

Groomed for Greatness help men in need rebuild their lives

Local men in need will have the chance to get a fresh start through a new program launched by Abuse Hurts and long-time volunteer Liz Livingstone.

Groomed for Greatness: Empowering Men to Rebuild Their Confidence, One Fresh Start at a Time, was launched last week with two men from a York Region shelter being selected as the first beneficiaries of the new initiative.

The initiative takes a holistic approach to getting men in need back on their feet and includes a makeover, complete with new clothing, and skills training as well, which they hope will lead men to new opportunities.

Taking its cues from similar programs they offer for women, Livingstone saw her initiative as being particularly focused on men who have experienced homelessness or live in shelters as they look to re-enter the workforce.

'I have been working with Abuse Hurts for a number of years now and was really involved with the fashion show for the last three years, which was wonderful. Most of the programs are geared towards women and children, which is wonderful, and obviously, that is necessary, but there really isn't much for men,' explains Livingstone, who was previously involved in the Dress for Success initiative spearheaded by Moore's Clothing for Men, and thought there was room to take things 'a little further and actually help people get back into the workforce.'

'I have a recruitment agency called Trevor Frances Recruitment and part of what I do is help people with resumes, help them with their job search and interview coaching and things like that. [I thought] if we can incorporate both of those and create something that not only makes them feel good and look good, and give them some new clothing, etc., but also take it a step further and say, 'Okay, let's help you actually get a job.'

'Financial insecurity is happening for a lot of people, but the scariest thing in the world is not knowing where you're getting any money from. If we can help them get back into the workforce, get paycheques, and [help them] step into the next phase of their life, I thought that would be a great program to offer.'

Coming together to help make Groomed for Greatness a success were sponsors B. Quail Ironworks, Main Street Realty Ltd., Ontario Barbershops, and Trevor Frances Recruitment.

Ontario Barbershops, located in Newmarket, played host to the first Groomed for Greatness event last week where one of the gentlemen in question came in for a fresh haircut and a hot shave, all of which was paid for.

Donations from the other sponsors helped organizers secure many necessities for the next step.

They hope to hold future sessions quarterly.

Watching this all unfold was Abuse Hurts founder Ellen Campbell who was able to spend time with the first recipient after the barber visit. The happiness that radiated off him afterwards was palpable, she said.

'You should have seen the difference in this man - it was unbelievable,' she says. 'He got \$500-worth of brand-new clothes, a whole supply of men's toiletries, and then Liz is going to work with him on a resume and help him find a job. I think it's really going to change this man's life. This was just one day, but now he has the tools to go out and find a job, and he's got the confidence now because he looks amazing. The difference between when he came in and when he left, even just his attitude, we see that with the women a lot, too. I could tell he really felt there was some hope now.'

At the end of the day, that's what it's all about.

?Ideally, the goal is to really help people get into the next chapter of their lives ? that's the number-one goal,? says Livingstone.
?We're just trying to create some awareness around the fact that there aren't a lot of programs for men. We need to continue doing all of the programs for women that we have, but it's important that we start to introduce some initiatives for men as well because there's abuse that happens and hard times that happen to men as well and they don't get the same level of support necessarily as women.

?I would never want to take anything away from the women's programs, because they're absolutely necessary, but I think we just need to start thinking, in addition to those, what can we do to support men in the community as well??

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter