

## Family Transition Place has tough few months as COVID-19 takes toll

Written By PAULA BROWN

Adaptability and resilience.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, Norah Kennedy, Executive Director at Family Transition Place (FTP), says that these are the most important things, she believes, people have learned from the experience of the pandemic.

“That’s what we’re really focused on creating in Family Transition Place,” said Ms. Kennedy in an interview with the Free Press, “an ability to adapt, be resilient, and be there when we are needed.”

FTP, which has operated since 1984, is an organization that provides services for women and children who are experiencing abuse and unhealthy relationships. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it continued to work at helping keep women and children experiencing abuse safe, through counselling, help lines, and its shelter, which they were able to remain open, alongside many others all across the province.

“Like everybody else in the province or the country it’s been challenging, it’s been confusing but our commitment to being there to serve the women and children of our community has remained strong,” said Ms. Kennedy. “What it has meant is that we’ve had to look at how to do things differently and to look at how we safeguard the people who need it the most, even during these really exceptional times.”

Adapting to the restrictions brought on by COVID-19, FTP worked to find alternative accommodations rather than bringing people into close proximity within the shelter. They also made counselling available through virtual sessions, in some cases being more available with the evening appointments for clients.

But while FTP still remained open, Ms. Kennedy says that they and colleagues of hers across the province reported an initial decrease in the number of calls they received for help.

“That really concerned us because we know that the extra pressure of being isolated at home for women who are in abusive relationships, we know that that was only going to make things worse and they weren’t calling.” That was really concerning,” she said.

A Statistics Canada survey on the impacts of COVID-19, released in April, at the peak of the virus, showed that 1 in 10 women were very or extremely concerned about the possibility of violence in the home.

“For a lot of women who are in those situations, the day-to-day pieces of their lives are so important,” said Ms. Kennedy. “Going to the grocery store, going to their job, getting the kids to school, those all provide a respite from the abuse. It also provides safe opportunities where they can pick up a phone and make a call.”

Family Transition Place started promoting a text number and email as an alternative way for women to reach out to them.

With the easing of restrictions and the move to Phase 3 of the provincial COVID-19 recovery, FTP is preparing by reducing the number of people living closely within the shelter. A strategy developed by the organization will have each person going into the shelter having their own bedroom, bathroom and small sitting area as a way to ensure safe social distancing.

“We realized that very early on that in a place where we could potentially have 26, 27 women and children sharing a kitchen, dining room, and living space that’s a prime location for a virus to spread really quickly,” Ms. Kennedy said. “So we’ve made arrangements to change that.”

To contact FTP for help you can call their Crisis Intake line (1-800-265-9178) which can also be found on their website.

?That line always, and has been all throughout [COVID-19], has been answered by a human being,? said Ms. Kennedy, ?24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.?

While its head office is in Orangeville, Family Transition Place also has satellite offices in Shelburne and Caledon.