



## Region's first homeless women's shelter in works

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A strong case for York Region's first homeless women's shelter is on the table, say the volunteer community team members gathered around it.

And, with former MP and current Magna International executive vice-chairperson Belinda Stronach at the honorary helm, the newly struck committee is closer to building a much needed shelter than any of their predecessors.

"I am happy the ball is rolling," she said. "It's an important issue. There's space for abused women and those with children, but homeless women don't have anywhere to go. It's insane."

Established earlier this year as an advisory body to Blue Door Shelters, the group includes community leaders and stakeholders such as Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen, representatives from The Krasman Centre, the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness, other municipalities and businesses.

One regionally funded contract consultant is on board.

Although she serves as honorary chairperson, Ms Stronach is matching her team's commitment.

"I'll be very hands-on," she said. "I'll do anything that's required. Everyone brings a different expertise and we're working hard to make it happen."

Convinced the shelter will come to fruition, Ms Stronach can't speculate exactly when.

"I'd like to see it open within 36 to 48 months," she said. "We're not exactly a small community anymore, but York is still neighbourly. I've always found that when the community becomes aware of an issue, we rise to the occasion."

Progress is formative, but focused, Blue Door Shelters business director Kristin Griffith said.

The group is providing guidance and advice on location sites and design, she added.

To date, the team has completed pertinent research, established its terms of reference, identified responsibilities and has a strategic plan in place.

"The enthusiasm is amazing," she said. "Everyone definitely understands the need, believes in the cause and is committed to a finding practical ways to help bridge the gap. The needs are huge."

"If there are 10 women in my drop-in centre, nine of them are either homeless or are at imminent risk," said Krasman Centre executive director and committee member Tanya Shute. "It's because of the sheer overwhelming nature of poverty and social inclusion in York Region."

The exact tally of homeless women isn't available, the social service providers contend. It's difficult to track the unseen.

Alliance director and team member Jane Wedlock is buoyed by the work of group thus far.

"I think it's great to see a diversity of folks at around the table," she said. "While we're at the formative stage, we're exploring the different roles we can take to move forward. There's a compelling case for this work to be done."

The plight of women without a home needs to be addressed and publicized, she said.

"It's more substantial than we'd like to think," Ms Wedlock said. "That's what is fueling our desire to do something."

Magna-For-Community manager and team member Steve Hinder agrees.

"I don't think the community at large knows how dire this situation is," he said. "When you talk to people about it, they're hearing it for the first time. It's quite shocking."

The only future milestone the community team will announce is a location feasibility study by November, he said. However, he anticipates dynamic progress.

If you are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, help is available

- To locate emergency shelters call 1-888-256-1112 or TTY: 905-762-0401
- Crisis Intervention 905-310-2673
- Homebase Youth Drop-in Centre 905-884-3070 (collect calls accepted)
- Krasman Warm-Line (Non Crisis Support Line) 416-954-4110 or 1-888-777-0979
- Canadian Mental Health Association 905-841-3977
- Inn from the Cold (December to March) 905-895-8889
- Leeder Place Family Shelter 905-898-1658
- Porter Place Mens' Shelter 905-898-1658
- Youth Shelter (male only 16-26) 905-830-0121
- Out Of The Cold - food and temporary overnight shelter from November to March 416-948-6682
- Pathways for Children, Youth&Families 905-471-7877 (collect calls accepted)
- Yellow Brick House - for abused women with or without children 1-800-263-3247
- York Region Street Outreach Van - food, clothing, blankets, medical advice, needle exchange and information 905-252-8933 or 1-866-553-4053
- Housing Help Centre 905-713-2696