to others' emotions; if someone else was in a downturn or difficult state, we'd find her in the same situation. As her primary support worker, we talked about goals, but independent living was barely on her radar. Budgeting and healthy eating weren't issues, but confidence was. Eventually, I convinced her to cook lunch for the entire house. Which she did. For 25 very picky people! She regained confidence. And now she's living in one of our independent apartments.

C: The tenant I'm thinking of is known as the friendliest person in the building. He had tried to live independently, but it always ended with him being taken advantage of and in serious financial trouble. He had worked, but again, often in abusive situations. He loves to tell how Indwell and living at Perkins has changed his life. He's been able to deal with his past trauma through counselling, with help from New Hope Church. We were also able to arrange a trustee at Mission Services, where he learned how to budget. Now he's debt-free and even saving!

What's the best part of your job?

C: The little interactions that we have every day with our tenants that show that we have real relationships. We're part of a community together and we go through all sorts of things together. Even if I'm having a challenging time with a tenant, the next day we'll be able to laugh together, cook together or have a good conversation. That's what life is – real relationship. That's what I like.

A: Very similar. At Indwell we promote community. I find we're welcomed into the tenants' community. We're not living there, but are very much part of it. The tenants will try to make me feel better. When a tenant feels that comfortable with me, it's all worth it. You know that they have found a place for themselves. This is their home.

You've found that actually works, creating that sense of home?

C: Yes, and when you have that rapport with people, a base relationship, then when things aren't going so well, you can still have the conversation that challenges them.

A: I really like that. It speaks to respect, that our tenants don't just see us as landlords, but respect who we are. So if we do speak to them about something negative or something that shouldn't be happening, they respect us.

C: It helps in the hard times, where tenants aren't happy with you or your decisions.

So, you have hard days. What is the most difficult part of your job?

A: A tenant's disappointment is probably the hardest thing for me – they're waiting for a phone call from their daughter, or expecting to get an appointment or a cheque in the mail. I know why they were hoping for that, and now I can hurt with them. It does help me to support them more.

C: I would agree. A lot of our tenant's struggles are really complex, whether it's addictions or hard times with mental health. It's challenging because there is often not a lot we can do to "fix" these problems. You can do little things to support, stand by them and advocate for them, but ultimately getting through those struggles is a long process and watching that unfold is hard.

One of the biggest things I do is help tenants problem-solve.

When you're going through difficult times, what gets you up in the morning?

C: Two things: First, the hope that things can change, and it won't always be like this. It goes back to having the base relationship with that person. Because as you're watching them go through a hard time, you still know them and absolutely care about them. Second, the community is a part of it. There will be parts of my day that are really tough, and then there will be a beautiful moment where I'll see other tenants interacting, or I'll be able to laugh with somebody or see someone accomplish something they'd been working on.

A: Hope. Hope and the confidence in the community; knowing that I'm not the only one that's going to be there for them. By the time I get back in the morning, they'll have talked with their friends and neighbours. We're just a part of the supports, not the whole thing. We've seen those relationships develop to where we're seeing tenants helping each other solve problems now. Obviously that's the goal. It's the community rallying together to help each other.

HOPE & HOMES BANQUET

Liuna Station, Hamilton
Thursday, June 2, 2016
Reception: 5:30, Dinner: 6:15

RSVP by May 27, 2016
info@indwell.ca
866-529-0454



Indwell's Board President, Trevor Horzelenberg, recognized Henrietta Hielema for her years of service to Indwell's board at the annual Celebration Dinner in Woodstock, November 5, 2015.

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donors each month to sustain
the supports that Caitlin and
Andrew provide our tenants.*

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to sustain day-to-day
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Cut off and return to Indwell

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