

## Social Agency Cleans House

*By I. John Harvey  
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Susan Pigott is hoping to really clean up with her latest business venture, which will then help fund programs at the non-profit social agency she runs in Parkdale.

All Through the House is a home-cleaning service targetting the growing number of condos in the King St. W. area between Bathurst St. and Spadina Ave.

If the company makes money, it will support programs at St. Christopher House, which provides a wide range of services to youth, families, the disabled and seniors through various locations in west-central Toronto.

Pigott, who is St. Christopher's chief executive, says it all started when the agency found itself strapped for cash last winter.

"We knew we had to come up with other streams of revenue," she recalls. "One of the things we looked at was our core competencies. We already had a service cleaning homes for the ill and elderly and we thought, why not expand that - especially for condominiums that are really changing the area."

They took their idea to the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, where a team of MBA students helped create a business plan and arrange financing.

The fledgling business launched an eight-month pilot project last August, using \$50,000 in startup funding from Social Capital Partners, an altruistic investment group started by software pioneer Bill Young ([www.socialcapitalpartners.ca](http://www.socialcapitalpartners.ca)).

"All Through the House is not staffed by clients, it's a stand-alone cleaning business," Pigott explains.

"We hire and screen professional staff like any other business and we want to pay them in line with our unionized staff at St. Christopher's."

Cleaners are paid in the low \$20s per hour.

Pigott says they decided to target condos because it means less travelling between clients and will hopefully generate word-of-mouth referrals within each building.

Managing the new company is Tom Rimac, one of the MBAs who helped craft the business plan, who says he took the job because it fits with his own values.

"Yeah, I'm making less than I was when I was going to school," he laughs, noting most MBA grads end up in high-rise offices with swanky suits.

"But the idea really attracted me, and the chance to do something entrepreneurial without risk - save for my time and effort - was very attractive. I also like the idea of being able to make a difference."

He says All Through the House now has eight weekly clients and a cluster of casual clients who call on an as-needed basis.

"There are days when things are going well and days when it seems too slow," Rimac says. "But it's like that with any new business."

He visits with each prospective customer, eyeballs the space and determines how much cleaning will be needed. Supplies are provided by the clients and a feedback sheet notes when things such as paper towel or cleaning solutions are running low.

"Obviously, if they want the stove and fridge cleaned every week, it's going to take more time," Rimac says. "Others, you wonder why they need a cleaning service. It's all people's lifestyles."

The business also offers premium services, such as pet and plant care and concierge duties.

"People are enthusiastic about being able to get involved with something that is beneficial like this," Rimac says. "And our plan has always been to ensure the highest level of satisfaction and then go one step further."

A feedback form ensures a constant dialogue with clients, and any special concerns are noted in the file.

"We also assign a dedicated person to each client, so they get to know them and their preferences," Rimac notes.

The concept of non-profit agencies generating their own revenue is not new. Goodwill, for example, has long turned cast-off clothing into a revenue stream for its social programs.

Pigott hopes other agencies can learn from St. Christopher's experience.

Sean Van Doorselaer, director of social investment for Social Capital Partners, said the \$50,000 startup funding is "on the low side" compared to other projects the company has funded.

The company was created in 2001 and funded by Young, an early investor in his cousin Bob Young's company, Red Hat, which packaged the Linux Operating System software, an alternative to Microsoft Windows.

Van Doorselaer says requests for funding are assessed on a specific set of criteria.

"We're looking to see if the social mission fits - to see if they will create jobs, be self-sustaining and have a good management team. St. Christopher's has a great team, Sue Pigott is a wonder."

For more information or to book All Through the House cleaning service call 416-998-2884, email [service@atth.ca](mailto:service@atth.ca) or visit website [www.atth.ca](http://www.atth.ca)