

Media release:



Ground-breaking transitional home for LGBTQI2S youth to open December 1
The Friends of Ruby Home offers a unique in-house mental health model tailored to LGBTQI2S young people during this turbulent time

Toronto, ON (November 11, 2020) – Friends of Ruby, the charity dedicated to LGBTQI2S youth, is thrilled to announce the opening of the Friends of Ruby Home, an innovative custom-built transitional house for LGBTQI2S young people, aged 16-29. LGBTQI2S youth face disproportionately high rates of family rejection, trauma and violence and, due to fear of exclusion and harassment, many end up on the streets. The Covid-19 pandemic, which hit the LGBTQI2S community particularly hard, has intensified the crisis, particularly for Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) within the community.

Located at 257 Dundas St. East, Toronto, the Friends of Ruby Home was designed after comprehensive consultation with young people from the LGBTQI2S community with the aim to make it feel like a home – a warm and welcoming place that supports them wherever they are on their personal journeys. People between the ages of 16 and 29 who identify as LGBTQI2S can apply to live at the Friends of Ruby Home through an online application or through a referral by another service provider.

"The Friends of Ruby Home is uniquely suited to help LGBTQI2S youth during these times due to its one-of-a-kind mental health approach, including in-house programs and services tailored to their specific needs," said Carol Osler, Friends of Ruby Executive Director. "From immediate crisis support to long-term life goal planning, everything at the facility will be geared towards helping youth achieve healthier, independent lives."

Due to family rejection, many LGBTQI2S youth have a difficult relationship with the idea of 'Home'. The Friends of Ruby Home will provide much more than a roof over their heads – for many, it will be the first place they experience community. It will house 33 LGBTQI2S youth (aged 16-29) in mostly individual rooms (with a few rooms for couples) along with shared spaces to foster a sense of connection. The facility is fully accessible, energy-efficient and pet-friendly, with a pet shower (serving the needs of the facility's four-legged inhabitants) in the basement and a rooftop garden for solitude and leisure.

The official opening of the Friends of Ruby Home will take place on December 1, 2020, with staggered move-ins to take place throughout December and January. Keeping health and safety a top-of-mind priority, in-person attendee numbers for the ribbon-cutting will be limited, but all are welcome to join virtually on Tuesday, November 24th at 9:30am EST [here](#).

Photos of the Friends of Ruby Home available [here](#).

To learn more about Friends of Ruby programs and services, visit Friendsofruby.ca.

Partner and supporter quotes:

The opening of Friends of Ruby Home is a proud moment for Egale Canada, and we are incredibly thankful to everyone who has played a role in making this possible. From our donors and partners to the leadership of our Housing Advisory Board Members, the building of this home for LGBTQI2S young people has truly taken a village. When we come together, we have the power to change lives and because of the dedication and generosity of our community, countless LGBTQI2S youth will have a chance at a better future.

- Jacki Lewis, Chair of the Board, Egale Canada

Every young person deserves a place to call home. Nearly ten years ago, Egale set out on what felt like an impossible mission to build a home for young homeless LGBTQI2S people, and today we're proud to witness the doors open. Although it seems like a long time, we know that little has changed to remove the barriers that young LGBTQI2S people face in school, at home, in the workplace and in the community. We hope that with supports like this home, that young LGBTQI2S people will go on to break down the barriers they have yet to face as we strive to create a truly inclusive Canada and world.

- Helen Kennedy, Executive Director, Egale Canada

"The Daniels Corporation is proud to be the lead supporter of the Friends of Ruby Home. As an organization committed to social justice, we use the power of our platform to lead, to create and to build inclusive, sustainable and resilient communities. It was incredibly gratifying to collaborate with such a passionate and dedicated group of professionals to build a safe place for vulnerable youth to call 'Home'. The official opening of the Friends of Ruby Home is a vital step in making a real difference in the lives of LGBTQI2S youth who need it most."

- Don Pugh, Vice-President, Daniels Corporation

"The LGBTQI2S community is a part of us and we are a part of them. We wanted to find a way to get involved, take action, and support a cause close to our hearts at home in Canada. The concept for the Friends of Ruby Home was brought to our attention and we naturally leaped toward it. Together with EGALÉ and Friends of Ruby, we exchanged knowledge, curiosity, talent and skill all with the common goal of acceptance. It was a recipe for positive change and we could not be more humbled or proud to stand with EGALÉ to share the Friends of Ruby Home with our community."

