

More Than a Place to Sleep

Before this essay, I had a narrow idea of what supportive housing was. If someone asked me to picture it, I would have thought of a homeless shelter with cots lined up in a gym or classroom, concrete floors, blankets, and people staying there for the night. I saw it as something temporary and institutional, more about survival than living. I never really thought of supportive housing as an actual home or as something built into regular neighbourhoods. I definitely did not think of it as something that could quietly shape a person's future. Because of that, I never really considered why services like Support House are so important to keep funded.

The more I learned, the more I realized how incomplete that picture was. Supportive housing is not just about helping people after they have hit a crisis point. A lot of the time, it helps prevent the crisis from happening in the first place. It can mean geared-to-income housing, group homes, housing for seniors, or living spaces that give people stability while they work, study, raise a family, or learn independence. That was the biggest shift for me. I had been thinking of housing as a place to sleep, not a system of support that helps people keep moving forward. That early support is easy to overlook, but it often prevents instability before it starts.

What changed my perspective most was realizing how close this topic was to my own life. One of my friends lives in a geared-to-income townhouse walking distance from my house, and I had no idea. What surprised me was how normal it looked. It was just part of the neighbourhood like anything else. That made me realize how wrong my assumptions had been. I had pictured supportive housing as something distant, connected only to homelessness or extreme need.

Instead, it exists quietly in everyday life and makes a difference without most people noticing. It also showed me that keeping these services funded is not just about individuals, but about maintaining balanced communities where people from different situations can live side by side.

Once I thought about my friend's family more seriously, the importance of that kind of housing became obvious. His mom is a single parent raising four kids while trying to go to school and improve her situation. Before this, I never would have connected affordable housing with opportunity so directly. Now I do. Without geared-to-income housing, how could she afford rent and still study? How could she create stability for her kids while building a better future? Without it, the situation could easily fall apart. They could have ended up homeless, and my friend's life would have looked completely different. In a strange way, I realized that if that support did not exist, we might never have met. Situations like this show how quickly things can change when support systems are not in place.

That realization also made me reflect on myself. I felt embarrassed that I had been so narrow-minded about something this important. I started rethinking moments in our friendship. There were times I suggested going out without thinking about cost. There were times I got annoyed if I had to cover him because he "forgot" his wallet. Now I see those moments differently. Maybe he was not forgetful. Maybe he just did not have the money. That is uncomfortable to admit, but it is part of learning. It made me realize how easy it is to fall into an "us versus them" mindset without noticing. Before I understood any of this, he was just my friend. In the most important way, he still is. Awareness should not separate people. It should make us more understanding and less quick to judge.

Another connection that changed my thinking is my next step in life. I am going to university and will likely live in residence. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that a dorm is also a form of supportive housing. It is not the same as geared-to-income housing or group homes, but the idea is similar. It gives students a place to live with others in the same stage of life while learning independence in a structured environment. You are not fully on your own, but you are not at home either. Residence provides support while you build routines, confidence, and independence. In that sense, it helps people through a major transition.

That connection made the topic feel more personal. One of the things I am most excited for is independence. I want to manage my schedule, meet new people, balance school and sports, and figure out who I am outside of home. That is exciting, but also a lot. Living in residence helps make that transition possible because it provides structure and community while still allowing growth. That made me think differently about supportive housing for others too. If I value that kind of environment, why would a senior, single parent, or person with a disability not? Independence does not mean doing everything alone. Sometimes it comes from having the right support.

That idea connects strongly to sports, especially volleyball. In volleyball, no one succeeds alone. Even if one player finishes the point, it starts with a pass, then a set, then the attack. Every role matters, and support is built into the game. Good teams are not just talented players. They are systems that allow people to succeed. Supportive housing works the same way. It is not just putting someone in a building and hoping it works out. It is creating conditions where people

can stabilize, grow, and succeed. The support is not a weakness. It is what makes independence possible. Without funding, those systems break down and fewer people get that opportunity.

This also changed how I think about housing in general. Sleeping is survival. Living is belonging. Living means routine, privacy, comfort, and safety. It means having a space where you can actually relax. Growing up, I heard my mom talk about homes because of her work, but I never really understood it. Now I do. Real estate is not just property. It is about stability and opportunity. Supportive housing plays a role in making that possible for people who might otherwise be excluded.

It also connects to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In school, it is easy to treat it as just a theory, but housing makes it real. If shelter and safety are unstable, it becomes harder to focus on school, work, or personal growth. You cannot think long term without a stable foundation. Supportive housing strengthens that foundation. It gives people a platform to move forward. Without funding, that foundation weakens and the effects spread beyond individuals into entire communities.

Before this assignment, I thought supportive housing was mostly emergency shelter. Now I see it differently. It can be preventative, community-based, and life-changing in ways that are not always visible. It can help a single parent stay in school, support a senior with dignity, give a person with a disability independence, or help a student transition to adulthood. Housing is not just where people sleep. It is where they belong. It is what allows people to build a life. That is why services like Support House need to continue being funded in our society.

