

North Hastings Community Trust gets a hand from United Way HPE

By Mike Riley Local Journalism Initiative Reporter Bancroft This Week has been looking at various local community organizations that benefit from United Way Hastings Prince Edward's support over the past couple of weeks. This week, we look at another one of these organizations, North Hastings Community Trust. The Trust's executive director Jane Kali and their Rural Outreach Community Kindness program coordinator Victoria Burke, comments on the assistance that they get from United Way HPE.

A long-time local agency, NHCT found a permanent home within the heart of North Hastings at 19 Valleyview Drive in Bancroft in 2023. Partially funded by United Way HPE, they were able to buy this building in which several programs are housed and nurtured, but their core mandate is simple; to work with the community to give emergency and sustainable solutions to poverty in North Hastings. They are fierce advocates for those who find themselves without adequate housing, food or hope, even though they no longer offer immediate emergency funding. Kali says that everyone is welcome at NHCT.

"Daily, we witness people coming together to connect and support each other and bring forward ideas for our new home; community gardens, food programs, art, builder spaces and housing. We are made up of people from the North Hastings Community who are passionate about everybody being warm, having food and a home, feeling connected and having a sense of purpose," she says.

United Way HPE supports 52 agencies and 74 programs in Hastings Prince Edward Counties and works with local

organizations, the business community, the health sector and individuals to increase our community's capacity to respond to human needs. Visit www.unitedwayhpe.com/donate to support the United Way campaign.

NHCT is the go-to for North Hastings residents who need assistance navigating referrals and accessing government programs. They also provide computer and phone access, food, clothing, harm reduction and a sense of belonging and community.

The Trust leads Harvest the North Community Gardens, which are planned, planted and harvested by local residents. Started in 2015, the gardens have grown every year and bring people together to grow food and strengthen community connections. The Trust plans to expand the garden space around 19 Valleyview Drive and welcomes everyone to participate.

Another community-based project that grew out of the Trust is Wood Share, whereby teams of people in the community donate, process, organize and deliver wood to people who need wood to heat their homes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, NHCT kept its doors open and responded to an increase in homelessness due to the housing crisis which was worsened by the pandemic.

For the past three summers, the Trust has provided survival kits (tents, sleeping bags) and has been calling on all levels of government to provide truly affordable housing.

Kali says that the NHCT has a long relationship with the United Way, who've been providing support and funding as the organization builds its capacity to respond to local and current issues related to poverty, isolation and inequity.

"While most of the Trust's funding comes from community support and donations, the United Way is currently funding ROCK, which is made up of people with lived experience of substance abuse which provides information, referrals, harm reduction and supply kits, and most importantly, kindness. ROCK works to reduce the stigma and judgement that people experiencing homelessness and people who use drugs often experience in our community," she says.

Burke is the ROCK's coordinator, and says that the ROCK team is made up of people with wisdom coming from a deep understanding of substance abuse and from a lot of life experience.

?We know our community's strengths and the ways we are stigmatized and hurt. We know about resilience and we know about heartbreak. We also know

about the hope and possibilities that are around every corner,? she says.

The ROCK program provides opportunities for people with lived experience of substance use and/or homelessness by giving training, leadership roles and participation in the Trust's outreach program. One graduate of the ROCK program shares that they never realized they'd ever find a place to get the help they'd need to survive as a drug user and homeless person.

?The ROCK program gave me the help and guidance to get the help I was looking for. I also found ROCK offered me a place to help other people who are homeless and people who use drugs.

Without the help of ROCK so many of us would not have any direction and support.?

For more information on the ROCK program or any other NHCT work, please contact them at 613-332-3657 or inquiry.nhcommunitytrust@gmail.com.

Burke says they are grateful to the United Way for its current funding of their ROCK program, especially as they see the need for harm reduction education and awareness in the community.

We have been witness to far too many overdoses and deaths and know we need a collective community response. Even if you think you are not affected, you are. Almost every family in our community, whether privileged or not, has been affected by discrimination, stigma, loss, and grief related to substance abuse and systemic neglect,? she says. ?Thank you to the United Way for believing in this program and the positive impact it is having.?