

Dufferin commemorates National Housing Day



By Jasen Obermeyer

Dufferin County has commemorated National Housing Day by having a housing and homelessness forum, to discuss poverty in the county.

The event took place this past Wednesday (Nov. 22) at the Salvation Army New Hope Community Church.

National Housing Day is observed every 22nd of November, to honour the one per cent campaign endorsement for all levels of government to invest additional funds in building social housing.

The day came the same time the federal government announced a new national housing strategy, which includes the implementation over 10 years of creating 100,000 new affordable housing units across the country, along with renovating hundreds of thousands of other housing units.

Keith Palmer, Dufferin County's director of community services, spoke to those in attendance on the status of poverty in the county. He says that while the county doesn't have a poverty or homelessness crisis, "we don't want to get there."

He gave some statistics on poverty in the county. Through his presentation, he said that Dufferin spent \$4.2-million on poverty in 2016, and forecasts it will go up next year to \$4.7-million. "We've got to build the infrastructure, how to support the infrastructure, to try and address the issue in our community."

The statistics also found that one in ten people in the county live in poverty, approximately 6,000 people. "You may not see them, but they exist," says Mr. Palmer.

He also showed a poverty cycle, describing how a low income leads to unhealthy eating habits, unable to pay rent, then going to shelters, but after a few months, one feels ashamed and then stays on the streets. "You may not see it everyday, it may not be demonstrated itself this way, but we see where we work, we see it all the time."

Mr. Palmer gave some various scenarios and solutions when dealing with poverty, bringing up the difficulty in getting a job, especially in a rural area. "That is not going to be the solution, it will never be the solution."

He says that transportation in the county is one of the main issues, and it's become more difficult to build in Orangeville, the suggestions of building in Shelburne, Mono, and Grand Valley aren't the best ones, due to transportation. "The amenities don't exist, so that's not the solution either."

He explains they can't keep creating housing for a particular group, "when we know in our community that's not the group that requires the services."

Wally Czech, a Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) trainer, also spoke at the event.

He explains that a big change when dealing with homelessness and those in poverty is changing the perspectives of those ways of life, and the people in it, to approach it a different way.

"We have to get away from asking them 'what's wrong with them?' but instead asking them 'what's happening to them?'"

Mr. Czech advises it's best to treat homeless people as human beings. "Bring that human factor back into this, it kind of changes your perspective."