

DEMAND FOR HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION SERVICES ON THE RISE

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the difference in the world," she said, noting there's long been an issue of local homeless youth not wanting to travel to the Oakville shelter as it takes them away from their community and supports.

"There is a need, and it's great that it's finally happening."

The sentiment was echoed by Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette.

"I'm very delighted to see the investment in youth accommodations in Acton," he said.

For local residents concerned about homelessness in their community, like Georgetown's Eric Doubt, Support and Housing Halton's plans come as welcome news.

"If housing and supports, not only shelter, can be provided for youths who

don't have the stability of a normal home life, their futures can be more secure and self-sustaining and the whole community is stronger," he told the Independent.

The funding decision came as part of a larger approval by council on how it will spend both provincial and federal dollars it receives for homelessness prevention.

For the 2020-2021 period, Halton has been allocated \$6.5 million from the province and \$755,000 in federal funds, with the region topping up the latter with \$400,000 approved in the 2020 budget.

Of the \$6.5 million, almost \$2.3 million will be used for emergency shelter solutions across Halton, \$1.8 million will go towards housing with related supports for residents, \$1.4 million will be used for

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- Coun. Jane Fogal

homelessness prevention, while the remainder will fund other services, supports and administration.

On the federal funding side, the money will be divided up between seven community agencies that help prevent homelessness, including Support and Housing Halton's five beds in Acton.

According to a report from Halton Commissioner of Social and Community Services Alex Sarchuk, the demand for homelessness prevention services increased last year, with

107 more Halton households receiving eviction prevention support and assistance with rapidly securing new housing with clean beds and furniture.

"Six-month followups demonstrate that an average of 92 per cent of clients contacted continue to retain their housing after receiving a homelessness prevention intervention," he reported to council.

Fogal said the document is timely as this is the first year that Halton Hills has had visible homelessness in the community.

"People just can't believe a community as wealthy as ours would have someone sleeping on a bench in a park," she said, noting she's received several calls from concerned residents and is aware that people are stepping up with offers to help.

On a recent day when the temperatures plummeted, Fogal said she called Halton's 311 government services line to ask if someone could check on the homeless individual, but she wasn't referred along to Halton Housing Help as expected and was instead transferred to the Halton Regional Police non-emergency line.

Sarchuk assured her that the deficiencies in information available to 311 staff have been addressed.

He explained that in this instance of homelessness in Halton Hills, the in-

dividual is resistant to accepting services, but his staff has done extensive outreach to ensure they're aware of the supports available to them.

"We need to be respectful of people's individual choices regarding this," he said.

For more information visit halton.ca and click on 'For Residents,' then 'Housing Supports and Services.'

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With homelessness becoming more visible in Halton Hills, we continue to follow all aspects of this important issue.

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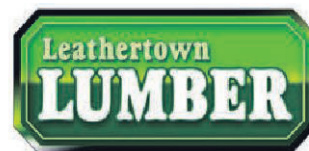
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