

Eight stairs still too many

Edgar Poulin's story

In the spring of 2021, I moved in with my partner in Montreal. Our apartment was \$920 a month, nothing included. It was on the second floor of a 6-apartment building. We decided to live there because there were no other affordable options for us, and time was important since my partner was getting renovicted and had to find a place for the 1st of July.

The stairs at our apartment caused me a lot of pain. I had a cane and a wheelchair at that time but I couldn't use the wheelchair because the place wasn't adapted for that and moving up and down the stairs a 25-pound wheelchair was a bit too much for us.

We moved again in August of 2022 to a first-floor apartment with 8 stairs, which is better than the other place, but still too many stairs.

My partner got diagnosed with arthritis a little while after that and recently got a cane. My pain and symptoms of fibromyalgia got worse. I started using my wheelchair outside of my place. It was a revelation to me: my wheelchair permits me to move freely with less pain than I have when using a walker or a cane.

Our place isn't adapted for wheelchair use; the doors are too narrow, there are those stairs, the bathroom is tiny, and there is no bar in the shower. Not having a bar in there makes it dangerous for me and my partner because we have nothing to grab if we fall while showering.

We are both very involved with our local housing committee so we started applying for social housing. However, a lot of housing cooperatives are not accessible (ex: they have stairs but no ramps to get inside of them), which narrows the search to about 20 housing cooperatives in the city.

Non-disabled folks don't have that limit imposed on them. They don't have to ask themselves if they'll be able to get into their homes without obstacles to overcome every time they go outside. Usually, housing cooperatives don't have a lot of adapted apartments, it is mostly 3 1/2 (1 bedroom) or 4 1/2 (2 bedrooms). Not a lot of them have apartments with more than two bedrooms that can be adapted. I would love to have a child but that restricts my right to do so.

I am on welfare, trying to get the government of Quebec to recognize that I cannot work due to my multiple disabilities, but so far, they recognize me as being able to work which means that I get \$857 per month.

My partner is also on welfare, but their disabilities are recognized by welfare so they get around \$1,200 per month. They are also retired. Because they are retired, welfare cuts the amount of money they send them to \$382 per month. From their retirement fund, they get \$822 per month. That add up to \$1,204 a month.

Together, we have \$2,061 for a month. After our rent and our bills, we have usually around \$250 left for food and other stuff.

With the inflation and the housing crisis being completely ignored by our prime minister, François Legault, I am very afraid of becoming homeless. Plus I have pets, I am transgender, and my partner is non-binary, are visibly not white and they were homeless at 16 because they left a homophobic and psychophobic foster home because of their father, which increases our chances of being discriminated against for housing. We are also both neurodivergent.

The solution is very simple: more social housing, not just for old folks, but for disabled people, Queer folks, people that have been or are at risk of being homeless, etc. We need more low-rental housing, more housing cooperatives, and ASAP. Of course, make all of these accessible.

Our future will not be given by the elites. We currently have and will have to fight for it, but that is a fight I'm willing to engage in.