

PANDEMIC INCREASING CHARITY'S CLIENT BASE

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ple who have suffered job losses, face illness, are victims of a violent, abusive relationship, refugees lost within a system they don't know how to navigate.

While most of Halton's half-million residents enjoy a high quality of life, there are others who are not as fortunate and they are all around us.

You might not pay much attention to the young couple ahead of you in the early morning coffee line up, unaware they are destitute, their meagre belongings piled in a shopping cart outside.

You barely notice an obscure motel in your community, but it's home to a very sick man who does odd jobs for a small discount in rent, while battling cancer and living off gift cards to supply him with liquid nutrition.

Without knowing, you might pass a nondescript house in your neighbourhood on an evening stroll, where a homeless couple is sheltered in the garage, completely dependent on donations and the kindness of the homeowner.

Perhaps you're seated near a frail elderly woman in church, who unbeknownst to you has been robbed of her estate by a relative and forced to seek help for the basics of life from complete strangers.

It is for these people and hundreds of others with similar heartbreaking stories that the Compassion Society is needed "as we are non-discriminatory, non-judgmental, not-faith-based and inclusive."

One client with a particularly heart-wrenching immigrant story wrote Khawari this note of thanks:

"I am so grateful because without the foods and supplies they are giving. I don't know how can we survive."

- Client email to Compassion Society of Halton executive director

"I am so grateful because without the foods and supplies they are giving. I don't know how can we survive. It is such a relief to my mental, physical and financial stress. We can't thank you one by one, but I hope this message will reach you all."

Before the pandemic hit, the Compassion Society's client base was 600 active recipients. Not all need help every week, but the fallout from COVID-19 has meant an uptick in numbers. Since April, approximately 290 families have been using the services of the Compassion Society and as the countdown to Christmas begins, the struggle to raise funds to support the now more than 300 families through the holiday season, is underway.

"We're not a Christmas program; we are here for help throughout the year," said Khawari. "The Christmas program is basically for the families who come to us throughout the year."

Others who come in search of help specifically for the holiday, are referred to the many organizations in the region who offer Christmas programs, such as the Salvation Army, she said.

This season, the Compassion Society's annual Christmas market program has been revised. Clients will instead receive retail gift cards in the amount of

\$50 for small families (three people and under) and \$100 for larger families (four people and up), and these will be given out over two weeks in December.

The Compassion Society has also partnered with several other organizations, both local and regional, to meet the needs of individuals and families this Christmas. For example, although the Compassion Society is collecting toys in bins outside its office, the Salvation Army outlets in Burlington, Oakville, Milton, Georgetown and Acton will be distributing the toys to families in need in their respective communities. Compassion Society gift cards will be accepted through December. Monetary donations are also welcome by going to www.canadahelps.org/en/giv3/97839.

Hours of the Compassion Society, located at 484 Plains Rd. E., are Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from noon to 2 p.m.

Visit www.compassion-societyofhalton.com for more information, or call 905-592-3722.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: *With the pandemic amplifying the needs of vulnerable local residents, we wanted to shine a light on how the Compassion Society of Halton is helping the less fortunate living among the affluent of the region.*