

Corrections officer spends 24 hours in cold at Maplehurst

Out in the Cold raises \$3,140 for Halton Women's Place

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Having just spent 24 hours shivering "Out in the Cold," corrections officer Ryan Graham would do it again in a heartbeat.

Together with probation and parole officer Wes Donovan, the pair stationed themselves out front of Maplehurst Correctional Complex to raise funds for Halton Women's Place.

Graham said it was an awesome experience.

"I was very encouraged by the amount of support in the community and the media," said Graham, who's been with Maplehurst for the last 12 years, and is now OPSEU's Local 234 president. "We've been

wanting to get out from behind the closed doors of the jail.

"People don't always portray us in the best light," said the father of four.

With that in mind, Graham, 33, decided to choose Halton Women's Place, since Maplehurst had partnered with the nonprofit group prior to Christmas to help collect essential items including clothes.

"We wanted to raise awareness of the homeless and displaced women and children fleeing abuse," he said.

In addition to braving 24 hours in the cold, out front of the jail, they also held a barbecue at noon for employees and community members.

On Monday, Jan. 8, they raised \$3,140, through the barbecue and an online campaign.

All it cost Graham was a few winks of sleep, and windburn to his cheeks. He was thankful the extreme



Nikki Wesley/Metroland

OPSEU Local 234 President and Correctional Officer Ryan Graham (right) and Probation Officer Des Donovan spent 24 hours out in the Cold to raise funds and awareness of homeless and displaced women and children fleeing abuse. They also hosted a BBQ outside Maplehurst Correctional Complex to help raise more funds for Halton Women's Place.

cold temperatures of the weekend snapped.

They sat in camping chairs, and although the pair didn't know each other prior, they became fast friends, sharing plenty of

stories to which they could both relate.

Graham figures he nodded off for about 10 minutes during the 24 hours, which began at 8 a.m. Monday and ended Tuesday at 8

a.m.

He said an ice fishing hut had been set up for them for shelter, but he never ended up inside.

"I was warm enough, but the temperature was the least of my worries," he laughed. "I had a lot of layers on, but I basically just sat in my chair and shivered. I'm glad it wasn't -20 C."

He said Halton Women's Place is also close to staff's hearts since some 20 per cent of inmates there had some history of domestic violence.

"It's all part of how we reach our and make the connections," he said.

"Domestic violence is part of a mental health issue that is a problem nationwide and worldwide."

Carm Bozzo, development manager of Halton Women's Place, said they're thrilled with the support.

"It's important to work together with our community organizations to pro-

mote all the work that we do collectively to prevent and end violence against women," she said. "We are grateful for this support and we hope to work together with them again."

Graham reiterated the movement Crisis in Corrections, which started with a hiring freeze imposed by the government seven years ago.

He said correctional facilities are crying out for resources, especially to help avoid the cycle of parolees returning to crime and ending up back in the prison system.

"The province really needs to invest in the appropriate resources," he said, adding that there are some 44,000 offenders in the probation system in the province at any given time.

"Some 50 per cent of staff suffer from mental health and addictions themselves," he noted, a statistic he came across recently. "We're overworked and under-resourced."

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