

# The Lighthouse — a shelter in the cold

by Michael Gregory  
Oakville Beaver Staff

**Despite being the only lodging for some of Halton's most vulnerable residents looking for a warm bed to escape dangerously cold January temperatures, the Salvation Army's Lighthouse Shelter in Oakville is always up to the task.**

"Every day is a fluid thing. Some people are here longer than others," said Esther Clark, shelter shift supervisor at the Lighthouse.

"It just depends because we have referrals from the people themselves who need housing, or perhaps the hospital, or other agencies, the police.

"When there's a cold alert obviously when we get to 30 beds, we do have overflow available to us. We also have lots of warm things to wear in case someone does not have that — a coat or mitts, or gloves."

On Friday, Jan. 9, Halton Region issued yet another extreme cold weather alert for the area as temperatures plunged below -15 C, without factoring in chilling 30 km/h winds.

In response to an alert earlier in the week, the City of Burlington opened warming centres at six recreation and community centres, but later clarified that they would only serve the community during normal business hours.

The Town of Oakville similarly advised that there were no facilities officially designated as warming centres, but that anyone could seek shelter from the cold during regular hours.

The task of ensuring that Halton's homeless population finds adequate accommodation around the clock is, therefore, left solely up to the Lighthouse, a non-profit shelter operated by the Salvation Army and Halton Region Social Services.

On any given night, the co-ed emergency shelter, located on Redwood Square, just west of Fourth Line, is at around 95 per cent capacity.

"With this very, very cold weather, people tend to stay where they are if they have safe housing, if they are in a shelter program somewhere else, until the weather breaks and that affords them the opportunity to move," Clark said, noting that over the holidays, the shelter's numbers declined as people stayed with family.

The lodging supports 38 beds, eight of which are designated for Halton residents in a mental health crisis.

The latter are given one-on-one attention and supported by staff from the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA).

Each individual's circumstances are unique, but generally the Lighthouse is not able to support those with pets, or anyone under the age of 16.

Families in need of emergency shelter may be served through The Salvation Army Halton Emergency Family Shelter Program, a division of The Salvation Army Oakville Community Church and Community Services.

Clark said each case is different and, as a last resort, Lighthouse would never turn anyone away

if they couldn't find him or her an appropriate place to stay.

"First and foremost, we'd keep them here because sending them out into the cold wouldn't be an option," she said.

Those staying at the shelter receive snacks and three meals a day prepared by an in-house cook.

Lighthouse also runs a lunch bag program for those heading out to work or school for the day.

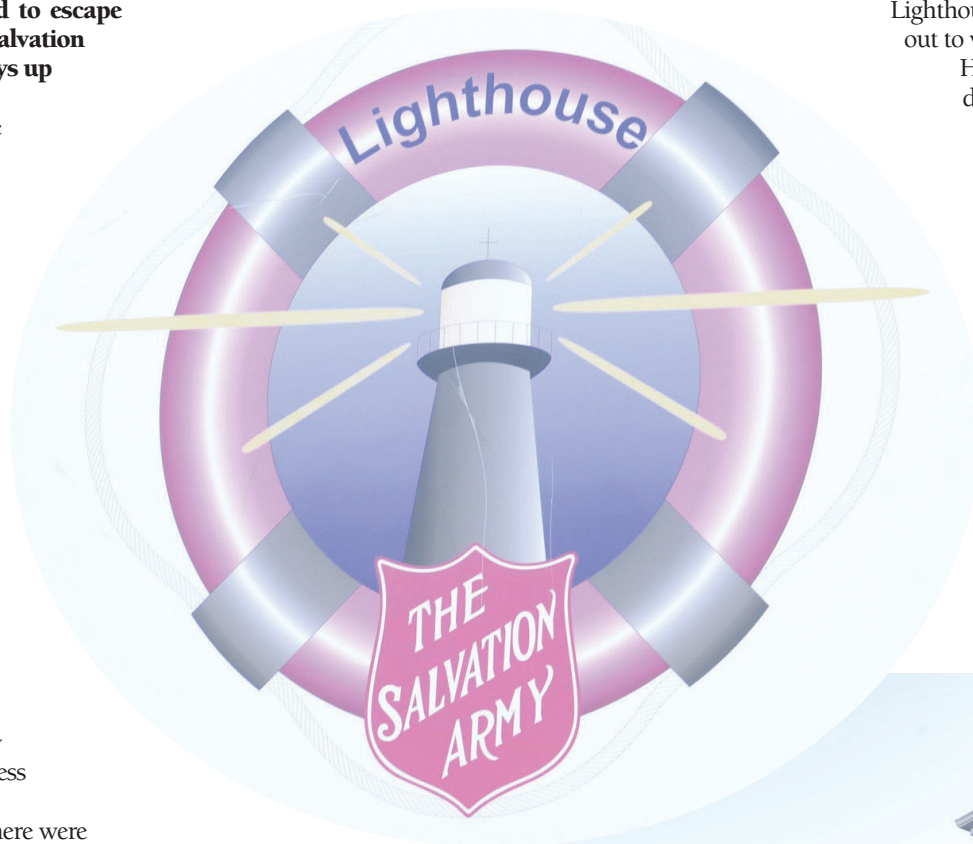
Halton residents looking to lend a hand are asked to donate warm clothes that are in high demand at this time of year.

"We're always happy to receive seasonal donations," Clark said. "Right now, that would be gloves, and hats and appropriate winter coats."

For placement at the Lighthouse, contact the Region of Halton at 905-825-6000 or 311.

Those in an emergency or calling after hours, can contact the shelter directly at 905-339-2918.

To make a donation in support of the Lighthouse Shelter, contact the Salvation Army of Oakville at 905-827-5324, ext 24, drop in at 1225 Rebecca St. location, Monday-Friday from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. or its website online at [www.salvationarmyOakville.ca](http://www.salvationarmyOakville.ca)



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