

Maggie's Resource Centre funding coming soon

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COVID-19 AND ALL the restrictions over the last couple of years have wrought havoc on many facets of people's lives. One of these facets has been the increase in domestic violence during COVID-19, especially with the lockdowns that have been imposed since March, 2020. While I have dealt with the stresses of COVID-19 over the past two years like many others, I have not thankfully had to contend with any form of domestic violence, although some in Bancroft and the surrounding areas have not been so lucky. The United Nations called domestic violence the shadow pandemic within the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Statistics Canada in a report from Aug. 2020, 10 per cent of women said they were very or extremely concerned about the possibility of violence in the home. During the first nine months of the pandemic, the Assaulted Women's Helpline, based in Toronto, reported that they took more than 71,000 calls, when they would usually get around 40,000 per year. There was some welcome news to help victims of domestic violence locally on Feb. 9, courtesy of the Hastings County Joint Community and Human Services Committee meeting. During this meeting, they said they will be recommending to Hastings County council that \$500,000 be reallocated to Maggie's Resource Centre in Bancroft, to help them initiative transitional housing for victims of domestic violence. Maggie's Resource Centre was established in the early 1980s and continues to operate as a not-for-profit agency with a volunteer, all female board of directors to help women and their children in North Hastings escape domestic abuse situations. They offer services that include; crisis intervention, safety planning, transitional housing support, counselling, safe placement and transportation for women and their children leaving abusive relationships, advocacy and referrals to health, legal and income support resource centres and advocacy with legal and social services. For more information or if you need their services, call 613-332-3010 or email executivedirector@maggiesresource.com or call their after-hours crisis answering service at 613-332-3010. Hastings County is also waiting to hear back from the source of this funding, Reaching Home Rural and Remote, to ensure that this redirection of funding is acceptable. RHRR is a community-based program whose goal is to prevent and reduce homelessness by giving direct support and funding to designated communities, including urban centres, Indigenous communities, territorial communities and rural and remote communities across the country. The \$500,000 from RHRR had initially been earmarked for a housing fund to create an eight-bed shelter in Bancroft, but the request for proposals to solicit bids for said shelter revealed that the three bids received all came in significantly over budget, and thus this project was shelved for now. The County will be looking at other options going forward. If approved by RHRR and the County, the \$500,000 in funding would support Maggie's Resource Centre's efforts to purchase and renovate a commercial building that would accommodate their office and the creation of two transitional housing units in the new building and three transitional housing units in their current building for women and children who are victims of violence. There are currently no emergency or transitional supports for victims of family violence in North Hastings. The Hastings County Joint Community and Human Services Committee's recommendation to reallocate the \$500,000 will be heard at the Hastings County council meeting on Feb. 24, according to Cathy Bradley, the clerk and corporate communications officer with the County. I think this is great news for the people of Bancroft and the surrounding area who have had to deal with not only the negative effects of the pandemic but also had to contend with this shadow pandemic of domestic violence. Tanya MacKinnon, the executive director at Maggie's Resource Centre agrees. She told Bancroft This Week on Feb. 10 that they were absolutely thrilled to hear about the reallocation of the funding. "We are looking forward to working with Hastings County on this very important project for our community," she says. "As more information becomes available further announcements with more details will be shared."