



The women at Next Door will keep warm this season by a wood burning fireplace.

RIGHT: This beautiful century home was donated filled with furniture and cosy living spaces to share.

NEXT DOOR

BY SHELBY HILSON // STYLED BY ANDREA RAMACIERI // PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY MACKAY

An incredible gift has been given to our community – the gift of safety, support and a second chance. Received in the form of a spectacular home, this gift was given to the women who need it most. *Continued on page 68*





A lovely sitting area off the kitchen is a great space for curling up with a book and cup of tea.

LEFT: A phenomenally restored kitchen is perfectly suited to a full house and boasts a great view of the yard.

BELOW LEFT: Christine MacLean is the Next Door Therapist and will be holding weekly sessions with the women living here.

BELOW RIGHT: Alison FitzGerald and Jennifer Ivans share excitement about the new program that Ivans hopes to benefit from.

For nearly 20 years, **My Friend's House** in Collingwood has helped abused women and their children throughout the Georgian Triangle. Thousands of women have found refuge there, been counseled there and have been given the tools to survive.

What the organization has struggled to provide though, is time to heal – until now.

Welcome to **Next Door**. This unbelievable home with nearly 4,000 sq. ft. of living space was anonymously donated to My Friend's House so supporters could do just that; establish a program that gives abused women the time, support and environment needed to turn their lives around.

When **Alison FitzGerald**, Executive Director at My Friend's House, received the call from the donor asking if they could use the property, she couldn't believe it. When she saw how wonderful the home was – fully restored and renovated – she really couldn't believe it.

As thrilled as she was, she wasn't sure if the organization could afford to support the new program, even with the donation of the house.

Then, Status of Women Canada came through with a grant of more than \$200,000 over three years, and the program came to life.

"There is a group of women who truly don't believe that a better life is possible because of the abuse and trauma in their lives," said FitzGerald in her speech at the open house. "We believed this gift was an opportunity for My Friend's House to create a space where women could truly be given time to heal."

When asked the reasons for donating the home, the donor says, "I just thought it would be good for the community and I've been pretty lucky so I wanted to give back."

The donor has always supported My Friend's House, originally donating money for sheltered women to buy Christmas gifts for their children.

"I hope it [the property] helps some of the women who suffer long term from abuse," he says. "It would be great if some of those women could be rehabilitated."

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RIGHT: With lots of country charm, a beautiful washroom with soaker tub adds to the home's relaxing environment.

BELOW: One of eight cosy bedrooms at Next Door. Art by Bonnie Fox.

Nobody has higher hopes than **Jennifer Ivans** though. She is not only the first woman selected to benefit from the new program and move into the home, but she is much of the inspiration behind the program as well.

Ivans spent most of her childhood in foster homes after being removed from her abusive father's care. Since then, she has encountered physical, sexual and emotional abuse in relationships with both foster families and men. She first went to My Friend's House in 2008 and then again a year later after struggling through another abusive relationship.

For Ivans, this is a once in a lifetime chance to change her life for the better.

"My hope is to heal," she says. "To learn how to go on with my life the way it's meant to be, to get out on my own, to take responsibility for myself and love myself."

Like all women who participate in the Next Door program, Ivans can stay in the home for three months up to a full year. She is counting on the weekly therapy sessions and lessons on living with others to help her work through her past so she can create a better future for herself; perhaps as a support worker for women like herself one day. *Continued on page 72*



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An outdoor oasis where Jennifer Ivans plans to spend lots of time reflecting and journaling.

TOP RIGHT: Program Director Kathy Marchand will provide daily support and conflict resolution to the women at Next Door.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Contractor Rick Fuhre brought both buildings up to code and was very generous with his time.

From the moment she stepped through the door of her new home, Ivans knew it was right. “It feels like when you’re a kid,” she says. “Like coming in from playing in the snow all day and putting on flannel pyjamas and a warm blanket.”

