

North Hastings Community Trust reaches fundraising goal

By William Kilpatrick

The North Hastings Community Trust (NHCT) held its annual online auction fundraiser during the week of August 18, with the goal of raising \$2,000 to assist local families in need. The NHCT is a non-profit organization that provides emergency financial funding, up to \$500, on a once per year basis, to families and children who may be struggling financially. Jennifer Robertson, NHCT programme coordinator, explained why the fundraising is essential to helping local families.

"We are funded by Hastings County through the Homelessness Prevention Partnership to cover costs associated with homelessness prevention," said Robertson.

"This can include heating costs and costs to assist in the live-ability of individual residences. We are also funded through the United Way with an eye to food security. Currently, we use this to purchase food gift cards to offset high costs of food."

The NHCT also helps people with food cards if or when they have exhausted their resources by paying for another essential item. Independent fundraising allows us to provide supports that do not fall under the Homelessness Prevention or Food Security guidelines. The focus for this year is for small, incidental medical expenses not covered by OHIP or a drug plan, essentially items that may be available to someone receiving social assistance but not available to someone who is not. For example, Epipens, insulin and administering equipment, allergy shots, casts, crutches, slings, prescription medication for a child's illness and gadgets required to get those medications into the child. The majority of jobs in this area do not have benefits that cover these costs," said Robertson.

The online auction exceeded its goal by raising \$2,300, but Robertson fears with the growing list of cuts to public assistance and cuts to items covered by OHIP that it will not be enough to service all the families in need. The NHCT served over 826 families, adults, and children in need over the last year and with Hydro costs continuing to increase Robertson believes the numbers will continue to rise. She quoted many statistics that were very alarming. Citing the North Hastings Community action plan on Homelessness and Affordable Housing in 2006, she highlighted that 31 per cent of households in Bancroft received social assistance when compared to 14.7 per cent for Hastings County and 9.7 per cent for the province. She also pointed out that female lone-parent families struggle far more than male lone-parent families. The Stats Canada website has the median income for female lone-parent families in Bancroft in 2005 listed as \$21,295, \$15,000 less than the provincial average and less than half of male lone-parent families whose medium income was \$44,998. Despite the many obstacles faced by families in the north Robertson remained optimistic that the issues could be overcome and stressed the importance of poverty awareness as an incentive for action.

For more information you can call Jennifer at 613-339-1100 or visit the NHCT website at www.northhastingscommunitytrust.org or by email at nhcommunitytrust@gmail.com.