

Colborne Chronicle

Castleton church youth group reaches out

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CASTLETON — News of the hopelessness young people are feeling in Attawapiskat and the suicide crisis in that remote Ontario community struck a chord with the young people of the Castleton United Church youth group.

It was not long after these spirited young people led an entire Sunday service with drum circle and drama, recalled volunteer Candace Cox.

"They wondered, 'How can we possibly do anything to help when we are so far away, and it is such a difficult issue? How can we let them know they matter?'" Cox recalled.

They have spent these past few spring weeks on two major efforts to do so.

One was to write letters of support and weave friendship bracelets to ship to Attawapiskat. In all, Cox said, the seven teenagers crafted and mailed out 30 bracelets to send along with the letters.

The other idea came about as the plight of these young people faded

from the headlines, and the Castleton youth wanted to do more.

They collaborated on an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Grand Chief Perry Bellegarde, Northumberland MP Kim Rudd and MPP Lou Rinaldi, and Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne.

The letter conveys how much they care and even offers some suggestions they have come up with, along with a challenge for the government to step up and help in any way possible.

As Castleton resident Cachell Cox said, it was important to speak up.

"We don't want the youth there to have to go to the extremes of suicide again to have their cry for help heard," she said.

"Something has to change, and we're not convinced it has."

Ideas they mentioned in the letter that might make a difference to their Attawapiskat counterparts include:

- A support group and counsellor just for them on a permanent basis.
- Programming they can count on and enjoy regularly.
- Demonstrations of stability and

constant love — for example, an adult volunteer who might visit regularly with a therapy animal.

- Some means of providing a sense of purpose, such as tending animals.

- A space of their own to take pride in and feel safe in — ideally, one they might build or create themselves in an existing building, and one they might continue to enhance with projects such as equipping it with solar power.

- Sharing their own creation stories.

- Doing things for their community so they feel a part of it.

This last suggestion is one the Castleton youth are familiar with. They have supported their church as it went Affirming and sponsored a refugee family of five from Syria.

Their latest project is something special for their own community. They have scavenged 15 old bicycles, painted them and filled them with flowering plants in the baskets, and they are currently being set up at various locations around Castleton.

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

This is the latest project Castleton United Church youth group? fixing up old scavenged bikes as planters to beautify the community.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Rev. David Lander of Castleton United Church is seen with the members of the church's youth group? clockwise from Lander, Penny Matthews, Charlotte Coxhead, Cachell Cox, Madi White, Sophie Price and Sawyer White.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Castleton United Church youth group member Elsa Deperasinski is seen with the group's latest project? fixing up old scavenged bikes as planters to beautify the community.