Though the home was donated in immaculate shape, a few things needed to be done to bring it up to code, which was made possible with funding from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and **Rick Fuhre** of **Fuhre Construction**. Rick worked with Doug Plummer at **Service One** to get rid of some mould in both the home and the coach house, and Robert Steller at **Breathing Easy** to improve overall air quality. **CS Energy & Mechanical** did the HVAC work and **Lorne Bunn Electric** completed the electrical.

Rick and his team divided the upper floor into two bedrooms and worked with **C.C. Tatham & Associates** and **Blue Mountain Welding**

& **Machine Shop** to design and install a fire escape. He also put a new roof on the coach house and coordinated the alarm system (**Huronia Alarms**).

Between the two buildings, Next Door is able to house and support up to eight women at once with eight bedrooms, two full kitchens, a handful of living spaces and washrooms, and a spacious yard gorgeously landscaped with a large pond, courtyard and plenty of privacy.

FitzGerald couldn’t be happier with Fuhre Construction’s work and their generosity with their time.

“I wanted to help out here,” says Rick “I always like to help community efforts and this is a good cause.”

Kathy Marchand, Next Door’s Program Coordinator, will be the staff member spending the most time in the house at three days per week. “It’s exciting to be a part of this,” she says as she explains that there is not another program like it in the province. *Continued on page 74*



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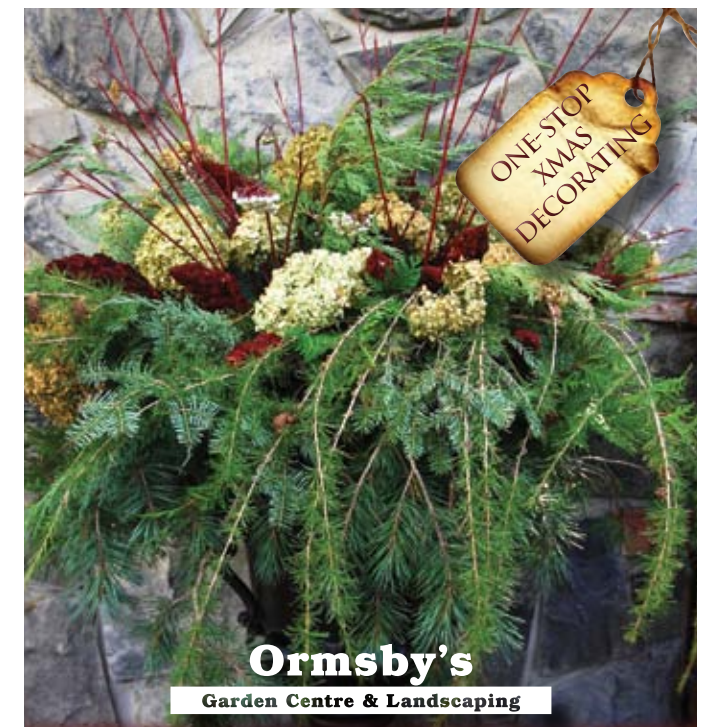
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Kathy has spent most of her adult life working in shelters in Simcoe County, but has never been a part of something quite like this. “It’s just amazing that we’ve been given the opportunity to run this program,” she says.

Ursula Abbott couldn’t agree more. As the Chair of My Friend’s House Fundraising Committee, she is responsible for reaching out to the several communities the organization serves and for raising \$180,000 a year to help maintain the support services they offer.

“We’re hoping that the members of communities served will see what a great program this is and will find it in their hearts to donate.”

Visit <http://myfriendshouse.ca> to contribute to My Friend’s House and the Next Door program. **OH**

OUR HOMES and Next Door would like to extend our thanks to Smarts Flowers for providing beautiful arrangements for our photo shoot. Eclectika Galerie-Boutique (705.812.0627) provided original art for the walls. If you see a piece of artwork in this feature that you love, a portion of the sale will be donated to Next Door.



LEFT: The living room in the coach house offers yet another warm, relaxing space to enjoy.

TOP: A second kitchen in the coach house is a great space for women to gather and prepare meals.

ABOVE: Board member Ursula Abbott is proud of the community’s support for Next Door and hopes they continue to donate to such a great cause.



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