

## Holidays see a 30 per cent increase in demand at Yellow Brick House shelter

The holidays are a time for togetherness, but that can sometimes exacerbate the situation for women and children experiencing domestic violence.

The Aurora-based Yellow Brick House shelter, which provides services for women and children in situations like these, typically sees a 30 per cent increase in calls to its crisis line as the holiday season approaches, leading to an increased demand in services for families seeking safety in their shelter beds.

?It's a very challenging time as many of us look forward to the holiday season to spend time with family and friends; women and children who are living in violent homes are often gearing up to face an even more difficult time within their homes and are often brought to the brink of having to escape because their lives are in danger,? says Lorris Herenda, Executive Director of Yellow Brick House. ?The need for services during the holiday season grows exponentially.?

Amid calls on the parts of shelters like Yellow Brick House for further public investment in prevention programs, Herenda says there is ?nothing worse? than having to say to a woman in a crisis situation, ?I am sorry, we're full, please call us back tomorrow.?

?We need to be able to offer those services to families that are approaching the holiday season. Once the families are within the Yellow Brick House shelter, our staff and our community do incredible work to ensure families are safe and they're celebrated and our community is very generous in making sure that the families staying in the shelter over the holidays received support, gifts and care so they know that they are not alone. We're often told by the clients that they never imagined that they could actually feel such a positive holiday spirit being in a shelter, and it was the best they had ever experienced. Kudos to our community for supporting the women and children.?

But, to make this a reality, as the saying goes, it does indeed take a village and Herenda says at this time of year the best thing community members can do to empower women who have escaped with their children is the donation of gift cards.

?We have catalogues so people can see how exactly every single dollar that is being donated to Yellow Brick House is spent on the service,? she says. ?If people are considering gifts in kind for women and children specifically, we encourage donations of gift cards, especially for places like Walmart, women can be empowered to purchase exactly what they need for their children and for themselves, and they can also, once they move out of the shelter, have access to food and groceries because of the growing pressures of the rising food costs. It becomes a challenge for families who are leaving the shelter to live independently without the support of the community. Something to consider, in terms of supporting, is to give the power to the women, to empower them to purchase what they need for their family.?

For more, visit [www.yellowbrickhouse.org](http://www.yellowbrickhouse.org).

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter