

Indwell might not end well

Heather Anne Wakeling Lister - September 2025

I've spent many hours thinking about the initiative to construct Indwell's supportive housing complex on land that was donated by the County of Lambton. Located on George Street, beside an existing EMS in Sarnia's south-end, a tremendous amount of pre-work has been done. Blueprints and surveys are complete, government money is secured and shovels are ready to construct what will eventually house 50 individuals.

Constructing stable shelter, housing those who have indicated that they have the purported will, if aided by supports, offering an opportunity, but not a guarantee to rise out of the deepest depths of addiction--sounds good on paper.

The reality is that those chronically addicted follow a way of life that swallows hard. It feeds off of co-morbidities such as mental, and physical illnesses. Sober bleeding hearts often bleed out when in the company of addicts who tend to have honed survival tactics that include illicit hand-to-mouth manoeuvres that often lead to jail.

In a recent conversation with a former jail guard, this person said that jails are overcrowded with those in need of treatment. Sent to jail instead of rehab or supportive housing, they dry out, leave with a somewhat clearer mind, but without another option than being on the street, it just leads to a repeat scenario.

A cycle that is in effect, death by slow suicide.

Seemingly caught within a circle dug deep around a postal code, Sarnia's south-end has given refuge to many by hosting shelters. We stock food banks, make donations and have welcomed social services into our neighbourhoods. While the insatiable needs of poverty keep increasing, south-end residents know that tent encampments are not an answer. That the clearing of Rainbow Park did little to ease these societal issues—just dispersed them further.

In response to the Indwell Housing Project, signage has been seen on front lawns and boulevards stating “We Are Already Doing Our Part”, while other signs, less noticeable, but usually on what appear to be financially challenged homes state, “Welcome Indwell, Thank you for Caring.”

Discernment is necessary here.

What does it mean to say they have done their part? Is it picking up the garbage, protecting their children from used needles, or by chasing those high on an animal tranquilizer dissolving not only minds, but neck and muscular structures, from their backyards? Is it because one mother now takes a baseball bat with her when she walks their daughter to and from her car? Or another who was threatened with death twice while walking her dogs?

This is no joke. People should not be mocked for their anger.

It's taken decades to get here. Traceable to the 1980s when rental controls were removed, but landlords had reduced rights for eviction, the closure of mental health/asylum facilities, all from a political view that community or marketplace would set things right.

It did not.

Instead, poverty has morphed into ‘big business.’ Homelessness and all that surrounds this issue is expansive--expensive in humane, monetary, and reduced access to social equity.

I know that no one becomes either self-made, or self-destroyed all by their lonesome—there is usually help in achieving one's personal view of themselves: in either direction.

It's rough out there. Beside crises inflicted by political collapse, war, financial crashes or pandemic spread, this is as serious as it gets.

There was a special council meeting in August, where 35 people presented their experiences, opinions and concerns regarding the Indwell Project. Mayor Mike Bradley opened the meeting, asking for respect, and with one exception, respect was generated through well-prepared and eloquently spoken presentations.

Condensed, information regarding housing numbers were presented by Lambton County staff: 2,490 affordable housing units are needed, 1,008 are on a waiting list. By a name-tracked count 294 people are chronically homeless.

A video from Indwell's Chief Executive Officer Jeff Neven addressed the benefits of supportive housing. Others were not so certain, while support was offered too—such as the woman sitting next to me who quietly said: “but they have to have a place to go.”

An interesting turn was when it was revealed that the donated land had been wanted for purchase by Dr. Farag, to establish a medical clinic. This initiative had been turned down in an in-camera meeting, and that information did not go over well with those in attendance.

However, John DeGroot of DeGroot Nurseries spoke, countered how our record isn't good, and

about the success of Indwell in other communities such as St. Thomas, London and Simcoe. ‘That we have to do something’, was echoed by Myles Vanni representing the Inn of the Good Shepherd. South-end resident Richard Marsh mentioned his shock after having lived in the south-end for 30 years, at the number of our citizens who live rough. “We live in a G7, one of the richest countries in world, and I believe in creating a better community for all. We need long-term stability with supportive medical care, right now.”

Let’s not pretend. The nuts and bolts always reduce to money. The cost of supportive housing: \$613 a month, versus \$4,300 for policing, and \$13,500 for hospital care.

To elaborate, it takes me one, sometimes two months to earn enough to pay our house taxes. Personally, I would like this money to be well-spent, recognizing respect for the life effort it takes for all of us to earn our income. And when looking at the close to \$1 million of our tax dollars spent, with no positive results in sight, I ask, “Really, haven’t we all been doing our part?”

With a cautionary note that addicts should never be housed in an area where they have access to their ‘drug family’ or drug of choice, right now, the question remains: Will Indwell end well in the south-end? It’s anyone’s guess.