Women's shelter must raise one-quarter of its budget

By Wilma Blokhuis
BEAVER FOCUS EDITOR

In addition to providing safe refuge to hundreds of abused women and their children, Halton Women's Place (HWP) must also fundraise $420,000 just to keep the door open.

"We receive 75 per cent of our funding from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, and the remaining 25 per cent has to come from our own fundraising," said Cheryl Taylor, executive director of HWP.

"Last year we fell short of our goal, for no reason other than there's strong competition for fundraised dollars in Halton," she continued. "This year we're fairly strong."

Taylor is hopeful this year's goal will be met.

HWP provides 50 beds at two sites in Halton, 30 at its South shelter in Burlington built in 1994 and 20 at its new North facility that opened in Milton two years ago. "Cribs and cots can add 10 – 15 occupants when you include small children and infants on a daily basis." Both shelters have handicapped facilities.

"We have newborns to 16-year-olds," continued Taylor. "We've had women give birth at the shelter.

"We see all sectors of society, everybody from women without money to those with no access to money," said Taylor.

Although HWP does not have a shelter in Oakville, "core services are offered there. A large number of women who access our services in Burlington and Milton come from Oakville." Taylor added the shelter has a working relationship with The Lighthouse emergency shelter for the homeless, run by the Salvation Army.

Residential services include providing counseling, referrals, food, used clothing and donations to help women get re-established. HWP's outreach services are similar – but without its residential facilities.

"Women leaving home need the goods to get started," said Taylor, adding that more than 500 women "who didn't seek residential services" made appointments to access HWP's residential services.

HWP is "usually full," said Taylor, and "peak periods" include early summer when "women are making choices to leave the family home and make a move without having to disrupt their kids' school."

This creates another problem, as Halton is "lacking in affordable, social housing that is subsidized, creating a big vicious circle around the needs of the community around social housing," said Taylor. "There is no second-stage housing in Halton…unfortunately," she lamented.

HWP prides itself in not only providing a playroom that is open 24 hours a day, but it also provides an interactive children's program resembling 'summer camp,' everything from crafts to day trips for those for whom it's safe to venture away, under supervision, from the shelter. The shelters have large secured fenced yards and video surveillance.

"We are strongly safety oriented when it comes to the kids," said Taylor, emphasizing "they're still kids and we need to fill their need for summer fun – and family fun – despite the family being in crisis." Taylor said children staying at HWP are counseled on understanding abuse, "how to face the future should they return to an abusive (situation), and that the abuse is not their fault."

The shelter's summer program relies on community support, such as donated tickets to pools and for day trips to the African Lions Safari or Canada's Wonderland.

"We leave the choice of whether the kids go out of the shelter for swimming or day trips with the moms," said Taylor. "Some men will go out looking for their kids, and some don't."

Mothers and children can stay at the shelter for a maximum of six weeks. "The greater number stay the maximum six weeks because they feel they have no place to go. Because there's no housing for them, they do the 'shelter shuffle,' they move from shelter to shelter while looking for a social safety net," said Taylor. "It's very difficult for them."

The average length of stay has increased to 25 - 28 days from 17-21 days. "Some women only stay for a couple of days."

The shelters operate on a communal living arrangement, where all of the women do their own laundry, look after their personal belongings and sharing basic household chores and cooking. Much of the food – basic staples – is donated while a small grocery budget allows for purchasing meat and fresh vegetables, said Taylor.

HWP will celebrate its 25th anniversary next year. Its first shelter was an old farmhouse in Milton. "We've been providing shelter for abused women since 1980," concluded Taylor.

Turnbull tourney went public four years ago

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"As I have found out canvassing for my fundraiser, it appears that less than 50 per cent of the people I've contacted know about HWP.

"Last year over 400 women and children stayed at the shelters due to domestic violence problems, 700 non-resident clients were assisted, and 673 women and their families were turned away due to lack of space.

"Due to the above problems the shelter in Burlington has added 10 new beds for a total of 30 beds, and the Milton shelter has gone from 10 to 20 beds. This, of course, has increased their operating costs," said Turnbull.

Until four years ago, the Turnbull Aquarium Challenge was a Deerfield members-only event. Now it's open to the public.

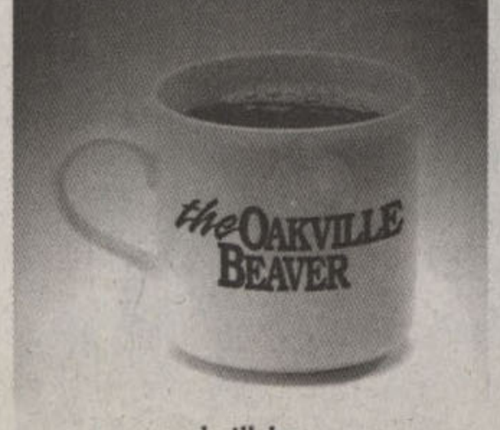
"From a golfing interest standpoint, this is the only golf tournament that I know of where one individual plays against the entire club, so it relates to about $100 a swing if I screw up," said Turnbull.

"My objective is to come in the middle of the pack, so that the losers pay the winners, which has happened most years. It's the only tournament in the world where I get to play everybody," he said.

Turnbull donates two Crystal Dolphin Trophies each year for the best Ladies and Men's scores for Deerfield members who play in this tournament.

Brad Townsend, owner of the Rude Native Bistro and Lounge in Oakville, Bronte, Burlington and Kitchener, offered to co-sponsor this event last year, and has signed up again this year. In addition, The Rude Native is entering five foursomes in the tournament.

Brian Turnbull can be contacted at 905-827-0982 (Tel/Fax), or by e-mail at worlds-greatest-putter@sympatico.ca. In addition to looking for more players, Turnbull is also hoping to attract more hole sponsors for $300 each, donations of gift certificates, and items for the raffle draw.



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