

CANADIAN

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HELPING RESIDENTS R.I.S.E ABOVE

Skyline's unique tenant assistance program

by Erin Ruddy

With more than 200 properties across eight provinces, Skyline Living has welcomed tenants from all walks of life and been privy to the countless circumstances that can lead to financial distress. From sudden illness, to divorce, to the current global pandemic, times of misfortune are inevitable.

For this reason, the company launched a unique tenant assistance program in 2018, now called R.I.S.E. (Reach, Impact, Support, Elevate), which uses mediation and financial aid to assist those affected by income loss through no fault of their own. In its first year of operation, the program helped more than 150 struggling tenants skirt eviction and remain in their homes.

"We have a responsibility to help our tenants, especially when they fall on hard times," says R. Jason Ashdown, Co-Founder and Chief Sustainability Officer, Skyline Group of Companies. "Without our tenants—our customers—we wouldn't be in business."

On June 25, 2020, the firm was named Rental Housing Provider of the Year by the Canadian Federation of Apartment Associations (CFAA) for the ongoing assistance it provides to hundreds of tenants. In 2019, Skyline effectively reduced its total evictions by 25 per cent and saved \$400,000 in lost rent, vacancy, legal fees, and eviction costs. "The math doesn't lie. We are saving homes, and the investment is paid back tenfold," Ashdown says.

Among the tenants who've benefitted from the R.I.S.E program are a man who suffered a

heart attack; a woman recovering from a car accident; a cancer patient; a mother fleeing an abusive relationship; and many more. And now, as COVID-19 continues to disrupt the lives of all Canadians, Ashdown says the program has seen a significant rise in applicants.

"We launched our program in late 2018 from the simple standpoint that it is the right thing to do," he remarks. "We were offering tenant assistance and saving homes long before COVID-19, and we're thankful the program was already in place when the pandemic happened, and we were able to hit the ground running."

Ashdown urges other landlords to consider implementing their own similar programs—particularly as Bill 184 continues to stir up controversy in Ontario, with many tenant groups fearing a surge in evictions is headed our way.

"Skyline Living has always believed in finding solutions that promote conversation, mediation, and relationship building between tenants and their rental housing providers," says Ashdown. "In part, Bill 184 will improve the landlord-tenant mediation and resolution process. Our internal Tenant Support Team [which facilitates the R.I.S.E. program] was

built several years ago for that exact purpose; the team is empowered to assist our tenants in finding any number of resources they may need should they fall upon difficult times. In our years of experience as a rental housing provider, we understand that we and our tenants want the exact same things—well run, well maintained, safe and enjoyable buildings to live in."

How the program works:

R.I.S.E. is open to any of Skyline's 50,000+ tenants across Canada who have fallen on hard times and are in need of support—whether it's financial relief, patience or direction. Steps include:

- Working with the tenant to assess their specific needs;
- Putting together a Community Resources Package to direct the tenant to any external resources that may provide financial relief or support;
- If outside resources do not provide sufficient support, Skyline helps the tenant complete a Relief Fund application;
- If the R.I.S.E Committee approves the application, that tenant is provided a pre-determined relief funding package. 🙏