



Focus on Housing

Where can I live?

The number one question our staff is asked after safety issues have been addressed is "where can I live after my five weeks here?" If the client is a single woman, she receives \$536.00 in total for all her needs in Social Assistance payments per month. If she has children there is an extra allowance per child. The loss of home environment is devastating. If a woman is injured or emotionally incapable of finding a job or unable to do so because of the danger posed by a violent ex-partner how can she possibly start her life anew on such a budget?

We are working to find a way to provide safe, low cost housing for those women facing this situation. A feasibility study has already been undertaken and we are in the process of putting together a business plan.

Will you do your part and see what low-cost housing is available in your area? Would you put pressure on your local officials to address this growing problem? You truly could help a woman (and her children) move forward in her life.

*Thank-you,
Anne Skeates,
Chair, My Sister's Place*

We're Changing Our Look

Our old logo had been with us a long time but after discussing it and consulting with the staff, the board came to its decision—it was time for a change! A huge thank you to the Logo Factory who were so generous in donating their expertise in creating this new logo for us. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Warren Houston who worked tirelessly getting rounds of opinions as we narrowed down our options. This is our first publication with the new logo but you'll still see the old one around for a while. We will be continuing to use our existing letterhead, brochures and other publications until our stock is depleted.

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1st World Conference of Women's Shelters

I recently had the privilege, and opportunity to attend the 1st World Conference of Women's Shelters, hosted by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) in Edmonton, Alberta. The theme of this event was: "Discovering the Common Core: Practical Frameworks for Change".

To say the experience was remarkable is truly an understatement.

There were 51 countries represented, with 801 delegates in attendance. Women's shelter workers arrived from all over the world to participate in this historic event. The conference began on September 8 and concluded on September 11, 2008. Each day offered plenary sessions, as well as morning and afternoon workshops facilitated by individuals from around the world, speaking on specific issues experienced in their homelands.

Whether it was a keynote speaker or a workshop facilitator, each offered their own specific gift of knowledge and wisdom. While there are truly too many individuals to list, I would like to acknowledge one man in particular, who made a huge impact on me, and my colleagues.

I had the honour of listening to Arun Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. His presentation spoke to the "things my Grandfather taught me". He shared with us the philosophy of nonviolence, as learned by the time he spent with his Grandfather and Grandmother. The stories he shared, and the parables he used, shall remain with me indefinitely. What a remarkable man, and what a gift I received to be in his presence.

The goal of the conference, to quote Jan Reimer, provincial coordinator for ACWS, was: "Shelter workers want to tell the world about what they have witnessed, and what they have accomplished in the past three decades. We hope to learn from one another, and support one another in our challenging work. Most of all, we want to speak out in one strong, clear voice for an end to domestic violence, everywhere."

There is no question that this goal was achieved, particularly when in her closing remarks, Jan Reimer, asked all of the 800 + participants to look around the conference hall. She reminded us to keep the picture in our minds of the faces of the individuals present, and who continue to work towards ending violence against women and children, everywhere. To see individuals from so many countries represented, looking around the room and acknowledging one another was bittersweet.

While it is encouraging to know that you are 'not alone' in this struggle, it is disheartening to hear the stories from around the world of women and children who still experience violence in their lives on a daily basis.

Please continue to honour and support the women and their children who, at great risk, find the courage to leave the violence in their lives.

*Thank you,
Judith Stevens
Executive Director*

SHELTER – A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT!

In a 1984 study, homelessness and insecure housing were considered to be contributing to a health crisis because “the lack of safe, affordable housing leads to increased illness and premature death” (Housing and Health Public Health Implications Of Crisis in Affordable Housing, October 1984).

Sadly, not much has changed since 1984! Women and their children continue to flee from their abusive homes to seek safety at shelters across Ontario. At People In Transition, My Sister’s Place, a shelter for abused women and their children, women have five weeks to secure safe and affordable housing. The reality is they don’t often find it in New Tecumseth or the surrounding communities. Women are often on Ontario Works, not necessarily because they don’t want to work, but often because they don’t have transportation to work outside the community or they are unable to work the evening and night shifts that are available in the local factories. These shifts make it extremely difficult to find available and affordable childcare. Many women have shared stories of discrimination from local housing providers because they are on assistance or have children. Others see no alternative but to return to the abusive home or out of desperation find inadequate living arrangements.

The reality faced by women seeking housing often comes down to paying the rent or eating. For example a single woman receiving Ontario Works gets \$350 to cover her shelter cost. This isn’t enough to pay for a room and eat. These women must access the local food banks to survive.

While we are fortunate to have rent geared to income available in Simcoe County there are not enough units available to meet the demand. Additionally, an individual must qualify for rent geared to income housing. Presently in Alliston, there is only one building offering rent geared to income units. Consequently, many families are forced to leave the area to secure housing in larger urban centers, such as Barrie, where there are more rent geared to income units available.

In 2005 the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (AHP) started offering low-income families an opportunity to secure an interest-free loan to purchase a home. In our area the County of Simcoe Social Housing Department is overseeing this program.

Another housing incentive program overseen by the County of Simcoe Social Housing Department is a housing allowance program where landowners can have rent supplemented by up to \$250 per month. My Sister’s Place is very thankful that there have been several housing providers in New Tecumseth that have opted to participate in this program.

