

FTP celebrating International Women's Day in style, today



By Mike Pickford

In a stunning new report released by the Global Economic Forum, it has been estimated that gender parity will not truly exist in our world for another 200 years. Yes, you read that right, two whole centuries. That's roughly six generations. So, with that being said, you can probably expect your grandkids' grandkids to have to fight the same issues we fight today regarding equality.

While it's unclear what type of progress could be made between then and now to speed things up, Norah Kennedy, along with the entire team at Dufferin-Caledon's Family Transition Place, are doing what they can to combat the issue of gender parity right here in the community. It is an arduous, at times frustrating fight, admits Ms. Kennedy, who serves as the organization's executive director. But it's one she's absolutely committed to seeing through to the end.

Since arriving in the community in 1984, FTP has provided critical services to thousands of women and children who have experienced abuse and unhealthy relationships. While there has been 'great progress' made in many ways since then, the local facility still finds itself in a position where demand for its services is on the rise, rather than on the decline.

Over the past 18 months, FTP has reported an average 10 percent increase across the board in clients served per program. This is an issue that is getting worse in our area, Ms. Kennedy states.

'Our emergency shelter here in Orangeville is never empty. We almost never have a spare bed, as soon as one becomes available there's somebody else straight through the door,' Ms. Kennedy told the Citizen. 'We have extensive waiting lists for our counselling services. We're taking phone calls every day. It's a truly, truly concerning trend.'

The facility provided emergency shelter for 103 women and 65 children between April 1, 2016 and April 1, 2017, while putting up 20 women and 23 children in second stage housing. 388 women signed up for woman abuse counselling, 151 women and 22 men enrolled in sexual abuse counselling, while 318 women and 5 men required transitional support services. In total, FTP received 3,742 calls on its crisis and information lines.

And so, with March 8 officially marking International Women's Day, Norah is keen to press home the fact that there are truly remarkable people in our community working to put an end to gender equality and all forms of abuse 'against both men and women. The organization is hosting its seventh annual International Women's Day Luncheon Fundraiser at the Best Western in Orangeville today. Kicking off at 11:30 a.m. and running until 1:30 p.m., the event will feature comedian Judy Croon as keynote speaker.

Her 'hilarious and inspirational' speech will explore seven stress-relieving ingredients, while also touching on how humour can help us all live a better life. There will also be several local businesses on hand to put on a special women's vendor marketplace.

'It really is a fabulous day, a really, really fun day that we here at FTP really look forward to and enjoy, because much of the work we do is really heavy and intense. On International Women's Day we're able to take a step back and celebrate,' Ms. Kennedy said.

'We're going to have around 300 people come together in the main ballroom, so the atmosphere will be really good.'

The event serves as one of FTP's two main fundraisers and in recent years has raked in roughly \$30,000 for the local non-profit. Ms. Kennedy is optimistic this 'incredibly generous' community will come together once again to raise at least \$30,000 for the centre.

Globally, the theme for this year's International Women's Day is 'Press for Progress' - a direct reference to the shocking Global Economic Forum report released late last year.

'I think what the organizers of the event are trying to get across with this theme is what kind of responsibility can we take to bring

that 200-year mark forward, because it's completely ridiculous to think we will have to go that long without gender parity," Ms. Kennedy said. "Whether it be recognizing women achievements, committing to gender equality in the workplace? As a man, committing to respectful conversations and respecting women's rights. There's lots we can and should be doing to try and bridge this monumental gap."

While there are many days where Norah admits she comes close to banging her head against a wall, she looks positively back on what the past 100 years have brought for women. Until legislation was passed in 1929, women were not even officially recognized as a person in Canada, instead being referred to as property. Since that time, women have secured the right to vote, to work and to represent communities, provinces and, in Kim Campbell's brief tenure, to run the nation.

"When my mother was born in 1929, she wasn't a person. I remember the stories she used to tell me growing up? There has been lots of shift and lots of change since those days. This one day of the year is a chance for us to celebrate those advances. Not resting on our laurels though, we also know it's an opportunity to bring the types of issues we're seeing today ? you only need to look towards the #MeToo movement ? to the fore in the hopes of eradicating them forever."

She added, "There's still a long, long way to go if we're seriously going to chip away at that 200-year projection. We're already working hard in this community on our educational programs for youth. While there are horrible issues prevalent in our community today, we're hoping, through our programming, through reaching kids at our local high schools, that they won't be as much of an issue 10 years from now."

"While it is discouraging seeing our numbers rise at such an alarming rate, all we can and should be thinking about, rather than getting discouraged, is thank goodness we're here. If there's someone in our community that needs support, needs that security and that safe place to lay their head at night, at least we're here to help them out. A lot of women from communities all across the world unfortunately don't have that opportunity. So, for that, we're thankful," Ms. Kennedy concluded.

In conjunction with its International Women's Day Luncheon, Family Transition Place will be releasing the sixth iteration of its Celebrating Women magazine. Featuring advertisements and articles focused on interesting women in our community, the magazine is available to the public as of today.

For more information on Family Transition Place, visit familytransitionplace.ca. For more information on International Women's Day, visit www.internationalwomensday.com.