

Dufferin Men's Shelter to close in September without boost in funding

Written By **Sam Odrowski**

Orangeville's only homeless shelter for men could close soon due to a lack of funding.

Erin Goodyear, executive director of the Dufferin Men's Shelter, told Orangeville council on Aug. 14 that the shelter will shut down next month unless it gets an immediate boost in funding.

The Dufferin Men's Shelter opened in March, and the annual cost to run it is \$509,100, but the County of Dufferin only provides \$163,000. This leaves a \$346,000 yearly shortfall or \$28,842 monthly.

"The shelter will no longer be financially viable by September 2023, so we are continuing to seek donations and grants. We need to find some stability, and we also need to have some sustainable operations for long term goals. Because now that we've opened this organization, of course, we don't want to close it," Goodyear told Orangeville council.

"The risk to the community is significant as men who are experiencing homelessness will no longer receive direct supports in this area, if our shelter does close."

Goodyear requested ongoing funding and advocacy support from the council for the Dufferin Men's Shelter.

"In order for us to continue to be able to support those who are most vulnerable, we need your support, and we know that together, we'll be able to continue to keep the doors of our amazing shelter open," said Goodyear.

She noted that the Dufferin Men's Shelter board is also presenting to Dufferin County Council's Health and Human Services Committee today (Aug. 24) to plead with them for funding to keep the shelter open.

"If we do not receive this support, however, a plan will be initialized by our board to cease the operations of the Dufferin men's shelter," Goodyear remarked.

Coun. Debbie Sherwood said the fact that the shelter could close in September just months after opening in March is very upsetting.

"We need to save this facility," she said. "We were just cutting that ribbon yesterday, and this is breaking my heart."

She said while the town doesn't have endless money it can give for the shelter, she asked if Mayor Lisa Post and Deputy Mayor Todd Taylor, who sit on Dufferin County Council, could attend the Health and Human Services Committee meeting to lobby the county for more funds.

"Can we not see if we can find a pot of money somewhere through the county to help save this?" Sherwood asked.

Mayor Post said she's a member of the Health and Human Services Committee and will try to address the funding issue at the meeting.

"We will definitely be looking for solutions and asking lots of questions to figure out where additional funding can come from," said Mayor Post.

She added that the County of Dufferin is looking at 2024 budget deliberations but is pretty tapped for 2023.

"There's not a magical bucket of money sitting there unused somewhere at the county at this particular point in time," Mayor Post

remarked.

Councillor Andy Macintosh said the funding request should go to the county, as the \$346,000 requested by the Dufferin Men's Shelter equates to an approximately one per cent property tax increase in Orangeville.

'You're going to be getting awfully busy at the homeless shelter with Orangeville citizens if our taxes keep going up, and this is something we need to keep in mind. We've got to keep our taxes in line here,' said Coun. Macintosh.

'I think it's a big ask, and I wish you the best of luck getting it. I could never support our council giving you that kind of money. But hopefully we can work something out somewhere, somehow.'

Deputy Mayor Todd Taylor asked Goodyear how her organization got to the point where it's only being funded \$163,000 per year when it costs \$509,000 to run.

Goodyear said Dufferin County never asked them how much was needed to run the shelter but offered what they could out of their budget.

'They told us what they were giving us. There's never been a fluid conversation as to this is how we operate; this is what we need,' said Goodyear. 'In any position that I've ever been in previous where we've had a system service manager, you present a budget and the system service manager comes back to you and says, 'this is what we can allocate for A-B-C-D.' That has not happened since I've been the director of this organization.'

Goodyear, who started as executive director of Choices Youth Shelter and the Dufferin Men's Shelter in March 2022, said when inquiring about the funding allocation, the county told her they never received a budget, and she was confused as to why.

'So as an organization, we chose to not operate during the daytime hours because we knew that financially, we wouldn't be able to have the staff dollars for that,' Goodyear said.

Dufferin Men's Shelter board member Keith Ward said the building the Dufferin Men's Shelter resides in was donated, offsetting their costs. He also stressed that the shelter is 'as cost-effective as anybody can be.'

The Dufferin Men's Shelter first opened in August of 2021 but closed in October 2021 due to a lack of funding before reopening in March 2023.

'I'm just begging this community to come through so that we do not lose this facility,' said Coun. Sherwood.

Dufferin Men's Shelter services

Choices Youth Shelter opened in January of 2000 to support youth 16-24 and operates the Dufferin Men's Shelter,

Choices has supported thousands of youths over the years and is funded through donations, community grants and government funding. It saw the need for a men's shelter and decided to address the issue head-on.

'After seeing a need, we felt that through the needs assessment and advocacy within the community, it was time to open up the Dufferin Men's Shelter,' said Goodyear.

In March 2023, the Dufferin Men's Shelter opened with eight beds, which has since increased to 20. It operates seven days a week from 7 p.m. to 8 a.m.

'We provide two meals a day that are hot cooked meal. So before the fellows leave in the morning, we provide them with

breakfast,? Goodyear noted.

?We have on site services and referrals for substance abuse support and anger management. We also have employment searches, housing supports, life skills development, counseling, and many other things.?

Since opening, the shelter has had 23 unique visitors, who stay for an average of three months, and six men have been successfully housed.

Goodyear stressed that the Dufferin Men's Shelter's services aren't just for those residing there. The organization's support services are available to everybody in the community.

Demand for shelter

A needs assessment conducted in 2021 by the University of Guelph, in conjunction with the Orangeville Mayor's Homelessness Task Force, identified 23 people as homeless in Dufferin County.

The assessment determined the need for an adult men's homeless shelter, as there was nothing for men in Dufferin County at the time. Family Transition Place provides emergency housing services to women, and Choices Youth Shelter provides services to youth 16-24. Without the Dufferin Men's Shelter, homeless people in the region have to travel elsewhere to access services.

The County of Dufferin has a 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan that includes providing client-centred homelessness services through collaboration with local agencies, and Goodyear says the Dufferin Men's Shelter is stepping up to meet this need.

Affordability issues

During Goodyear's presentation to Orangeville council about the Dufferin Men's Shelter, she also spoke about housing and affordability issues.

?We are in a housing crisis, the amount of affordable housing that we have, not only in Dufferin County, but across Canada is really something that has become tremendous,? said Goodyear.

She noted that it now takes 22 years for the average person to be able to afford the down payment on a home, but the many people who live paycheque to paycheque don't have a path to home ownership.

?If you were to look in the housing market on realtor.com, about \$850,000 is something that would be conceived as affordable,? Goodyear said.

She added that at any given time, over 25,000 people are homeless in Canada, and the affordability crisis is making it harder to escape poverty.

The Dufferin Men's Shelter is located at 59 Tonwline, Orangeville.