

COMMENT

Homelessness is an 'invisible' reality

By Melanie Hennessey

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The View From Here

A few weeks ago I was in Toronto with my children, and as we walked up the street I could see a homeless man ahead.

He was dressed in worn-out, thread-bare clothing that's far too thin for the cold, with a pair of equally weathered slippers on his feet. He held out his toque towards everyone who passed by and asked if they could spare some change. My kids were in awe of this man, and the thought that somewhere in this world not too far from home, there are people who don't have roofs over their heads, or even money to buy food. And that got me thinking, where are the homeless people in Halton Hills? I knew there must be some here, but in our predominately affluent municipality, you just don't come across people begging on street corners.

So I started looking into the issue, and let me tell you, some of the realities about homelessness in our little community will surprise you. Yes, there are most certainly homeless youths and adults in Halton Hills, but it's an invisible, or hidden, problem. They're teens who are "couch surfing," staying over at friends' houses until they're no longer welcome. There are people who are sleeping in cars or living in motels. They're moms who would be on the streets with their young children if they weren't

lucky enough to secure one of the few transitional housing units in Halton Hills.

I had the privilege of meeting a couple of these people and they were gracious enough to share their stories with me. Although they both faced very different circumstances, they each delivered the same message: more needs to be done to help those in need. They were certainly very grateful for the help they've received so far through various local organizations, but even those who help the homeless will tell you that there just aren't enough resources available locally.

So what can we do? Well, for starters we can talk openly and frequently about the issue. Let's keep it at the forefront of the agenda for the powers that be and create an awareness that can't be ignored.

Next, let's remember that we can help. We can reach out if we know someone who's in need, instead of minding our own business. We can volunteer with organizations that help the homeless in our very own community, like Bridging the Gap. We can advocate for more affordable housing to ensure a roof over everyone's heads.

We can hope to see the day that homelessness in Halton Hills is invisible because it doesn't exist.

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