

Kim Walker – a property manager who works to improve her tenants’ lives

Kim Walker was attracted to a career in teaching because she believed she could make a difference. Although she left the field several years ago, she’s still exerting a positive influence on the lives of those around her.

Walker, 36, is a property manager at Easton Manor on Adelaide Street North and a director with the London Property Management Association (LPMA). She says people who are interested in teaching often possess qualities that translate well into other careers.

“For me, it’s things that are targetted towards kids, whether it’s an Easter egg hunt or even just being outside with the kids and talking to them and listening to them and seeing what’s going on in their lives. You just see that, in some cases, they’re really ignored in their home family life. It’s nice to acknowledge and appreciate the little things you can do.”

Walker began her career after graduating from the University of Western Ontario in 1994 with a Bachelor of Education degree. She supply taught for two years, but found it difficult to secure regular teaching work. As a result, she began working as a building superintendent and then as a rental agent.

It was while she was working at an apartment complex on Huron Street that she created events designed to boost community spirit. She carried them over to Easton Manor in 1996 and continues to organize balcony contests, colouring contests, a resident appreciation barbecue and an Easter egg hunt.

Walker is characteristically low-key about her efforts to improve tenants’ lives in the 500-unit complex. She describes many of her tenants as being “underwhelmed” by the events she organizes.

“Kids are much easier to please, especially with the little things,” she notes. “I try to focus on the adults, try to focus on making changes in the kids. Maybe they (adults) are downtrodden because they’re not working and they can’t see past that, and just they let their kids do what they want to do.

“They’re less likely to be impressed by what they would perceive as being a little show of acknowledgement. Maybe they’re just tired of getting their hopes up and having them go down again – I don’t know what it is exactly.”

In her daily routine, Walker makes a point of speaking to children who vandalize the property by defacing it with graffiti, or by starting fires or throwing rocks. She also makes them take responsibility for their actions by cleaning up their messes — under staff supervision.

“Sometimes they need a little prodding, sometimes there’s a little complaining or there’s only a five or 10-minute attempt. But it’s an acknowledgement that what they’ve done is wrong and I’m hoping they’ll care a little more the next time. Whatever their home life, the cycle they’re in, that may or may not change,” Walker says.

In an effort to make life easier for her tenants, Walker canvasses friends and acquaintances for used toys and clothing. She makes those items available to tenants who have just moved in and have few material possessions.

While she enjoys helping others, Walker has learned to adjust her expectations and to recognize that sometimes tenants aren’t particularly grateful for the items she has given them. “If I feel good about it, that’s fine, but if they don’t want it or it ends up in the garbage because they decide they don’t want second-hand, that’s really not my call,” she says.

Walker’s philosophy extends beyond her own buildings. She has chaired the London Housing Advisory Committee and the Rent Bank Advisory Committee, and is currently chair of

the London and Middlesex Housing Corp. She also served for two years as president of the LPMA – volunteer roles that take her beyond the scope of her daily work.

Louise Stevens, director of municipal housing for the city, has known Walker for many years and has worked with her on the London Housing Advisory Committee. She says the fact Walker hasn't moved on to work in buildings in more prestigious neighbourhoods is a sign of her commitment to low-to-middle income tenants.

“She really does care about tenants and her tenants' lives; she always did go above and beyond what one would normally expect of a landlord, in a good way,” Stevens notes. “She stays below the radar and doesn't often get the recognition she deserves.”

Walker's advice to other property managers is simple when it comes to dealing with tenants from a wide range of backgrounds: “Just try and turn one child or one person at a time and be happy with your successes and not focus on your failures. Don't be afraid to try the same thing twice.”