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Home Beautiful

Artwork enhances emergency-housing apartment

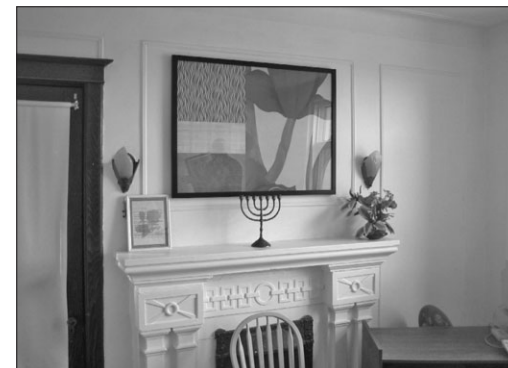
By **FRANCES GOODMAN PELLATT**
Special to The CJN

It is not remarkable that Passover, the holiday commemorating the exodus of Jews from slavery, coincides with spring, when we anticipate new beginnings and clean our homes?

Home is a haven, a place where all are safe and where we can restore ourselves from the daily grind of life. Where we can sit amid our belongings and enjoy the serenity of our tranquil surroundings and furnishings, including our objects



The Jewish Women International of Canada's emergency-housing apartment in Montreal had bare walls before it was adorned with artwork.



The emergency-housing apartment was enhanced with artwork supplied by the Art For Healing Foundation.

d'art. But what if home is not a panacea? What if it is always in turmoil because a partner is abusive – verbally, physically, or both? What if you have to escape from your home in a hurry, without being able to take with you any special possessions?

Much like our ancestors who ran from Egypt with little but the clothes on their backs, many women, with their children, find themselves running from their homes for their own safety.

For more than two decades, Jewish Women International of Canada (JWIC), a non-profit organization, has been working to help women who want to leave abusive relationships. In 1989, it opened its first Alternative Short Term Emergency Housing (ASTEH) apartment in Toronto, then it opened an ASTEH apartment in Montreal in 1994; in Winnipeg in 1995, and in Vancouver in 2003.

The ASTEH apartments are safe houses, with alarm systems, in secret locations. Professional and volunteer support is provided for the families living in them.

Through private donors and fundraisers, such as the Walk-a-Thon on May 4, JWIC maintains and operates these apartments. Clients are referred to JWIC by the local Jewish family services, and a woman and her children can remain in the apartment for up to three months, sometimes longer, while she plans for the future.

“Each apartment is an all-kosher housing facility that provides anonymity... and is an alternative to a public shelter,” says Liat Lev-Ary Goldstein, JWIC program specialist and fundraiser.

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Happy Passover

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Homes for abused women

Continued from page 34

The apartments are equipped with the necessities of life, including furniture, linens, games and toys for children. The kitchen is stocked with food and cleaning supplies when each new client moves in.

The Montreal apartment recently underwent redecorating, for which JWIC partnered with the Art for Healing Foundation. The foundation, started in 2003, is dedicated to bringing the healing power of art and art education to hospitals, hospices and shelters. The organization's founders, Earl Pinchuk and Gary Blair, believe that art can help heal souls.

"When Liat contacted us in the summer of 2007, both Gary and I were immediately interested in this project, as JWIC is a wonderful organization helping women and their children in crisis," Pinchuk says.

Although most of their projects have been in large hospitals, they liked the intimacy of the ASTEH endeavour and wanted to help in any way they could. The foundation supplied JWIC with 24 reproductions to adorn the apartment, and Pinchuk and Blair lent their expertise in arranging the artwork "so as to provide a more nourishing atmosphere for those who find themselves as clients of JWIC," Pinchuk says.

Lev-Ary Goldstein, on behalf of JWIC,

expressed deep gratitude to the foundation and its co-founders for their generosity of spirit.

"It was a pleasure working with them," she says. "Their thoughtfulness, attention to details and professional conduct made the experience very smooth and pleasant."

Tzipie Freedman, JWIC regional director, says: "Now, each room of the [Montreal] apartment has artwork on all the non-window walls – the two bedrooms, the living room, the kitchen, the bathroom and the hallways.

"It's all colour-co-ordinated, the frames match and the whole thing looks great. The apartment is so much more cheery and vibrant, and I'm sure our future ASTEH clients will love it."

JWIC is fortunate that the foundation found a donor to cover the cost of the artwork, framing and installation for the Montreal ASTEH apartment. Plans are now in the works to do a similar renovation for the Toronto ASTEH apartment.

For more information about the JWIC May 4 Walk-a-thon, which marks its 10th anniversary this year, contact the JWIC office at 514-487-2330 or visit the website at www.jwiccanada.com

The Art for Healing Foundation can be contacted through its website at www.artforhealingfoundation.org.