

## Additional community supports coming to help victims of human trafficking

Hundreds of thousands of dollars recovered from the proceeds of crime will be reinvested in the local community to support victims of human trafficking.

Funds from the Province's Ontario Civil Remedies Grant Program have been allocated to the Newmarket-based Bridgenorth, which works with and provides services to sexually-exploited women and girls through survivor-led support, prevention, education and advocacy, as well as Cedar Centre, which provides similar survivor-led support for children, youth, and adults recovering from interpersonal childhood trauma.

The funds will support Bridgenorth's intervention program, assisting youth between the ages of 12 and 19 who have experienced sex trafficking or sexual exploitation, while Cedar Centre will use their share to establish York Region's first Child and Youth Advocacy Centre.

The funds were announced at York Region's Newmarket headquarters on Friday afternoon by Doug Downey, Attorney General of Ontario, and Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy.

"Government makes a choice. Government can create new programs, and sometimes they are flashy and you can explain what you are trying to do. What we have chosen to do is invest in you, the people doing the real work, already on the ground, serving people, and we are adding capacity instead of adding administrative structure," said Downey. "The work that both Bridgenorth and Cedar Centre are doing is really remarkable. There is no denying the challenge that we have, the magnitude of the challenge that we have."

The funds, he said, were derived from proceeds of crime, including seized assets, "whether cash, cars, purses, any number of things," and putting the money "in use for proper purposes."

"Through the Ontario Civil Remedies Grant program, our government is investing in initiatives that provide meaningful support, create opportunities for healing, and help protect vulnerable individuals from exploitation and abuse," added MPP Gallagher Murphy. "I am pleased that up to \$200,000 will support Bridgenorth's Life Edge intervention program, helping more youth between the ages of 12 and 19 who have experienced sex trafficking or sexual exploitation to allow them to access survivor-led and trauma-informed support services". You are the boots on the ground, and you are making a difference". I am equally pleased that up to \$200,000 will support Cedar Centre, another phenomenal organization. This will work to establish York Region's first Child and Youth Advocacy Centre. This important project will bring together specialized supports in one safe, trauma-informed environment, helping children and youth navigate difficult circumstances while reducing the risk of further trauma.

"These investments go beyond funding dollars. The investments will help ensure that young people know that they are not alone. They are about providing families with support when they need it most. It's also about building a stronger York Region where children and youth can feel safe, supported, and empowered to move forward. Every young person deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. Every family deserves the access to support and care. Every community benefits when we invest in prevention, protection, and recovery."

The real-world impact of these dollars were outlined by representatives from both organizations.

"Bridgenorth exists because, sadly, sex trafficking is happening right here in York Region," said Executive Director Karen Todd. "We help youth experience freedom from sex trafficking through advocacy, education, and awareness and direct services. I am pleased to share that the grant being awarded today will help us do two things.

"We will build capacity in at least 25 frontline service providers from other agencies to recognize the signs a youth is being exploited or trafficked. Youth often don't recognize that what they are experiencing is exploitation and don't always identify themselves as victims of crime. Three additional spots in our program are also being funded for both this year and next. It provides

low-barrier, trauma-informed, individualized support for youth aged 12 to 19 who have experienced sex trafficking or sexual exploitation.?

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