

Family Transition Place women's shelter offers hope for victims of abuse

Written By BRIAN LOCKHART

"We're full all of the time," said Norah Kennedy, executive director of Family Transition Place (FTP) executive director, regarding the demand for services at the local shelter for women and children in Orangeville.

The shelter serves the entire Dufferin/ Caledon area.

With FTP currently in its 35th year of operation, the fact that the shelter is always full speaks volumes about the hidden abuse that takes place in our society. Not every victim of abuse makes it known to family or friends.

However, sometimes a situation becomes so dire a person will reach out for immediate help and Family Transition Place is there to offer support by finding shelter and providing counseling.

The Bredin Parkway location is divided into two sections. One wing houses the emergency shelter for women and children. The other section is for administrative staff as well as social services and counseling services.

"We have the emergency shelter where most nights we have 24 women and children living with us," Ms. Kennedy explained. "On the community counselling agency side we have counselling services for sexual assault for both women and men. There is abuse counseling, services for woman with substance misuse issues, we have supportive housing programs, and we also have a rural response program based out of Shelburne and youth education programs."

While the shelter serves to help people in need, stopping abuse before it ever starts is part of FTP's mandate.

"Our youth education programs are held in the schools," Ms. Kennedy said. "They are an eight-week curriculum. We go from grade five to grade eight with age appropriate programs. We work with the kids on self esteem and healthy relationships and good communications skills. We try to prepare them for healthy, violence-free relationships for the rest of their lives."

The shelter is constantly filled to capacity. This is due in part to the fact that there is a shortage of available and affordable housing in the community.

"What used to be possibly a six-week stay in the shelter while they were getting themselves set up and on their feet is now turning into months because there's nowhere available in our community and if it is available it's not affordable. That is one of our biggest challenges right now. The bottleneck is at the front door. We've got women calling and needing a safe place to go and we don't have a bed available. Sometimes a woman is ready and able to move on and it's safe for her to do so but she can't because there's no where for her to go."

She said that although the shelter is usually full, FTP will find alternative places for a woman to stay and does not turn anyone away.

The shelter works with other agencies in the region to ensure clients are helped and are safe.

We are very closely tied to our community and all of our community resources," Ms. Kennedy explained. "We have some amazing partners in the community and really good relationships with pretty much everyone in town. Our counselors are very knowledgeable. If this isn't the right service here, we will find someone to connect you to,"

There is no typical person that needs the shelter's help.

?Domestic violence affects people from all socio-economic classes. It affects people from all races. If there is a woman in a violent situation at home and it's not safe for her to be there, she may come by herself or with her kids. She may be brought here by the police. She may have been referred from another service or the hospital or another shelter in another community. We also take in women who are homeless. Quite often we find that is someone is homeless there's also violence in their history.?

The shelter is a secure facility with controlled access. They have a very good relationships with local police to ensure the safety of their guests.

However, the location is not hidden.

They want to be visible to the community.

?We want people to know where we are when they need us.?