

## Landmark donation helps 'unsung heroes' help local victims

By Brock Weir

Ashley Wade has learned to sleep again at night, but for a while it was tough going.

A long-time sponsor for families in need, the Whitchurch-Stouffville resident, however, felt she would be able to have more of an impact on the lives of people she sponsored, if she learned more about them. The sheer number of victims of human trafficking in York Region shocked her, but steeled her resolve to continue helping Victim Services of York Region (VSYR).

Ms. Wade and her husband Marc recently made a landmark donation to VSYR, the largest-single donation ever received by this small-scale non-profit which is often drafted in by York Regional Police to work with victims of trauma from across the spectrum, usually when the trauma is still fresh and raw.

"I have a much more difficult time hearing the details than my wife does," says Marc. "I am just not hard-wired that way. There have literally been cases where a family has had one parent incarcerated, one parent deceased all because of violence, and you might have a teenager looking after two toddlers. That one sticks out in my head more than anything else.

"Ashley went out and got all the groceries and food cards for the teen, got him a computer so he could work, bus passes, clothes for the kids and himself. This teenage boy is now raising two kids, let alone being the victim of a horrific crime himself."

This is one particular case that sticks out in the mind of Gillian Freeman, Executive Director of VSYR.

"He dropped out of school, got a full time job, and is now supporting his siblings, and we have gotten services and support to him so he can be effective in doing that," says Ms. Freeman. "We're sponsoring him for the holidays as well so his siblings can hold onto the belief of the season and get some relief from having to pay the regular bills."

The donation from the Wades will go a long way in helping meet the needs of cases similar to this young family.

"When I first heard of this donation, I have to admit I was a little shocked, and then I cried tears of joy," says Ms. Freeman. "My head has been swimming ever since with all the amazingly wonderful things that can be done with it. It is so rare in our business. Every day, 24 hours a day, I am on call, every second week. Every day we hear bad news stories. It is lovely to see the wonderful side of humanity. It is wonderful to see people are caring about what is happening in their own neighbourhood. It is overwhelming."

VSYR is an organization Ms. Freeman says is "highly underfunded." York Region might appear to be an affluent area, but crime occurs on a regular basis. Last year alone, the organization assisted over 7,000 clients who were victims of crime or tragic circumstances, and this donation will help broaden their scope.

Their counterpart in Peel Region, for instance, has seven crisis counsellors but VSYR has to make do with just four working with the same number of clients. And this is an improvement. Last year, they only had two counsellors, and are still working without a case manager or a housing support program currently proving an asset to Peel.

"We have never really had any funds to do fundraising," says Ms. Freeman. "Even though I am the Director, it is all hands on deck. If an incident occurs, I too must have the capabilities of responding and providing services regardless of what the incident is, which can be anything from home invasion to elder abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault or fire. We don't actually have administration costs because of our partnership with Police - they provide support in kind, a space to operate, and their phones and computers which allow us to operate on a regular basis. All of the dollars go to client services."

Adds Marc: "After this donation, I can tell you that for Ashley and Gillian the real work begins now. The donation was easy. It will go on a case by case basis. It is not there to solve the world's problems overnight, but it is to help out families in need. This

organization is here because of the problem and these unsung heroes are here to help.?

For more information on Victim Services of York Region, visit [www.victimservices-york.org](http://www.victimservices-york.org).