

Local woman asks people to stop judging

By Chris Drost

Bancroft This Week was contacted recently by a 60-year-old local woman, Norma Jean Millar, who wanted to share the challenges of finding herself homeless at the end of the month. This is her story.

Norma Jean Millar is a 60-year-old woman with a disability who is being evicted at the end of the month. The property where the cabin she has been renting has been purchased by new owners who do not wish to have renters.

"I received a verbal notice in May but there is nothing out there. The shelter allowance on ODSP is \$497 per month," explains Millar.

"I want people to know that it is not just drug addicts that are homeless. My daughter and her family have had no place since January," she says.

Millar has contacted the County of Hastings and has been on the emergency housing list, with no luck so far. She understands there are two vacancies at the Chateau but it is for age 65 plus. "I heard that if you are disabled you can get in there at age 55, but I am not sure if this is true." Millar wonders why they classify seniors at age 55 but there is no rent-geared-to-income housing for those under 65.

Millar is looking for a small apartment, not just a room. "When I want to be around people, I will," she says. Millar has a medium size emotional support animal that she says makes it harder.

"I could share with a friend but not strangers when I don't know who they are," adds Millar.

"Some on ODSP are nasty tenants. When they get evicted, they go through the Landlord and Tenant Act. Some people use the system," she says.

There is a sense of frustration in Millar's voice when she comments that with all the homelessness, the provincial and federal governments buy land for highways.

Millar's family moved to the area in the 60s. Her father lost his job and applied for welfare. She remembers that it paid for rent or your mortgage, heat and hydro and food stamps that you had to work for. "When they took that away, that is when it [the system] got abused," she maintains.

"People on ODSP are stereotyped but we are not all bad," says Millar.

She is looking to pay her own rent and to find a place where she can live long-term. Even a winterized bunkie would work. For now, she has the use of a trailer until winter.

Millar has reached out to everyone she can think of for help. When she called the MPP, she simply received all the same information for the people she had already called. The MPP's office told her they were sorry but they could not help her.

"I still pay taxes even though I am on ODSP, I pay HST and the provincial sales tax," she says.

"If they think I don't want to work, they are mistaken. I don't want to live like this."

Millar is concerned that people who came here during COVID-19 bought places and have now moved back to the city and are

renting out the places through Airbnb at high prices, or letting them sit empty.

She questions why government land, such as Crown Land, cannot be used for the building of tiny home communities.

Millar is willing to move to other areas south of Bancroft into Centre Hastings, but would really like to stay in a small community, not too far from family.

In the interim, she is hoping someone will let her put a trailer on their property. She recognizes however, that there are municipal bylaws that could make this a challenge.

?I looked into purchasing a mobile home in Coe Hill but found that they don't usually give a mortgage to people on ODSP. You can't get a mortgage for a mobile home,? she explains.

The only way to get a place in a motel is if you have plans to go to a place within a few days. So that option is out for her too.

?What we really need is an apartment building for age 55 plus,? she adds.

When asked what Millar hoped would be achieved by sharing her personal story, she explained that she hopes people in our area don't judge everyone as drug addicts and alcoholics, some became that way because they became homeless. She also stresses that not everybody has support from family. Not everyone on ODSP is bad and destroys property. Not all are going to the Landlord and Tenant board.

?I was upset at being evicted at first but realized the new owners have a right to use their property as they wish,? says Millar.

?I also hope that someone may have a place I can call my own.? If you have a place for Millar and her support dog, she can be reached at njmillar@gmail.com.

Millar has promised to keep Bancroft This Week informed as her search for a home continues.