

Yellow Brick House reports 25 per cent increase in calls

A missed call could be a missed opportunity ? and for Yellow Brick House, the Aurora-based shelter for women and children fleeing domestic abuse, a missed call can be a missed opportunity to get a family to safety.

As such, Yellow Brick House's Crisis Support line, a 24/7 hotline for women and children, will be in the spotlight this Friday at Yellow Brick House's annual fundraising Gala, held in at Markham's Le Parc Banquet Hall to coincide with International Women's Day.

?March 8 is International Women's Day, it is a day that we celebrate women worldwide and our gala has strategically been scheduled around that date because it is a time to celebrate women in our lives and celebrate all our achievements and also to remember the ones that did not make it,? says Lorris Herenda, Executive Director of Yellow Brick House. ?This will be our fifteenth annual gala and it has become the basis of our fundraising and public awareness. Typically, we have between 300 and 350 people who attend our gala and learn about the impact of domestic violence on our communities. That is a very important step for us to partake in as part of prevention. Education is part of prevention and we're hoping the more people become familiar with the impact of domestic violence on both individuals and communities there is going to be a shift in our culture and attitudes towards domestic violence.

?In addition to the awareness piece, it is an essential component in raising dollars for Yellow Brick House. We only receive about 67 per cent of our operating budget funding from the Provincial government and a little bit from the United Way of Greater Toronto. We are essentially forced to fundraise about 25 per cent of our operating budget. The Gala itself contributes to a good 15 per cent portion of our fundraising goal.?

In previous years, the Gala has featured survivors speaking about their experiences fleeing violence, their experience using Yellow Brick House's services, and how these services have had an impact on their lives.

This year, however, Yellow Brick House is taking a new angle, focusing on the importance of their Crisis Support Line, an essential service available for women and children trying to escape violent situations.

?In many ways, we equate our Crisis Support line with a lifeline such as you would consider 911 to be for any medical emergencies,? says Ms. Herenda. ?For us, our Crisis Support line is a lifeline for the women and children fleeing violence. It will be an opportunity for our guests to learn about the importance of having this essential service available in our community 24/7 so that women and children who have finally reached the crossroads in terms of being able to escape a violent home don't have to be stuck there, they can give us a call and we can help them do some safety

planning and do our next steps to get them out of that situation.

?We have had a 25 per cent increase in calls coming through our Crisis Support Line. Last year alone, we answered over 3,400 crisis calls and if I look back eight years ago, or even five years ago, the demand on our crisis lines was much lower. Having an increase in the crisis calls and having an increase in the complexity of the calls coming through, it puts additional pressure on us to maintain two crisis lines 24/7. There is the operating cost in ensuring that these crisis lines are available because we don't want to be in a situation where a woman or child calls our line and the call is not answered. That is just not acceptable because it is a lifeline.?

Yellow Brick House's 2020 Gala will take place this Friday, March 6, at Le Parc Banquet Hall in Markham. Tickets and sponsorship opportunities are available. Individual tickets are \$200 and a table of eight is \$1,600. Doors open to a cocktail reception at 6 p.m., with dinner at 7.30. For more information, visit yellowbrickhouse.ca/gala.

By Brock Weir