- George Yabu and Glenn Pushelberg, Founding Partners, Yabu Pushelberg Toronto

"Socially-responsible design is about emphasizing the needs and experiences of the people and the community a building serves. To that end, we involved youth from Egale Youth Services (now Friends of Ruby) from the beginning of the design process. The young participants reinforced that the Friends of Ruby Home should feel like a home, with a careful balance of private and communal spaces, and that it should be as environmentally-friendly as possible. It's exciting that the two existing buildings we rehabilitated are getting a renewed life with a new, targeted purpose - transitional housing for LGBTQI2S youth, with on-site counselling and life-skills services. Jane Jacobs would be proud."

- Paul Dowsett, Principal Architect, Sustainable

"Cadillac Fairview is very proud to partner with Friends of Ruby to bring to life the Friends of Ruby Home. The opening of this unique transitional house is not only a momentous occasion for the LGBTQI2S community and the City of Toronto, but also serves as a highlight in my 50-year career at Cadillac

Fairview. It has been an incredible honour and privilege to serve as the Construction Advisor to design and develop this safe space which we know will be an invaluable resource for youth for many years to come."

- David Handley, Senior Vice President, Special Projects, Cadillac Fairview

-30-

About Friends of Ruby

Friends of Ruby (formerly Egale Youth Service) is a registered charity dedicated to LGBTQI2S youth (aged 16-29) well-being through mental health services, social services and housing. Friends of Ruby's approach is comprehensive, involving mind, body and community – we support LGBTQI2S youth, wherever they are on their personal journey. In addition to the Friends of Ruby Home, Friends of Ruby operates a Youth Centre (489 Queen St. East) encompassing a drop-in space and access to mental health and practical support services. For more details, please visit friendsofruby.ca

Media Contacts

Max Mosher, Communications Lead
Friends of Ruby
media@FRIENDSOFRUBY.CA

Sofiya Yusypovych, Account Executive
Edelman
sofiya.yusypovych@edelman.com

Key Messages:

Message Box

- Between 25 and 40 per cent of homeless young people in the Toronto area identify as LGBTQI2S and the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit the LGBTQI2S community particularly hard, has made the situation worse.
- The Friends of Ruby Home is brand new transitional house built specifically for LGBTQI2S youth, with a one-of-a-kind model that redefines LGBTQI2S community support.
- It was designed after a comprehensive consultation process with LGBTQI2S youth and reflects a unique housing approach, with embedded mental health services supporting youth in every stage of their path towards independence.

Key Message 1: *the history / the need*

The Friends of Ruby Home grew out of the 2012 Egale Canada report, “Not Under My Roof”, which highlighted the urgent need for housing solutions specifically for LGBTQI2S youth, who face unique barriers in overcoming homelessness and precarious living situations.

Proof points:

- The report found that, amongst youth experiencing homelessness in Toronto, almost one in four identify as LGBTQI2S.
- A disproportionate number of LGBTQI2S youth face family rejection, trauma and violence.
- Most existing services do not consider LGBTQI2S youth specific needs resulting in additional experiences of exclusion, harassment and violence.
- Subsequent research suggests even larger numbers: between 25 and 40 per cent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQI2S, while only 5 to 10 per cent of the general population identifies as LGBTQI2S.

Key Message 2: *Mental health supports and COVID-19*

Mental health and housing services tailored specifically for LGBTQI2S youth, such as those offered at the Friends of Ruby Home and Youth Centre, are needed now more than ever as the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately hurt the LGBTQI2S community. Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) within the LGBTQI2S community have been hit particularly hard by mental and physical health impacts and financial setbacks.

- The Friends of Ruby Home is uniquely suited to help LGBTQI2S youth during these times due to its one-of-a-kind mental health approach which supports young people through every step of their path towards independence.
- Friends of Ruby Home builds on our experience of operating a Youth Centre dedicated to LGBTQI2S youth since 2014, which includes a drop-in space with activities, counselling, therapeutic groups and practical supports.
- A recent study from Egale Canada found that BIPOC LGBTQI2S-identified people are two times more likely to know someone who has died of COVID-19, and two times more likely to significant negative impacts on their mental and physical health due to the pandemic, compared to the general population. ([Source](#))
- An earlier report from Egale Canada found that LGBTQI2S households have been hit hard financially by the pandemic: 53% have been affected by lay-offs and reduced hours, compared to 39% of Canadian households overall. ([Source](#))
- A study from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press and A Way Home Canada found that, even though youth are facing high levels of income and housing instability, mental and health effects and social isolation, many supports that would typically be available times of crisis, such as hotel rooms, youth drop-in and shelter spaces and in-person social programs, have shut down or are not taking on new clients. Resources and services tailored for LGBTQI2S Indigenous and racialized youth sheltering in place or without homes are especially needed. ([Source](#))

