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Sutton REALTOR® Provides Safe Shelter to New Refugees

Toronto, ON – Jason Shine, a REALTOR® with Sutton Group - Assurance Realty Inc,* admits he had some doubts when he and his wife packed up their home and moved into a small, 90 square-foot bedroom at Matthew House. The couple made a three-month commitment to serve as night managers at the refugee shelter in downtown Toronto, beginning in April. Fortunately, their sacrifices in terms of domestic comfort are far outweighed by the benefits of working with newcomers to Canada.

"It's interesting how much you can gain by being willing to sacrifice a little privacy," says Jason, who now shares a house with as many as 13 refugees everyday. There is one kitchen, one dining room and one television. "When you put it into perspective, these are really small things to give up. What we gain is the opportunity to make friends from around the world, help people when they are most vulnerable, and assist them in tangible ways."

Since Matthew House opened its doors in 1998, it has welcomed refugees from 87 countries. Most stay at the shelter for 60 to 90 days as they complete government paperwork, seek employment and arrange to find permanent housing. Matthew House operates on government funding and the generosity of individuals in the Toronto area.

"Refugees very quickly apply for and receive welfare. A portion of that is a housing allowance paid to Matthew House, which helps to pay the bills including utilities, rent to the City of Toronto and part of the food costs," says Jason. "The rest of the meals are supplied by the food bank and charities. The settlement workers are funded mainly by churches and church members who feel the new refugees should be treated well. Their regular donations are essential. We also gladly receive used furniture, dishes and pans."

"The Ontario Real Estate Association gave a sizable donation to Matthew House last year. I was part of the grant application process this year. It's a great thing to give money but it's also good to be able to say there's a REALTOR® volunteering here."

Matthew House recently received a unique gift: a renovation by the Divine Design television show. Host Candice Olson transformed the awkward, "hallway style" living and dining areas into inviting spaces for refugees and staff to relax and share meals.

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Sutton Group Realty Services Ltd. Contact:

Gabriel Soh 604-691-1610 stories@suttonspirit.com

Sutton Group - Assurance Realty Inc.* Contact:

Jason Shine 416-236-6000 jshine@sutton.com

*Independently owned and operated brokerage