

Halton Women's Place annual gala presents An Evening in Wonderland

By John Bkila

Metroland Media Group

Halton Women's Place Development Manager Carm Bozzo says while the regional shelter has been around for almost 40 years, it's still shocking to some that abuse continues to happen in their communities.

That's partly why its annual gala this year, held on Feb. 25 in Oakville is so important, according to Bozzo.

Not only is it one of Halton Women's Place's (HWP) major fundraisers, but it helps spread awareness of women abuse, how it can be stopped and how others can help, she says.

It's a captive audience of between 300-400 people that learns more about not just about Halton Women's Place and our programs and services, which is really important, but also the issue of women abuse, Bozzo explained. We do want them to know what they're supporting,

who they're supporting.

The Burlington-based HWP operates two shelters in Halton that will more than likely tend to be full another fact Bozzo says typically shocks people, adding the organization's gala isn't meant to be a downer, but rather to educate people on the work the shelter does and how their funds can help.

It's a real big piece of awareness and advocacy for us and from that, we get to meet new people who want to do more for the organization, whether it's volunteering, donating; whether it's just finding out more about us and how they can help, how their kids, their company can help, she said.

It's a great way to educate the community that not only does abuse happen in our community, but we need these two shelters and why.

While HWP's mandate is to help Halton women victims of abuse and their children, Bozzo

says the shelters accept anyone who comes to their door.

Never turning anyone away, she notes HWP has had women come from Ottawa, Montreal and B.C. who have heard of the organization and how it can be a place for them if they need help and support.

Our counsellors are wonderful. (Our clients) are treated with the best respect and we run an organization that really believes in empowering our clients, so we never pass judgment..., Bozzo said. Leaving an abusive home is a journey and needs a lot of support and time.

According to HWP, its shelters help 1,000 women and children in a year, on average, and counsellors take in about 2,100 calls annually.

Bozzo says, in the last five years, they have noticed many of their clients presenting with mental health and/or addiction issues, which tend to come out

as a result of abuse.

For that reason, HWP has developed a partnership with the Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK).

So, we are now working with ROCK through a couple of grants to have women and their children supported, said Bozzo. We believe strongly in partnerships with other organizations in our community.

While the gala isn't HWP's only annual fundraiser Hope in High Heels and a golf tournament also take place every year

Bozzo says the former raises between \$60,000-\$85,000.

Last year, it raised \$80,000 with 446 people attending numbers HWP wants to see repeated, if not increased, in February.

This year, HWP is inviting residents to An Evening in Wonderland; the gala's theme changes annually.

We wanted something more whimsical this year that gives us

a chance to be more fun with the décor and entertainment, Bozzo noted.

It's a great night, very classy, a lot of fun and a great way to support Halton's only women's shelter.

Held at the Oakville Conference Centre, 2515 Wyecroft Rd., from 5:30-11:30 p.m., the gala includes a Step and Repeat Photo Session with fake paparazzi taking pictures of gala goers as they enter.

It will also feature: cocktails, a sit-down dinner and candy bar; photo booth; live and silent auctions for prizes such as a one-of-a-kind ring made for the gala, concert tickets and a girls night out; and a draw for a trip for two anywhere Air Canada flies.

Tickets are still available at a cost of \$150 by emailing cbozzo@haltonwomensplace.com.

Visit haltonwomensplace.com for more details about HWP and how it helps victims of abuse.

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