

# COMMUNITY

## Helping women in need, one basket at a time

### Basketeers in need of new recruits

By Stephanie Hounsell  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Imagine you're fleeing an abusive household with your child in tow. For a few weeks you stay at a shelter and then gather the courage to venture out on your own.

Now you're starting all over again with little but the clothes on your backs. Your rental apartment looks sadly empty and you wonder if you made the right decision to leave home. Knowing Christmas is coming only adds to the stress of having so little.

Now imagine your thoughts are interrupted by the ring of a doorbell. And standing there is someone from the shelter bearing a beautifully-wrapped gift basket full of things you need — and some little luxuries, too.

You haven't been forgotten.

This scenario plays itself out over and over again each year thanks to a dedicated group of people who call themselves Basketeers.

Each Christmas, volunteers assemble baskets full of items that'll help abused women get back on their feet and make a fresh start. There are about 1,500 volunteers in six chapters across Ontario, which support 22 shelters.

Baskets are distributed by shelter staff to women who are either at the shelter and preparing to leave, or those who have recently left.

Last year, Halton Women's Place received more than 100 baskets from the group, which has been supporting the shelter for the past few years.

"You can tell a lot of time and

love went into the baskets — they're gorgeous," said Carm Bozzo, development manager of Halton Women's Place, which operates short-term shelters in Milton and Burlington.

But there are more women in shelters than there are baskets.

The Basketeers are hoping to change that by spreading word of the program across Halton in hopes of gaining new members.

"Basketeers is not a registered charity, it is a lifeline for women starting over and we would like to inspire more people in Milton, Burlington and Oakville to extend this lifeline," said volunteer Meredith Galbraith, who works alongside founder Cheryl Stoneburg.

Galbraith, a Milton resident, has recruited family members to create baskets in lieu of a Christmas gift exchange.

Her mother, Barb, is equally passionate about the cause and getting people on board.

"This year has started off slowly and with the economy the way it is, I feel that more than ever women will need help," Barb said.

This year's drop-off date for completed and wrapped baskets is Saturday, Nov. 21. They should be brought to the Salvation Army, 3173 Cawthra Rd., in Mississauga between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

A basket put together by a Milton resident could be given to a client of Halton Women's Place, or it could go to someone at one of the other eight shelters the Greater Toronto chapter supports.

Getting started is easy, Meredith said. Once you register on-line, an



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**FILLING UP ON GOOD WILL:** Basketeers Meredith Galbraith and mother Barb have fun assembling some baskets.

empty Rubbermaid basket is dropped off at your house to fill. Or, if you prefer, you can simply make a monetary donation on-line.

Many Basketeers fill a basket according to a theme, such as kitchen or bed and bath.

Items in a kitchen basket might include a kettle, frying pan, kitchen towels, dinnerware and dish detergent. A bed and bath basket could be filled with bed sheets, bubble bath, a pillow, an alarm clock and a blanket.

The cost to fill a basket is usually from \$150 to \$200, but thrifty shoppers can do it for less. Basketeers who can't do a whole basket themselves can do one as a family or with a group of friends or co-workers.

Drop-off day is a lot of fun, said Meredith. It's a chance to see what other volunteers have done and there's definitely some friendly rivalry.

The donated baskets are part of Halton Women's Place's Holiday Hamper program, in which close to 300 families are sponsored.

Bozzo said the women are beyond grateful for the much-needed items.

"They often come with whatever's on their backs," she said, adding for the women with children, their kids become their top priority and there's little left for themselves.

This is a way of letting the women know they haven't been forgotten.

"It's nice to be able to give to these women who are on their own for the first time, and struggling with their decision (to leave their abuser), perhaps," she said. "It makes them feel confident in their decision."

Even though Basketeers don't have any contact with the women who receive the baskets, they can rest assured they've helped spread some joy.

"They've provided a lot of our clients with a wonderful Christmas," Bozzo said.

For more information or to register, visit [www.basketeers.ca](http://www.basketeers.ca).

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