

Housing needed for most age groups in North Hastings



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By Chris Drost

By this time of year, after a hot and busy summer, many of us start thinking about the long cold days ahead cozied up by the wood fire with a favourite book or show. For some in North Hastings however, the oncoming cold creates concerns about finding safe and warm housing for the winter. While a tent, unheated trailer, camp, or in some cases, a vehicle, may be fine for the summer months, it is not enough for the cold winters of North Hastings.

The reality is that any rental accommodation in North Hastings is almost non-existent, let alone modestly priced rental spaces. According to Andra Kauffeldt of Ontario Works in Bancroft, there is a need for housing for every demographic, from youth to seniors.

The two recently emerging populations of homeless include seniors in the 75 to 85 age group who have been displaced from their home for a variety of reasons, and young adults, millennials born between 1984 and 2002. These individuals frequently have been away and obtained college and university educations but have returned to North Hastings with no long-term plan. Kauffeldt noted that some research points to generational issues with this age group resulting from the over protective parenting strategies in the '80s and '90s, but of course that is not always the whole story. Couch surfing has become the norm for many young people, some who are still in high school.

In cities like London, there are letting agents who help tenants get in touch with property owners. In contrast, in North Hastings, the community is lacking homes where families can feel safe and comfortable. Families with children are also experiencing housing challenges. According to Ontario Works, the current number of families on the waitlist for social housing (Woodview Lane) is 53. Kauffeldt said this number is underrepresented because some families do not wish to live in a segregated housing community, which is all that is currently offered for social housing in North Hastings.

This situation has "sparked" a new grassroots group in the community. The initial meeting called "Spark" was called by Dianne Eastman. After the initial meeting the group divided into two parts, one that will be looking at long-term options for building sustainable, affordable homes, including the possibility of tiny homes, straw bale and natural build homes, and the other, to address the more immediate needs of people who require a warm bed for the winter. The second group has named itself the "Housing Link Tank." Its first task is to do more in-depth research into the type of homes individuals need and want and to research strategies for connecting them with spaces to live that meet their needs in terms of price, location, accessibility and compatibility.

One of the options the Housing Link Tank is investigating is the concept of house sharing. There are many communities that have adopted house sharing strategies with some success. While one Home Share program in Vermont has been operating for over 35 years, closer to home, the Home Share Pilot Program in Cobourg/Port Hope has been running for just a couple of years. This pilot project is using a five-stage process for screening applicants. It includes "meet and greets," background checks and what is called a "suitcase visit" where the applicants stay for a two-week trial period to ensure both parties feel it will be a good fit. Regular ongoing

check-ins by the project co-ordinator confirms the sharing is still working. Currently, there is more demand from those needing homes than those willing to share their spaces.

This program, as well as others in the U.S. and Eastern Canada, can include a service component. That means that the arrangement can include a reduction in rent if the renter is willing to take on pre-determined tasks such as cleaning, snow shovelling, dog walking, shopping etc. for the property owner. These details get set out in writing at the outset. Some locations include baby-sitting and cooking.

Hastings County advises that there are currently 900 single seniors living within the county. Some of those seniors may be experiencing challenges that are making it increasingly difficult for them to stay in their own home. They may be financial, but they may also be mobility challenges such as no longer being able to drive or simply walk their dog or put out the garbage. A home share, or "second suite" (where part of the home or separate building on the property provides a second living unit) might be the answer for some of these people. Having an arrangement where someone sharing their home takes on some of these responsibilities may help them to stay in their home, and out of an institutional setting, longer. Home sharing can also provide extra income which could be greatly needed by a senior on a fixed income. When a number of seniors live together in one home there may be opportunities for co-ordinated service visits such as foot care. Some communities have found a good match between seniors and young single parents in need of stable housing.

For the Housing Link Tank to move forward, they need more in-depth information about the kind of housing arrangements people need and want, as well identifying individuals who may be willing to offer either separate units or space within their homes. The Housing Link Tank, made up of approximately 10 local volunteers, is at the very beginning stage where further information is very much needed to help them play a useful role in connecting individuals with a home this winter. The Housing Link Tank has already been in touch with the county and will be inviting other organizations and agencies to upcoming meetings to ensure they move forward with a "better together" approach.

The Housing Link Tank is currently in an information collection stage. They would like to hear from individuals who would be willing to share their immediate needs for housing. They would also like to connect with people who may have a space within their home, or other under utilized housing space to offer and current accommodation providers such as motels, B &Bs and lodges/cottage owners.

The Housing Link Tank has a new email where you can send answers to the following questions, linktankhousing@gmail.com. Alternatively, you can call the North Hastings Community Trust office at 613-332-3657 or stop by their Bridge St. W. office from Tuesday through Friday between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

For those needing a place to live: What is your approximate age? What type of housing arrangement are you looking for? Would you be interested in doing tasks in exchange for reduced rent? Where would you like to be located? Do you have your own transportation? Do you have a pet? What type of housing have you had in the past six months? Are you currently on the county waiting list for housing?

For individuals who may be interested in providing a space, and want to do a tenant background check. What is your approximate age? Do you have a room or a separate unit within your home or property? Are you interested in an arrangement where the renter carries out tasks for you in exchange for reduced rent? What are your fears of entering into such an arrangement? How could we best address your concerns? Is your space accessible to shopping etc. without the use of a personal vehicle? Would you require modifications to your house before considering to rent? (i.e. add a wall, separate entrance etc.) What age tenant would you ideally be interested in?

For existing accommodation providers who may be able to help. What type of space might you have available and for how long? Where is your space located? Would you be interested in an arrangement where the renter provides services such as cleaning, property maintenance etc. in exchange for a reduced rent?

At the end of the day, Jane Kali, committee member and director at North Hastings Community Trust, says, "the Housing Link Tank wants to do its part to ensure everyone in North Hastings has a safe and warm place to live as winter closes in."

For more information or to receive a personal call back, please email linktankhousing@gmail.com or call North Hastings Community Trust at 613-332-3657 and leave your name and number.