

# Youth homelessness persists and is on the rise

Continued from page 1

This raised some serious concerns for Youth Program Co-ordinator Amanda Kostjuk, who has seen the issue of homelessness persist and rise since she began working with local youth 12 years ago.

"At the end of the day my priority is that youth are safe, and sleeping outside is not acceptable," she said. "My phone will go off at all hours of the night because I'm checking in with youth and saying, 'Are you alive?'"

News of the three youths sleeping in the dangerous cold set off a flurry of activity, with Links2Care, the Town and the Region working quickly to get them in a safe environment.

"My first intent was to get them inside," said Halton Region Commissioner of Social and Community Services Sheldon Wolfson. "We secured motel rooms in Halton Hills for up to three nights, and the Region took care of that, and also breakfast the next morning."

In addition, the Region sent staff to work with the youths regarding further emergency housing and offer them supports through various other programs, but Wolfson said they declined.

"They were very nice, but they had no interest. We could've given them emergency shelter on a longer-term basis, but we can't force people to accept help," he said.

The youths have since turned to family, friends and peer networks for help and support, Links2Care reported.

For Howard, the story of youth becoming homeless during the coldest season of the year is one that's all too familiar.

Last winter, the local teen said he found himself on the streets after being falsely accused of something by his parents. With no youth shelter in the community and nowhere to go, Howard sought the simplest of warm places to stay.

"I was couch hopping from house to house. I was sleeping in my buddy's car. I did that for a long time," he said. "I was freezing, but it was better than sleeping outside and being more cold. I made do with what I had."

During the six months that he was homeless, Howard said he continued to attend school for as long as he could. Eventually, the challenging task of providing the necessities of life became all-consuming, forcing Howard to stop going to school.

"I was always looking for the next place I'm going to stay and the next meal I'm going to eat," he said.



**'My first intent was to get them inside'**

—Sheldon Wolfson, Halton Region  
Commissioner of Social and  
Community Services —

Howard eventually found his way to the Open Door Youth Centre and connected with Kostjuk, whom Howard describes as "a mom" for local teens. She helped get him in touch with Bridging the Gap— an organization that offers a host home program for homeless youth. Through the program that serves as an alternative to emergency shelters, youth are placed in the homes of local residents who've volunteered to serve as hosts for those aged 16-24 in need.

"I walked in (to my host home) and got a hug from a lady I don't even know," said Howard, who is still currently living in a host home. "The atmosphere is very nice; chill and easy going."

While Howard is now off the streets, finishing school and holding a job, he said he knows there are still many homeless youth out there that he'd like to help.

"They're honestly everywhere, but because we're not a big city, people don't see it," he said. "We definitely need a shelter here, and more affordable housing."

Power echoed Howard's sentiments.

"Affordable housing and a shelter in Halton Hills to help youth who are isolated and without shelter or in transition can provide a safe

place for them to learn important life skills, get on steady footing and assess their options to move forward outside of a state of crisis," she said. "While often not welcome in communities, youth shelters and drop-in centres are an investment in youth."

Currently Links2Care operates two drop-in centres for youth in Halton Hills: Off the Wall in downtown Acton and Open Door in Georgetown, located inside St. George's Anglican Church on Guelph St.

For Howard, Open Door has served as a refuge during his most challenging times.

"It's kind of like a home. I come here every day," he said. "You've got people that support you, food and drinks. If you need to talk, you can talk. It's a safe place."

In addition to operating the drop-in centres, Power said a large part of Links2Care's role is to help youth navigate and be aware of services in the area. This can include: connecting youth with local food banks, mental health resources, school and employment services; helping meet their basic needs for showers, laundry and clothing; advocating on their behalf to overcome barriers; assisting them in rebuilding family relationships and exploring housing and shelter opportunities.

Spreading the word about local resources for homeless youth and raising awareness of the issue in general are crucial, according to Alex Hilson of Inspire Halton, a youth non-profit that promotes community involvement.

"A lot of these youth aren't connected in the community as well as they'd like to be. Some might not know where to turn," he said. "I think the solution is awareness; awareness that homelessness exists here, and awareness that there is help."

If you or someone you know is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, contact Kostjuk at 905-703-4594.

*\*Name has been changed to protect identity*

\*\*\*

Stay tuned for our next story on homelessness in Halton Hills that will take a closer look at the plight of homeless adults and families.

## Measles case reported in Halton Region

Halton Region Health Department is reporting a confirmed case of measles. The Halton resident is a male in his thirties. During his period of infectiousness, the case did not spend any time in Halton.

"The Halton Region Health Department is working in coordination with other local public health units to ensure any potentially exposed persons are notified in a timely manner," said Dr. Hamidah Meghani, Medical Officer of Health for Halton Region.

"Measles is preventable through immunization with two doses of the measles vaccine," explained Dr. Meghani. "People who have measles need to isolate themselves while they are ill and for four full days after the rash first appears."

Since measles is now circulating in southwestern Ontario and easily spreads from person to person, the Halton Region Health Department is urging all residents to have their vaccination up to date. Adults born before 1970 are generally presumed to have acquired natural immunity to measles; however, some of these individuals may be susceptible. All Ontarians, regardless of date of birth, are eligible for two doses of MMR vaccine. For individuals born in 1970 or after, two doses of the MMR vaccination is required to be considered adequately protected.

For more information, dial 311 or call the Halton Region Health Department at 905-825-6000, toll free 1-866-442-5866 or visit Halton.ca/measles.

# HASSELL

## AUTOMOTIVE SALES & SERVICE

45 Mountainview Road North  
Georgetown, Ontario  
905.877.7958

e-mail: [hassellsauto@bellnet.ca](mailto:hassellsauto@bellnet.ca)  
[www.hassellautomotive.com](http://www.hassellautomotive.com)

### Warranty



- Auto/4 cyl
- Certified & E-tested • A/C
- Traction Control
- Power Windows/Mirrors
- Cruise Control

**\$14,500**

+ HST/LIC

### Warranty



- Auto/4 cyl
- Certified & E-Tested • A/C
- Keyless Entry
- Heated Seats
- Cruise Control

**\$9,900**

+ HST/LIC

### Warranty



- Manual/4 cyl
- Certified & E-tested • A/C
- Power Steering
- Driver/Passenger Airbags
- Cruise Control

**\$9,400**

+ HST/LIC

CALL

