

# SHIFRA OFFERS LIFETIME SUPPORT, SAYS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Romic.

Escaping troubled, often tragic pasts, most of Shifra's residents have been abandoned by family. They live on the streets or in cars; some couch surf. In one case this year, a young mother-to-be, days away from giving birth, was discovered sleeping in a hammock in the city's woods.

The women and teens, some as young as 16, are destitute and frightened, without any trust in those who should protect them, depleted.

Whether taken in from Halton Hills, other parts of the region or beyond, Shifra offers "a safe place to lay their head down, take a breath and rest," said Romic.

With the purchase of a second location, gutted, renovated and furnished in little over a month, Shifra can now accommodate a total of 10 residents.

Here, food, clothing and medical care for the women and teens and their babies are assured. Under the guidance, support and nurturing of kind-hearted staff and a small army of volunteers, each of these young women will learn parenting and life skills, be pushed to finish their education and have the chance to change the trajectory of their future.

"Shifra is a real home where I feel welcome," said



Leta and Shifra executive director Nancy Romic sit in the family room of the new home.

Graham Paine/Metroland

current resident Judith. "It is a community where we all are made to feel comfortable, loved and part of a family. It is not at all what I expected. You forget about your problems and your past. The stress and worries are taken care of, allowing me to just enjoy every day. I now have hope for a wonderful future with my child."

In 2021, Shifra had 89 requests for admission from throughout the region and well beyond; with less than a month left in 2022, that number has soared to 179,

**"They show you the love and respect that you deserve when the rest of the world looks at you like you're broken beyond repair."**

- Keisha, former resident

in part because similar homes in southwestern Ontario have closed their doors, said Romic.

"We are continuously full with waiting lists. There's just nowhere to go for these young pregnant

women and moms. Honestly, it's devastating; the need is so great. The funding is diminishing everywhere."

The joy of opening a second home is tempered only by the fact the bottom line will be doubled. Costs are

currently just under half a million to operate one home, and staff are dipping into reserves to run the second. Shifra relies heavily on donations to supplement any grants they receive. Romic is constantly promoting and fundraising. It's not just the basic necessities of life required, but a myriad of in-house supports such as psychotherapists, addictions counselors, self-esteem groups and art therapy programs. Currently, there are also nine women in Shifra's

Seeds of Hope program, which offers support to former residents as they transition back into the community. With backgrounds that can include addictions, mental health issues, even human trafficking, "it's a lifetime of helping, assisting, until you know that they're on their feet and they've healed, and everybody heals and recovers at a different pace."

"I have a mission that I foster that this is always home for these girls and babies, so they're continually coming back, getting support even years later."

"If I had not found Shifra, I would be homeless and just going to drop-in centres to get food and support," said former resident Keisha. "They actually care. They show you the love and respect that you deserve when the rest of the world looks at you like you're broken beyond repair."

"Without Shifra, I can honestly say I wouldn't be clean and sober. I wouldn't have my kids and, as much as I hate to admit it, I probably wouldn't be alive right now."

*STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With a second maternity home opening for young homeless mothers, we wanted to share how Shifra is expanding its efforts to help those in need.*



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