

Choices Youth Shelter in Orangeville the latest to benefit from Caledon chapter of 100 Women



By Bill Rae

Choices Youth Shelter in Orangeville is going to soon be benefitting from the efforts of the Caledon chapter of 100 Women Who Care.

The women gathered for their second meeting last Wednesday at Caledon Ski Club near Belfountain and chose the facility from among two others that were up for consideration.

There were about 65 women on hand for the meeting. Participants were able to nominate worthy causes ahead of time, and three of them were drawn at random. The nominators were then given five minutes to make their pitch to the gathering.

Each participant had pledged to contribute \$100.

Although there were less than 100 at last week's meeting, the word is spreading. Christine Gnass, who was MC at the meeting, said the numbers have been growing since the first meeting in February.

"We're actually 100-plus Women Who Care Caledon," she remarked.

Elizabeth Morton spoke on behalf of Choices, saying that although the shelter is in Orangeville it serves youths from Caledon and beyond. Its mission is to give shelter to young people in need of it, aged 16 to 24.

The facility is open to young people at night, but Ms. Morton said they have to leave during the day, either to work or go to school. Workshops offered there are aimed at teaching basic skills and helping them with such tasks as looking for jobs. There are also programs dealing with counselling, anger management, etc.

They would like to offer more programs, she said, but need more money. Much of their funding comes from Dufferin County and the Province. There is also a Trillium Grant.

"They have to fund-raise," Ms. Morton said.

Choices serves young people who no other place to go, she said.

"They're helping those young people finish their growing up," Ms. Morton observed.

Ms. Morton said there are 10 part-time staff at the shelter. She added it's awkward to have volunteers because of the need to make sure trained staff is there.

"The kids have got to be in a safe house," she said, pointing out there's no contact with the parents, and the alternative is they would be sleeping on the streets. "They've got to feel safe."

Last week's efforts raised \$7,325 in less than an hour.

The other nominees last week were Headwaters Health Care Foundation and the Youth Program at Theatre Orangeville.

Helen Meek-Hickey spoke on behalf of Headwaters, commenting a main focus of their efforts this year is to get more defibrillators around the hospital.

"They are not cheap," she said, adding one costs more than \$20,500.

She added the Province doesn't fund them, so the Foundation has to rely on charitable support.

The facility serves a population of some 135,000, and Ms. Meek-Hickey said everyone knows somebody with heart issues.

"Defibrillators save lives," she declared, adding they are also very small and portable.

Barbara McCreath spoke on behalf of Theatre Orangeville.

Despite its name, she said "it engages all the surrounding areas."

She said some 20 per cent of the participants are from Caledon, as are about 25 per cent of those involved in the youth program. Theatre Orangeville is involved in touring schools to generate a young audience, and that's where they were hoping the money would go toward.

Ms. McCreath said they are planning to take issue-based plays to the schools, addressing such issues as bullying, addictions, etc. She added the hope is the program can empower the next generation of leaders.

Ms. McCreath said Theatre Orangeville gets a lot of its funding from ticket sales, but the Youth Program relies on charitable contributions and grants.

The proceeds from the February meeting went to Caledon Meals on Wheels. Christine Sevigny, executive director of the agency, was on hand to express thanks for the support, and for picking them from among other worthy causes.

Ms. Sevigny told the women the agency provides a number of programs, aimed at improving clients' situations in terms of health, nutrition, social interaction, etc. In addition to delivering some 27,000 meals per year, Meals on Wheels volunteers also do safety checks on people, as well as friendly visiting.

She also commented that the agency's Benevolent Fund is in financial need.

Ms. Sevigny explained that most clients can handle the nominal costs for the meals, but some find it a burden, especially when they face other challenges that make it difficult for them to get out to get groceries, and some are living below the poverty line.

She said there was a case of one man who could only afford two meals per week, and who had lost a leg owing to diabetes. He was also legally blind. The agency was able to determine he was eligible for the subsidy.

As well, she said the need for such subsidies is increasing. About \$3,000 in subsidies were distributed in 2012, but it's anticipated that figure will be more than \$18,000 this year.

Some people only need such assistance until they are able to get back on their feet, while others need it for years.

"It all depends on their situation," she said, adding looking out for people's nutrition helps reduce the number of visits to hospitals or emergency rooms, and aids people in living more independent lives.

For more information, go to www.100womenwhocarecaledon.com