

# JFS supported housing project

By Marcie Klein

Two exciting new community partnerships have allowed the Jewish Family Services Mental Health team to refresh and renovate our supervised apartments for people living with mental illness - and to embark on the development of a new shared housing program targeting vulnerable members of our community who need safe and affordable housing.

**Operation Apartment Renewal**, in collaboration with Vanier College's Special-Care Counseling department, brings a team of first-year special-care counseling students armed with paint, rollers and lots of energy to the *Super-vised Apartment* project for serious renovation on a tight budget. It is an opportunity for the students to complete the 10 hours of volunteer community work they must do as one of the requirements for their field practice course. For our residents, it is affirmation that they deserve better living conditions.

The **JFS Homeshare Project**, a new program made possible through a grant from the Claridge foundation and modeled on the very successful *L'Abri en ville* housing program, is intended to give vulnerable adult members of the community, an opportunity to live with others in an environment promoting autonomy, dignity and support. The residents of this program will be those who require a semi-autonomous living situation, meaning that they are able to live independently but at the same time they need support and assistance related to life management skills, such as budgeting, meal preparation and care of their apartments.

***"I could not believe it was the same apartment!"***



Located in the Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhood, the supervised apartments are very small, old and in dire need of repairs. Residents stay because of the quality support services they get from JFS and the low rents, but the actual apartments leave a lot to be desired.

Every academic semester, one apartment will be selected and taken over by the renovation team, led by the JFS supported housing coordinator Barbara Dunnigan and community worker John Quesnel. There are 19 apartments. The goal is to create a clean, safe, comfortable and updated living space of which residents can be proud.

Our first Apartment Renewal candidate, Pat, sent to a friend's place for the weekend of the big job, was delighted with the results when she returned. "I was deeply surprised and thrilled! I could not believe it was the same apartment," she said. The team brought in new furnishings, bed linens and window treatments - all courtesy of generous community donations - and replaced kitchen counters and tiled floors. When the building owner saw the completed apartment, "he was so impressed," said Barbara Dunnigan, "that he decided to replace the old carpeting throughout the apartment - something he had originally refused to do."

The team is now accepting and storing donations of paint, furnishings and household items - to be used in upcoming apartment renewals.

JFS plans to set up a couple homeshare units per year in three-bedroom apartments or duplexes, with three residents in each unit. Each resident will have his or her own bedroom and share all common areas. The service will include weekly house meetings and individual support for residents from the co-ordinator and from a team of volunteers. Volunteers will assist in cleaning, budgeting, cooking and in organizing leisure activities.

Target date for the project is the spring of 2005. *L'Abri en ville*, a project set up by the InterChurch Social Service Planning Committee 13 years ago, has been collaborating with JFS to help us replicate its model and adapt it to the needs of the Jewish community. Synagogues are being approached for help with volunteer recruitment in their congregations and donations of furnishings for the homeshare units. JFS is also on the lookout for affordable duplexes or three-bedroom apartments in Montreal's west end, which would be available as of May, 2005.



**Pat in her renovated appartement**

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