

## Abuse Hurts to tackle increased demand thanks to Hoedown funding



When public health restrictions were lifted as COVID-19 steadied across Ontario, it was a welcome return to normalcy for many people ? but, for others, it was a long-awaited opportunity to start anew.

For Abuse Hurts, a York Region-based organization supporting women and children fleeing all forms of abuse, it was like seeing a tap turned back on in terms of the numbers of families they were called upon to assist ? and, several months on, demand remains high.

Helping to address this demand will be the Magna Hoedown Community Fund, a pot of money established by Magna International to support 30 local charities that would have otherwise benefited from the annual Wild West Hoedown, which was cancelled for the third year running this past spring due to COVID.

?It is so critical because we're not like most charities as we're not doing galas or golf tournaments, so we're just so grateful to Magna not just for us but how they support the community over the years. It is phenomenal and we're truly grateful,? says Ellen Campbell, Executive Director of Abuse Hurts.

Magna's contribution this year will go directly to Delivering Hope, Abuse Hurts' programs supporting women and children. Through Delivering Hope, families who are referred by other organizations to Abuse Hurts are helped to get back on their feet with clothing, housewares, furniture and other supports.

It's not just women and children who are referred to Abuse Hurts, Ms. Campbell adds. Men escaping abuse sometimes come across their threshold as well.

?Demand has really gone up,? she says. ?Once COVID was over and the restrictions were released and the women could come out of shelters it was like a tap got turned on. We were open and we still provided and delivered, but [over COVID] it was a lot slower because the women were kind of stuck in the shelter. If one woman got COVID the whole place was shut down, but once restrictions came off we just had a flood. We're really busy now and it's like all of a sudden there's just a flood of people who couldn't do anything before who are coming to us.?

Domestic abuse is up over 30 per cent nation-wide, she notes, and some women who were planning on escaping their situation in and around March of 2020 had nothing short of a roadblock put in place with the Provincial lockdowns.

?It was frustrating [at the start of the pandemic] because we had all this clothing, furniture and everything but we weren't getting a lot of requests because everybody was kind of shut in,? says Ms. Campbell. ?As soon as the regulations came off, it was like a

switch and it hasn't stopped.?

While demand for the services Abuse Hurts provides continues to be on an upward trajectory, a heartening trend is so too is awareness of what abuse entails. This has resulted in people being more open about seeking help, says Ms. Campbell.

?Usually, it is physical abuse because it's when it really gets bad that women will leave and will go back too sometimes because of the financial situation and women [find] they can't manage,? she says. ?When it is physical abuse, it usually starts with emotional abuse and degrading words like ?You're stupid' or ?You're fat,' and it starts that way ? verbally, emotionally, and eventually it goes into the physical. Very rarely does it start off as physical abuse. It's a process and it takes time. The thing with emotional abuse, too, is sometimes people don't realize it is happening to them because it is so gradual. They start to lose a sense of self, self-esteem, and they're more or less conditioned for the physical abuse. It's kind of grooming.

?People are in shelters usually because it is physical abuse and they're running for their lives and fear because they have already been hit. If someone has been physically abused, they have also been emotionally abused, for sure, and sometimes sexually abused. The other interesting thing is people don't realize the domestic abuse of men.?

Men, she says, are not immune from domestic abuse and this is something the community has become steadily more cognizant of. While there have been some improvements, Ms. Campbell said previously police sometimes couldn't understand ?how this 5'4 woman was hitting and beating a six-foot man,? but recent shelter developments saw spaces for men quickly fill up.

?If you go through the same shame, guilt, embarrassment and everything a woman goes through, maybe even fear for your life, the shelter filled up immediately,? she said.

For more information on Abuse Hurts, visit [abusehurts.ca](http://abusehurts.ca). For a full list of local charities and non-profits benefiting from this year's Magna Hoedown Community Fund, visit [hoedown.ca](http://hoedown.ca).

By Brock Weir  
Editor  
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter