

Knowledge centre opens for underprivileged women

Friday, 14 October 2011

By Roy Toes

A knowledge centre dedicated to underprivileged women gaining computer skills has opened in Centretown, thanks to a grant from the Aviva Community Fund.

“Our main priority is to encourage these women to re-enter society. We want to give them the skills to do so,” says Melanie Birnbom, the webmaster and the creator of the centre.

“These women have had so many strikes against them and it’s about time their luck turns around.”

The centre, is part of The Well, a drop-in program at the Church of St. John the Evangelist on Elgin Street, and had its official opening recently.

“In today’s climate it is nearly impossible to get a job without any computer experience. If we want to get these women back into society, a knowledge centre is essential,” says Scott Sleightholm, an insurance broker involved with the project.

“When I first came here, it was just an empty room with two wall sockets in it,” says Birnbom.

The centre has come a long way since work started on it in June of this year.

It is bright yellow and features seven computers with Internet access.



There is even a spot for people with disabilities, which features a computer with speech recognition software. Some self-help computer literature is stacked on a shelf.

Sleightholm’s employers, Smith Petrie Carr & Scott, had proposed the idea of setting up a knowledge hub at the Well to the Aviva Community Fund in 2010.

The fund, which donates \$1 million every year to well-pitched causes, picked the idea and donated \$25,000 to create the centre.

“Amazing! Thank you.” The dining room is covered with such messages of gratitude to Aviva and everybody who helped. All of the women in the room seemed eager to learn more about the computers, approaching people for lessons and tours.

“Donating money to such causes and seeing the results, makes my job a lot more fun”, says Neil MacLeod, an Aviva manager, who came from Toronto just to see the knowledge centre.

