



Exhibit puts focus on York's homeless

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What: Hidden in Plain Sight: photograph exhibit depicting the daily life of people at risk in York Region.

When: Until Nov. 14

Where: Newmarket town office, 395 Mulock Dr.

Information: endhomelessnessyorkregion.ca

A photograph carries you through the world of an artist, depicting how a photographer sees and watches life.

The intense emotions captured by a click and flash become a focal point for conversation.

Conversation initiated by photographs displayed in the foyer at the municipal office in Newmarket doesn't include the latest trend in home decorating.

Instead, it deals with places to sleep — not comfy mattresses, but streets, playgrounds and hidden places.

The exhibit, Hidden in Plain Sight, hosted by the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness, captures what 35 poverty-stricken residents see on a daily basis, York Region Krasman Centre executive director and former alliance chairperson Tanya Shute said.

"There isn't the safety in numbers up here as there is in the city," Ms Shute said. "People are hiding. There are only so many places to hide."

The exhibit is just a small indication of how big the problem is in York Region, she said. There is no homeless women's shelter or detox centre in York Region and, based on the 2006 census, the number of people surviving on what's considered low income has increased by 55 per cent since 2001. That represents more than 112,500 people in the region, alliance co-ordinator Jane Wedlock said.

"People can't see it, so they don't believe it," she said. "The power of the images makes people more aware of the reality of homelessness in York Region."

The art-based research project started about a year ago, when volunteers in the alliance outreach van handed out 100 disposable cameras and journals to individuals living on the streets in York Region. Cameras were gathered and the top photos were selected for display.

"In the suburban 905, homelessness looks different than down in the city," Ms Shute said. "There are no numbers. The only number is how many we think are impacted. There are people who are one job, one illness, one bad

housing market away from living on the street.”

Cameras were placed in the hands of people at risk, who set out to capture their own lives.

There is a picture of a young woman sleeping in a playground, a place she considered safe.

“It brings a new meaning to the playground. It’s not just play, it’s shelter,” Ms Shute said. “People recognize their neighbourhoods. The photos are not confrontational, but show people that’s your corner.”