

It is Winter Hamper time at the Women's Centre of York Region



By Chris McGowan

Every year at this time the Women's Centre of York Region helps their clients by taking donations and assembling Winter Hampers.

A Winter Hamper provides seasonal support in the form of new boots, coats, a toy and a gift card for women and their children. The Winter Hamper program helped 112 families which included 208 children last year.

Some women are so destitute they cannot even afford to buy themselves personal toiletry items? said Kirsten Eastwood, Executive Director at the WCYR.

The WCYR is a registered charity non-profit that assists women from all backgrounds and cultures in York Region that suffer from low income due to a wide variety of reasons.

The WCYR offers a very respectful dignified means of helping? said Eastwood.

They provide counselling and skills development programs and basic needs services to help women get their lives back. Two thirds of the women seeking help are single mothers with 40% living on social assistance. The women must stay in the program in order to maintain the support and assistance.

We are women helping women? adds Eastwood.

Visiting their location in Newmarket, one can see services in action, including rooms for life skills training, and an area where daycare is provided for single mothers while they are taking classes. There is also a chest freezer full of bread that is donated to the Centre regularly and is given to Women on an as needed basis. It can be shocking how basic their needs can be.

We maintain anonymity for all our clients, and we do not pass judgement due to any circumstance,? added Eastwood.

The WCYR helps an average of six thousand women per year with counselling, support and donations. It is not a shelter, nor do they have access to store clothing or large items for donation, but they provide direction to their clients where they can obtain these items. Their goal is to make these women become independent productive members of society.

They would like to help more, but like many non profit charities they are restricted by their budget.

The WCYR receives funding from Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, United Way of York Region, Regional Municipality of York Region, Homelessness Partnership Initiative, as well as through fundraising initiatives and private donations like the Winter Hamper program.

Their needs do not stop with the Winter Hamper program as they gratefully always welcome volunteers who can assist in any way possible. Due to their tight budget, they depend on fundraising and donations throughout the year to help pay for the costs.

The Winter Hampers are collected from November 1 to November 15. The goal is to ensure no child goes to school without a warm jacket when it really gets cold.

Their message is clear: when you put our warm coats on when the weather gets cold and dreary as it always does in York Region, perhaps a thought could be spared for others in need this year, judge a little less and reach out in any way we can.

For more information, contact the WCYR at 905-853-9270 or 1-855-9270, or visit www.wcyr.ca.