

## Dozens living in the bush in North Hastings

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By Chris Drost

It has been a long difficult winter and spring for everyone but according to Jane Kali of North Hastings Community Trust, it has been especially difficult for those who do not have a place to call home. At a recent online meeting of NHCT's Home Share group, Kali said, "This is way worse than expected. We need people to open their hearts." During the past few months, Kali and staff from NHCT have been working jointly with the North Hastings Family Health Team to provide temporary housing at the Sword Motor Inn in Bancroft. "People are coming out of the bush to apply," says Kali. What this group has discovered is that there are literally hundreds of people precariously housed in the region, and dozens of people who are living outside. To-date there have been 18 applicants for the short-term housing at the Sword. The applications will help give the group more accurate numbers of the homeless. According to Kali, the Sword has been extremely helpful and supportive. Hastings County has provided COVID-19 emergency funding towards the housing costs and United Way of Quinte made a financial contribution that is making lunches possible for the individuals. NHCT staff provide a daily check-in with those staying at the Sword. "They don't want to be bombarded with social services. I believe the level of support currently being provided is right," explains Kali. She noted that those staying there have also been very supportive of each other. This arrangement however, is temporary at best. As the potential for home sharing during the COVID-19 is not necessarily practical, the group is reaching out for other ideas. Whatever arrangements can be made, "people need support, plus housing," says Carol Russell, a member of the Home Share group. Various options for the summer were considered, from establishing an area for individuals to tent, to reaching out for spaces at area camps where summer programs have been cancelled. Others will be researching a housing model used in Haliburton and other communities called "Places for People." While this is a longer-term prospect, it would result in establishing permanent rental housing spaces by renovating existing housing stock using the efforts of volunteers and professionals. "At the end of the day, people say they just want a place they can call home," says Kali. Other suggestions or offers of assistance can be directed to Jane Kali at NHCT at 613-332-3657.