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Choices opens new facility with first family unit in Dufferin County

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Choices Shelter and Support Services officially opened the doors to its newest housing facility at 18 Townline in Orangeville on July 30, marking another expansion in the organization's work supporting people experiencing homelessness.

The new building provides transitional housing for both individuals and families, with the county's only family unit located in the basement and three individual bedrooms upstairs. The facility adds another option to the local housing continuum, giving people facing homelessness a place to stay while they work toward greater stability.

Choices Executive Director Jamie Edge highlighted the organization's recent growth and the significance of this project, including bridge housing, its partnership with Heart of Dufferin and the Out of the Cold program, and its expansion into transitional housing.

Choices has long operated shelter support services from its property at 20 Townline. The newly opened neighbouring building at 18 Townline, also donated to the organization, expands those services by providing transitional housing while continuing its existing shelter operations.

?This has been one of the most monumental things that I think has happened for Choices,? she said. ?We were blessed to have this home at 20 Townline donated to us by an amazing donor, so to have this happen again here and be able to expand our services outside of shelter services has really been instrumental for our community.?

?Being able to add a family unit, making this the one and only family unit in Dufferin County, is a cause for celebration.?

Choices operates as part of a broader network of housing and community organizations in Dufferin County. Its work extends beyond providing shelter, with staff helping clients access the supports and services they need to move forward.

Edge said the 18 Townline location had already been operating for about two months ahead of the grand opening last Thursday. The organization was able to secure operational funding through the County of Dufferin after successfully proposing that funding previously used for motel rooms through coordinated access and transitional housing be redirected toward the new facility.

She described the building as a significant moment for Choices, particularly because it allows the organization to expand its services beyond that of a traditional shelter. The family unit is also the only one of its kind in Dufferin County, specifically supporting families experiencing homelessness together.

Deputy Mayor Todd Taylor attended the opening on behalf of the Town of Orangeville and congratulated Choices, its staff, volunteers, donors and community partners.

?It's an honour to be here, and it's an honour to represent Mayor Post, who could not be here today, but desperately wanted to be,? he said. ?A community is not a business. It's not about dollars and cents all the time. It's all related to each other, and the very fact that Choices is branching out and doing these wonderful things helps us all. If you think about communities that are struggling right now with homelessness and other social issues, Orangeville's so blessed.?

?The Town of Orangeville wants to thank and offer sincere congratulations to Choices on the grand opening of 18 Townline, and we are so grateful.?

Taylor also recognized Ken and Caroline Mikoliew, whose donation allowed Choices to acquire and renovate 18 Townline for

transitional housing, noting that their generosity will help provide a place for people to begin rebuilding their lives.

?Because of your extraordinary generosity, this home will offer hope where there was despair, comfort where there was uncertainty, and a place where new beginnings can take root,? he said. ?Thank you for believing that every person deserves a place to begin again with heartfelt appreciation.?

For the Mikoliews, the project began with a tour of Choices arranged through their involvement with the Dufferin Community Foundation.

?We had a tour here, and we had tours for a couple of other charities, and just in conversation, Jamie [Edge] had said, ?You know, eventually we'd like to buy this house,'? Ken Mikoliew said. ?It was just a very casual conversation, and it just clicked and seemed like a really good idea. This amount for a donation is unusual for us, but I had sold a business, and we had some extra money, so it just came together.?

The Mikoliews said their community involvement has long been important to them, and their support for Choices offered a chance to make a tangible local contribution.

?We are both already members of the Shelburne Rotary Club,? Caroline Mikoliew said. ?We're both very community-minded, and I think we've been like that all our lives.?

They were particularly drawn to being able to see exactly where their donation went and how it would remain in the community.

The grand opening concluded with a tree-planting ceremony, chosen to reflect the Mikoliews' connection to nature and conservation and to symbolize the opportunity for residents of the new home to put down roots and build more stable futures.