Key Message 3: *what it is / design process*

The Friends of Ruby Home at 257 Dundas St. East is Canada's first custom-built transitional house for LGBTQI2S youth (aged 16-29). It was designed after a comprehensive consultation with young people from the LGBTQI2S community with the aim to make it feel like a home. The design team consisted of firms Sustainable, Yabu Pushelberg and the Daniels Corporation.

Friends of Ruby (previously Egale Youth Services) was founded in 2014 by Egale Canada to meet the needs of LGBTQI2S youth in the Greater Toronto Area. Egale Canada began constructing the transitional house, then named the Egale Youth Centre. In 2019, we became an independent charity in order to best support young people and expand our scope as we prepared for the opening of the re-named Friends of Ruby Home.

Proof points:

- LGBTQI2S-identified young people took an active role in the planning and designing process. They noted the facility should feel warm and welcoming with plenty of natural light, windows that opened and the power to adjust individual room temperatures themselves - details that would make the space feel like their own.
- It will house 33 LGBTQI2S youth (aged 16-29) in mostly individual rooms (with a few rooms for couples) along with shared spaces to foster a sense of community.

- The facility is energy-efficient and pet-friendly, with a pet shower (serving the needs of the facility's four-legged inhabitants) in the basement and a rooftop garden for personal solitude and gardening.
- Inclusion and accessibility inform every part of the facility. Everyone who uses the facility – residents, visitors, and staff – of all abilities, can interact and feel welcome in the space.

Key Message 4: *what will happen there*

Due to family rejection and experiences of trauma, many LGBTQI2S youth have a difficult relationship with the idea of 'Home'. The Friends of Ruby Home will provide much more than a roof over their heads – for many, it will be the first place they experience community, and a social support system that will help them on their personal journey towards independent, stable and empowered living.

Proof points:

- At the facility, youth will have access to in-house programs and services tailored to their needs, helping them define and reach their goals for independent living beyond Friends of Ruby.
- Life skills programs will focus on financial literacy as well as cooking, cleaning, and professional mentorships, helping youth gain confidence, independence and build connections to the wider community.
- The facility will also feature mental and physical health services like crisis intervention, counselling, health check-ups, mindfulness sessions and physical activities.

Key Message 5: *call to action*

We need your support to keep providing the much-needed programs and services for LGBTQI2S youth. Please visit friendsofruby.ca to learn more.

Proof points:

- If you'd like to take part, many of the programs offered at the Friends of Ruby Home are already available at our Youth Centre at 489 Queen St. East.

Q&A:

Operations:

- **What is the Friends of Ruby Home?**

The Friends of Ruby Home is a one-of-a-kind transitional house, custom-designed for the needs of LGBTQI2S youth effected by homelessness. Located at 257 Dundas St. East in downtown Toronto, it has a unique model that combines emergency and transitional rooms with in-house specialized mental health supports and life skills programming.

- **What is Friends of Ruby?**

Friends of Ruby is a registered charity dedicated to the well-being of LGBTQI2S youth (aged 16-29) through mental health services, social services and housing. Our approach is comprehensive, involving mind, body and community, with programming for every stage of life's journey. Our vision is a world where all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and two-spirit young people feel validated, involved and empowered in their lives.

In addition to the Friends of Ruby Home, we operate a Youth Centre at 489 Queen St. East, where LGBTQI2S young people receive meals, groceries, community programming, mental health services and practical supports.

- **Why was the Friends of Ruby Home founded?**

Friends of Ruby was founded by Egale Canada as Egale Youth OUTreach in 2014 to meet the needs of LGBTQI2S youth in the Greater Toronto Area. The catalyst for the Home was Egale's "Not under my roof" study that shone light on the crisis of LGBTQI2S youth homelessness due to disproportionately high rates of family rejection, violence and trauma.

