

Mental Health Matters: Rotary Boutique for the Hidden Homeless

Who are the hidden homeless? Is this a concern in Kamloops? Sure, we have our share of homeless, but the problem isn't that bad ... is it? Well, yes it is.

Did you know that four out of every five homeless Canadians do not live on the street? More than 80% of Canada's homeless are improperly sheltered while thousands more are on the verge of eviction. Many sleep in temporary beds.

They are the youth, adults, families and seniors who move from friend to friend and relative to relative while looking for affordable housing. They live in cars and abandoned buildings. They are women who accept a place to stay from a man rather than freeze on the street. They are children who are put in the care of Children's Aid Societies, because their parents can't afford to care for them. They are not easily recognized as homeless and are often not seen – the hidden homeless, and this issue costs taxpayers millions of dollars every year in police, ambulance, hospital, and other costs.

Sadly, the vast majority are women and children, making up an estimated 90% of the hidden homeless population. This is what has captured the attention of the members of the Kamloops West Rotary Club, a group that is determined to change assist hidden homeless in Kamloops.

One in every seven people who use a shelter in Canada is a child and many of the youths served daily by CMHA are not permanently housed, and have no “home”. For some, CMHA is their only nutritious meal of the day, and their only adult guidance or influence.

CMHA operates Emerald House, an 8-bed shelter for women and children. The most recent homeless count organized by our friends and partners at ASK Wellness revealed 22 homeless women. With this count, who could predict that in only 10 months of operation, Emerald House would provide shelter for literally hundreds of women and children in Kamloops? Now you know how large the problem of hidden homeless is, and why Kamloops Rotary West has rolled up its sleeves in support of these women and children.

May is Mental Health Month and on May 23rd and 24th, Kamloops West Rotary Club is holding Rotary Boutique at The Executive Inn. Rotary Boutique is a fundraising activity where expensive clothing will be on sale for prices ranging from \$5 - \$30. Barely used formal or business wear and gently used high-end casual clothing is being donated by the bagful, all in support of Kamloops' hidden homeless. The money raised will be used by non-profit groups serving hidden homeless women and children to bridge funding gaps that are preventing them from stepping out of homelessness, and back the community where they can participate and contribute.

Sometimes it only takes a few dollars to get a woman off the streets and into housing. How do we know this? Downtown businesses have commented to us that they see far fewer homeless people than in the past. CMHA and our partners like ASK Wellness, BC Housing and various provincial government departments have been working together to achieve this. More than 200 hundred women have found permanent homes in the ten months Emerald House has been open. Many lives have literally been saved.

Help Rotary in this wonderful close-to-home humanitarian idea that is a tax-saving, resource-saving and life-saving venture. You can help in two ways: first, donate your gently used high-end clothing to the CMHA Clubhouse at 857 Seymour Street, or call us at 374-0440 for pick-up by one of our Rotarian friends. Secondly, shop for a new wardrobe at the Executive Inn on May 23rd and 24th between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. You will save money, look better, but what is even best of all, you will feel better knowing you have helped the community.

Find out more at kamloops.cmha.bc.ca, and help create a better future in Kamloops today.