

Every day is a saved life at Yellow Brick House, says Executive Director



By Brock Weir

Every day is its own milestone at Yellow Brick House ? it is a worthy day because they save lives, according to Loris Herenda, Executive Director of the Aurora-based shelter for Women and Children.

In last year alone across Ontario, Ms. Herenda says 48 women, children and their family members lost their lives due to domestic violence, an all-too-tragic signal that their work is far from over.

Ms. Herenda made her remarks on December 6, huddled up against the cold as she joined Mayor Tom Mrakas, Councillors, and members of the York Regional Police at Town Hall to raise the purple flag on the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, a day founded in remembrance of 14 women killed 29 years ago at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique. ?We are here today on the National Day of Remembrance of the 14 women killed 29 years ago just for being women,? she said. ?Here we are, 29 years later, and we are still dealing with gender inequality, gender inequity and gender-based violence. In last year alone, in Ontario, 48 women, children and family members lost their lives due to domestic violence. Our work is definitely not done. Having a woman, a child or a family member killed every seven days in Ontario is unacceptable for us.?

Yellow Brick House, she added, appreciated the Town's support in ?helping us in our quest to end violence against women and children,? raising the flag at Town Hall for the first time.

?Today's flag-raising ceremony is to show the support to women and children impacted by violence, it is to show the support to families who have been shattered because of violence, and to work towards eradication,? she concluded.

These sentiments were echoed by Mayor Mrakas, who gave his thanks to Yellow Brick House for ?helping women and children impacted by violence rebuild their lives and seek shelter from abuse.?

?We are gathering to show our support for 14 young women whose lives ended in gender-based violence on December 6, 1989 at Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal,? he said. ?This event nearly 30 years later reminds us that women continue to be targeted because of their gender and we, as a community, need to come together to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. And we need to create a culture of respect, admiration and equality for women. Today is a day to reflect and take responsible actions to make women and girls feel safe at home, at work, and in their respective communities.?

Following the flag raising ceremony, Ms. Herenda told The Auroran that in this, the height of the holiday season, women and children who are either staying in their shelters or using their community counselling and supportive services, are in ?dire need? of contributions.

Yellow Brick House encourages anyone considering a donation to their organization to make a financial contribution, or donate a gift card. Each option, she said, ?empowers women to purchase whatever they need for their families.?

?The gift of a gift card usually gives them that opportunity to really make their own decisions,? she said. ?We typically recommend to donors to get gift cards from stores such as Walmart or No Frills, grocery stores, where a woman can get the biggest value for a dollar. Teenagers always love movie passes and Indigo gift cards.?

Yellow Brick House is a not-for-profit charitable organization that gets about 69 per cent of its funding from the Province. The rest

comes through donation and fundraising.

"I think every day at Yellow Brick House is a worthy day because we save lives," said Ms. Herenda. "Women come to us, children come to us, and we hear the stories of horror and terror. The fact that the women have the courage to leave an abusive situation and leave and get the help she needs from us is a fantastic milestone because we know we're keeping the homicide rates down."

For more information, including how to donate, visit www.yellowbrickhouse.org or call 1-800-263-2231.

If you are in an abusive situation and need assistance, call their 24-hour crisis line at 1-800-263-3247.