It found that almost one in four young people experiencing homelessness or precarious living identified as LGBTQI2S. Subsequent research suggests the number is even higher.

In 2019, we became an independent charity in order to best support young people and expand our scope as we prepared to open the Friends of Ruby Home.

- **What is the Friends of Ruby Housing Model?**

The Friends of Ruby Home has a unique housing model, combining immediate support for those experiencing homelessness with longer-term assistance to help youth achieve independence through skill developments and goal setting. This hybrid model allows us to provide tailored support to meet each young person's needs.

- **Who is Ruby and why the name Friends of Ruby?**

A few years ago we had a young person who visited the drop-in space but never spoke with anyone. Despite our best efforts, the youth didn't seem comfortable engaging with staff or other participants. Then one day we had a visit from Ruby, a golden retriever who enjoys cuddling and meeting new people. The two hit it off immediately. Little by little, the youth opened up, asking for Ruby whenever they visited and eventually starting counselling, with Ruby by their side.

Friends of Ruby is all about creating a welcoming and supportive community. Like Ruby, we are there with youth, no matter where they are on their personal journey.

- **How big is the Friends of Ruby Home? How many people will live in it?**

The Friends of Ruby Home, located at 257 Dundas St. East in downtown Toronto, is 18,000 sq. Ft. with room for 33 residents.

- **How long do residents get to live there?**

Residents will live in the Home for 3-12 months depending on need, with the option to extend their stay after the initial year.

- **Who designed the Friends of Ruby Home? What did the design process entail?**

The facility was built by a partnership between design firms Sustainable and Yabu Pushelberg, with Daniels Corporation as project managers.

The innovative design grew from a comprehensive consultation process with LGBTQI2S youth from the community, whose thoughts and feedback were incorporated into the final building. The building is energy-efficient, entirely accessible and pet-friendly. It incorporates dog showers in the basement and a rooftop garden on top.

- **How long did it take to build?**

The building took five years to construct. Construction of the Friends of Ruby Home consisted of converting a 19th century house and a mid-sized apartment into a wholly renovated and integrated new facility.

- **When will the Friends of Ruby Home open? When will people begin moving in?**

The Friends of Ruby Home will open its doors to youth in December 2020, with staggered move-ins throughout December and January.

- **Are there plans to open up additional locations?**

Right now, we're focused on getting the Home ready for the first round of residents, but as an organization we're always thinking about new ways and different opportunities to support LGBTQI2S youth.

- **What are the requirements for living at the Friends of Ruby Home? How can people apply?**

People between the ages of 16 and 29 who identify as LGBTQI2S can apply to live at the Friends of Ruby Home directly on the Friends of Ruby website, at our Youth Centre (489 Queen St E) or through referrals from another service provider. Applicants will be asked to provide information about their current housing, income and safety situation, along with short and long-term life goals. After an interview, the in-take committee will decide on whether the Friends of Ruby Home can accommodate the applicant.

- **Can a person who does not identify as LGBTQI2S live at the Friends of Ruby Home?**

No. The Friends of Ruby Home was founded to serve the need for specific support for LGBTQI2S youth experiencing homelessness in the GTA. LGBTQI2S youth face disproportionately high rates of family rejection, violence and trauma. For this reason, the Friends of Ruby Home was custom-designed for LGBTQI2S as a safe-space where they could access meals, mental health services and life skills programming.

- **How will you assure those coming to Friends of Ruby are in fact LGBTQI2S?**

Applicants will be asked for their gender, pronouns and if they identify as part of the LGBTQI2S community, along with what experiences they've had in the LGBTQI2S community. These questions will help us to understand the applicant's relationships and supports, and level of comfort and safety in their identity and their environment.

- **How will you support youth whose applications to live in the Home were unsuccessful (i. e. Turned down to live in the Home)?**

Applicants who are unsuccessful will be informed of the decision-making process and depending on those reasons, the proper referral will be made. First and foremost, all applicants will be referred to a Case Manager at the Friends of Ruby Youth Centre (489 Queen St. East) who can help them find alternative housing, based on their needs.

- **Is it free to live at the Friends of Ruby Home?**

There will be a small occupancy fee (below 50% of the average market) for youth who has a source of income (e.g. housing allowances from Ontario Works and ODSP, or employment). Our staff will provide support for youth without an income source to apply for a housing allowance. All fees collected will be reinvested into the Housing Program.

