

A student's reflection

With a New Year, I find myself reflecting over what has transpired during the last year and looking forward to the future. Many of the people in the Town of Aurora and beyond know that in February 2017 I became homeless after I left a toxic family situation.

After leaving my home I relied on the support and shelter from 360Kids support services in Richmond Hill.

I had previously heard of 360Kids through MPP Chris Ballard's then executive assistant Brian Morris who connected me to 360Kids several months before I needed their services. Brian connected me to 360Kids because at the time I was interested in starting my own charity to help families with children who have cerebral palsy and other disabilities. I never dreamed that I would actually later be in desperate need of 360's services for myself.

I learned more about myself during my four month stay at 360 Kids connections emergency shelter than I ever have before. It is because of the community of Aurora and the support staff at 360Kids that I am where I am today and I am who I am today. I cannot tell you how many people most of them I didn't even know wondering how they could help. I got messages of support, messages telling me never to give up on my dreams and messages telling me to keep my head high.

I want everyone to know that I am truly grateful for all the kind messages donations and words of encouragement I received over the past several months and continue to receive. I am still blown away by the generosity of the Canadian public who raised for my education over \$45,000.

On another note I was absolutely thrilled to find out that my friend and the owner of Lighthouse Legal services, along with other members of the community put together and hosted a benefit night for Inn from the Cold, a youth shelter that is open during the winter months to keep homeless youth off the street during the coldest months of the year. I'm extremely proud of Brian not only as a friend but as a community member and business owner who cares deeply about the community where my heart lives.

To give everyone an update on my situation I finished my first semester at Carlton University in Ottawa with a grade of 80% in my law course and 74% in my criminology course. I am hopeful my second semester will be as successful, if not more successful, than the semester just passed.

My hopefulness also comes with some concern however because in the summer there is a very real possibility I will be facing homelessness once again. I also just found out that my wheelchair needs new seating again the cost of which is estimated at \$2,000 or more and the provincial government's assistive devices program is not likely to pay the usual 75% they do normally because the seating can only be replaced every two years and mine is not even a year-old.

But they don't take into consideration that I just had surgery. My wheelchair which I rely on in the same fashion that able-bodied people rely on their legs also needs more necessary repairs to keep the wheelchair in good working order.

It is unclear even with the money from the Go Fund Me whether or not I will be able to afford the necessary repairs considering the last bill was over \$3,000.

I wish to make it clear I did not write this letter to get sympathy or to be a poster child as some have suggested. I wrote this letter to continue to bring to light the difficulties and struggles of being homeless and/or not stably housed while living with a physical disability namely cerebral palsy. And to thank those in the community who have shown me support.

In closing, I say this I am thrilled that events like the one hosted by Lighthouse legal services are helping to continue the much-needed dialogue around youth homelessness.

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