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Combined contributions make Homeward Bound Halton work

More than 150 women graduate and find employment since it was established in 2004. The program is unique in that each partner provides something that on its own would help, but wouldn't necessarily address other concerns that would allow the participants to return to school.

For instance, the OCF will pay for the participants' tuition and books. A significant contribution, it wouldn't allow a single mother to return to school because she would still have expenses such as rent and day care.

"I had been looking into going to college and was overwhelmed with the cost of everything from tuition fees and books to traveling costs and daycare bills," said Linda, a 32-year-old single mother of three. (Her name, like Rebecca's was changed, and their stories provided through interviews with HSH). "I was feeling like it would never be possible."

HSH executive director Michelle Pommells said the goal was to find a long-term fix to break the cycle of poverty.

"How can we get a solution that is not a Band-Aid?" she said. "How can we help these women reach a whole new level of self-sufficiency?" Working together, the community partners are able to provide comprehensive support to help participants succeed.

Halton Region will provide housing and daycare subsidies while Sheridan will provide the students with laptops, internship placements and assistance with their job search following completion of the program.

HSH will recruit participants and qualify their applications. It will also provide support, job internships and advice on expanding the program in the future.

Two other community groups will also assist

with the program. The YMCA of Oakville is providing participants' children with swimming lessons, teen leadership programs and summer camp experiences, while ArtHouse will provide music, drama and visual arts programming for children between the ages of seven and 11.

"This couldn't be done with just one organization," said Jeff Zabudsky, president and CEO of Sheridan College. "Sometimes students aren't successful because of other challenges they face. This will allow them to focus on their academic success."

The collaborative effort of the Homeward Bound Halton program has Oakville Community Foundation CEO Rusty Baillie excited about seeking partnerships for future projects.

"If we can align on priority issues and knock the big ones down, the others will be so much easier," he said. "Together we can fund them and do more."

Rebecca and Linda will both begin studying business administration in September. They will be two of the first five to enroll at Sheridan through Homeward Bound Halton.

"What I am looking forward to most by going to college is learning," said Linda, the first member of her family to go to college. "I am finally going to get the education I didn't want or value when I was younger. I think (my children) now see it as a possibility for themselves as well."

The original Homeward Bound program in Toronto has had an 80 per cent success rate since it began. It has been estimated that for each dollar invested in the program, four dollars are saved in social assistance.

Halton Region chair Gary Carr said the...

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