- **How is the Friends of Ruby Home funded?**

The Home, along with Friends of Ruby overall, is funded by the generous contributions of corporations, government bodies and individual donors.

- **What programs and services will be available at the facility?**

Friends of Ruby's approach is comprehensive, involving mind, body and community – we support LGBTQI2S youth, wherever they are on their personal journey. At the Friends of Ruby Home, residents will have access to mental and physical health services, community and life skills programs and personal case managers who will help them navigate complex systems and break through barriers so they can live empowered, independent lives. Youth will also be able to access supports for specific communities, including groups for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) youth, transgender people and newcomers and refugees.

- **How is the success of those moving through the transitional home ensured?**

We measure residents' success based on the individual goals they established when they entered the program. These goals may include finishing school, developing life skills or professional training, finding regular employment or looking for long-term housing, outside of our program. The programs and activities they engage in while at the Home will be geared towards reaching these goals, so the resident is set up for success after they leave the program.

- **What support is there for residents once they move out of the Home?**

If a resident moves out when they're still under the age of 29, they can continue to access the services at the Friends of Ruby Youth Centre and work with a Friends of Ruby Case Manager. If the resident has aged out of the program, we will work to make appropriate referrals that best fit their needs and situation, long before they move out.

COVID-19:

- **Why has COVID-19 had a particularly harmful effect on the LGBTQI2S community?**

A recent study from Egale Canada found that BIPOC LGBTQI2S-identified people are two times more likely to know someone who has died of COVID-19, and two times more likely to experience significant negative impacts on their mental and physical health due to the pandemic, compared to the general population.

Another study, this one from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press and A Way Home Canada found that, even though youth are facing high levels of income and housing instability, mental and health effects and social isolation, many supports that would typically be available times of crisis, such as hotel rooms, youth drop-in and shelter spaces and in-person social programs, have shut down or are not taking on new clients. Resources and services tailored for LGBTQI2S Indigenous and racialized youth sheltering in place or without homes are especially needed.

- **What precautions are you putting into place to protect participants and staff from infection at the Friends of Ruby Home? (spaces, cleaning, guests)**

Starting in December 2020, move-in will be staggered throughout the winter so that we can avoid crowding in the building. We are limiting the number of people in shared spaces and limiting attendance in programming until the situation in Ontario has improved. For the time being, no guests will be allowed in the facility.

Residents will complete a COVID-19 screening procedure before arriving at the Home on their move-in date, and all staff will complete the same procedure before starting their shifts. For youth wishing to access the emergency program on the spot, staff will complete the screening in the lobby area. Residents will also be screened if they are away from the Home for more than 12 hours.

Support workers will be responsible for following a 3-hour cleaning schedule throughout the day, and office spaces will be cleaned by staff before and after each appointment.

Will masks be required at the Friends of Ruby Home?

All staff and participants are expected to wear a mask in the Home, unless they are in a private area (such as, their own private room). Staff will wear masks in shared spaces, but can remove it if they are working alone in an office. Staff and residents may also remove their mask when eating or drinking but must maintain a physical distance of 6 feet from other individuals.

For residents who are unable to wear a mask, alternatives will be discussed. These alternatives can include wearing a face shield or a scarf.

- **What is the procedure if one of the participants comes into contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19, or tests positive themselves?**

If a participant comes into contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19, the participant will be asked to self-isolate in their room and to monitor symptoms. Staff can support with this through daily screenings and referring the participant to the nearby testing centre, if the participant wishes to be tested.

If a resident tests positive themselves, they will be in the care of Toronto Public Health and the City for the time being, without jeopardizing their residence with the Home. The resident is to inform staff of any residents they have come into close contact with, which has been defined as spending more than 15 minutes together and not maintaining a distance of six feet. Staff and residents who were in close contact with the resident must self-isolate for two weeks, as recommended by Toronto Public Health, and testing will be highly encouraged.

- **What will happen if the Friends of Ruby Home witnessed a COVID-19 outbreak?**

If a COVID-19 outbreak were to occur in the Home, no new youth would be able to access the Home until the situation is deemed safe. This information would be communicated to the city of Toronto's network of youth shelters and to other partners who make frequent referrals to ensure that no new referrals are made.

Staff and residents who have had close contact with the positive cases must self-isolate for two weeks, as recommended by Toronto Public Health, and testing will be highly encouraged.