

Mission chief to retire

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Diane Morrison retires this week after 20 years as Executive Director of The Ottawa Mission.

Working with the homeless is not for the faint of heart.

It takes boundless energy, determination, an open heart balanced by realistic expectations and tenacity balanced by the ability to attract and retain excellent staff, volunteers and donations from far and wide.

Diane Morrison's 20-year tenure as executive director of the Ottawa Mission was one of innovation and success. In the past two decades the shelter's number of beds has grown from 76 to 235. The annual budget has risen from six figures to almost \$8 million, providing programs and services to address the multi-faceted issues that bring people to homelessness.

On Friday, Morrison will have her last day at the Mission. She's retiring from her post but hasn't made firm plans for the future.

"As far as I know I'm not going back to full-time work but I never know what's going to happen," she said. "I really like working and if some opportunity comes up I might take it."

A schoolteacher before she came to the Mission, Morrison's proud of the organization's school and learning centre. From teaching people to read to offering courses partnered with community colleges, the education programs help homeless people to re-enter the workforce.

All the Mission's programs aim to offer homeless people practical help while treating them with dignity.

"The one that's closest to my heart is the hospice," she said. "It's a palliative care unit that's 10 years old now and we have the only one that I know of certainly in North America."

In addition to providing a safe, comfortable place for homeless people to die with dignity, the hospice also became the place where 75% of residents reconnected with their families, Morrison said.

As she prepares to say goodbye, she wants to leave offering thanks. "Working in Ottawa, I can't believe the generosity, the caring of the people in this community," Morrison said. "I would really like to thank them for their constant and continuing support."

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