

Coming together in times of crisis



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By Nate Smelle

When it comes to fighting the war on poverty in the Bancroft area, the North Hastings Community Trust has been battling on the front lines for more than 15 years. As winter approaches and the cost of living climbs higher, so rises the number of families, friends and neighbours in need of assistance with their heat, hydro, water, rent and grocery bills.

Catching up with the Trust's executive director Jane Kali last week regarding the organization's Wood Share program, she provided me with an update on how poverty is affecting people in our community, and what plans they have in place to help empower people in need.

While acknowledging the great generosity of people from within the community and the role these contributions play in fostering resiliency in communities throughout North Hastings, she explained to me how the Trust had been actively striving to create connections with people from all walks of life and of all political and religious orientations.

Despite this generosity and the growing level of civic engagement, Kali said the Trust's biggest challenge is keeping up with the constantly increasing number of people in need living in North Hastings.

Referring to several conversations she has had in the past few weeks with community members that have focused her attention on the impact poverty has on people's mental health, Kali explained to me just how much more work needs to be done to make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to appreciate a healthy and enjoyable quality of life.

Elaborating on what she had learned from these discussions, Kali said the first step is addressing that poverty is a crisis. Recognizing the dire circumstances that so many people are faced with because of this crisis, she said the potential to solve it resides in each of us and our willingness to embrace a more compassionate and caring mindset towards others.

"We can do this, and we can do this day to day because we are actually living in a crisis situation," said Kali.

"It's not a big flood, but it is certainly a crisis. When we have seniors who are so sad and depressed that they don't want to live; and we hear about the numbers of youth at the high school who don't have homes and don't want to live, that's a crisis. We need to continue to build on our community connections, our friendships and our capacity to care for each other. We are in such big trouble that we have to build our resiliency, and for me that means we need to look after each other way better than we have been doing." Highlighting how everyone came together back in the spring of 2013 to help one another when the York River rose to unprecedented levels and overtook the town, Kali said the only way to deal with a crisis as physically, mentally and spiritually devastating as poverty is as a community.

Imagine the resentment, the divisions and the damage to our communities that would have occurred in the spring of 2013 if people did nothing to help one another during the flood.

Whether piling sandbags along the river's edge to prevent the waters from consuming the town, making a donation to organizations like the North Hastings Community Trust, or lending a hand or an ear to make someone else's life worth living, each of these courses

of action help to build a more caring and compassionate community.

Standing idly by while those around us are drowning, when we have the means to throw them a lifeline is simply unacceptable.