Unfortunately, we need more!! In April 2007 the Wellesley Institute presented “Creative Housing Solutions for Simcoe; **The Three Elements To Successful Housing Solutions:**

1. **Supply** – enough homes to meet the population needs
2. **Affordability** – housing costs that are affordable – no more than 30% of annual income
3. **Supports** – extra supports and services to those who need them

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about the housing allowance, home ownership program or would like more information about the Wellesley Institute please contact Pam Wilson, Transition and Housing Support Worker at 435-3993 ext 224 or by e-mail at pwilson@bellnet.ca.

*Pam Wilson
Transition Housing and Support*

The Inextricable Link Between Domestic Violence and Homelessness

Domestic violence affects us all. According to Statistics Canada, family violence represents 27% of all violent crimes and among those, 62% is violence perpetrated by a spouse or common-law partner (2004, 5). The Canadian General Social Survey in 2000 showed that almost one in every three women reported having experienced at least one incidence of physical violence in her long-term relationship (Sev'er 6). Although similar numbers of men and women report at least one incidence of violence the frequency and consequences are significantly higher for women (Sev'er 6). Women are more likely to be injured, to require medical attention for injuries that are sustained and to fear for their lives (Statistics Canada, 2007, 2).

After a shelter stay, some women leave intending to return to their homes but many have plans to stay elsewhere. On April 19, 2006 (Statistics Canada's "snapshot" day), only 15% of women intended to return to their husband or common-law partner (Statistics Canada, 2007, 6). The other 85% report having acquired new accommodation (27%), planned to go to other shelters (12%), intended to stay with friends and relatives (9%), entered residential services or hospitals (4%) or intended to go somewhere other than one of the specified categories (18%) but 18% of women left the shelter without any planned destination (Statistics Canada, 2007, 6).

While relatively few women arrive at the shelter with the intention of returning to the abuser, a significant number of women, possibly as many as 50%, do return (Haj-Yahia, 2001, 38). According to Statistics Canada, women who are experiencing violence turn to shelters more than once. "The 2006 THS [Transition Home survey] found that almost 4 in 10 women residing in shelters on the survey snapshot day in 2006 had stayed in that shelter before." The breakdown showed that 39% of the returning women had been in the facility one other time in the previous year, 21% had had between two and four previous stays and 14% of the women had stayed in the shelter five or more times that year (Statistics Canada, 2007, 4-5). According to Aysan Sev'er, a professor of sociology at the University of Toronto, "the two most commonly given reasons for returning to abusive partners are: not being able to find jobs and/or alternate housing" (Sev'er 5).

Women who do not return to their abusers often face months and sometimes years of unacceptable living conditions. According to the statistics, even with priority given to victims of abuse, the wait for geared to income housing can be from three weeks to five years (Sev'er 20). Women often end up accepting shelter that they cannot afford and then find themselves evicted for non-payment of rent. This makes them particularly vulnerable; living on the streets puts them at risk of losing their children because they cannot provide for them and it puts them at risk of violence from strangers (Sev'er 20).

We are living in a society where cuts have been made to social programs and women and children are being put at risk because of those cuts. We cannot measure the number of women who stay in abusive relationships because they feel they have no where else to go but we know that women leave and then are forced by circumstance to return to their abuser. We also know what women tell us. In a recent survey, 39 survivors urged other women to leave their abusive partners but when they were asked why they stayed so long, more than half of them said that they were afraid of not having a decent place to live (Sev'er 19).

We so often hear the question asked, "why doesn't she leave?" But if we consider a woman's socioeconomic situation – "whether she has money, a job or access to safe and affordable housing" – we see that the question must become, "how can she leave?" (Sev'er 18) It is only by ensuring that women have access to a safe, affordable place to live and raise their children that we will be giving them the opportunity to build new lives free from violence.

~ Sue Hopcroft

Haj-Yahia, Muhammad M., Eldar-Avidan, Dorit. "Formerly Bettered Women: A Qualitative Study of Their Experiences in Making a Decision to Divorce and Carrying It Out." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*. 36(1/2) (2001): 37-65.

Sev'er, Aysan. "Flight of Abused Women, Plight of Canadian Shelters: Another Road to Homelessness." *Women's Health and Urban Life*. 1(1) (2002): 4-23. [University of Toronto Research Repository](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/701). 12 October 2008 <<https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/701>>.

Statistics Canada. 2007. *Canada's shelters for abused women, 2005/2006*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE. Ottawa.

Statistics Canada. 2004. *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2004*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-224-XIE. Ottawa.

Housing Resources in South Simcoe

The Simcoe County Alliance to End Homelessness (SCATEH) serves as a forum to understand, plan and co-ordinate activities that raise awareness of the complex issues surrounding homelessness and to create solutions.

The Alliance is made up of people and organizations who are dedicated to helping end homelessness in our community.

The steering committee of the Alliance meet monthly in Barrie to discuss the six chapter areas that make up Simcoe County. They consist of Barrie, Collingwood, Midland, Orillia, Alliston and Bradford. We work together on planning homelessness forums twice a year to bring awareness to all in our community on affordable housing and the need for additional shelters and transitional housing units in Simcoe County.

For any other information regarding the Alliance, you can reach the Administrative Assistant at the United Way of Greater Simcoe County at 726-2301 ex 30.

~ Nancy Smith
Financial Coordinator, The United Way of Greater Simcoe County

The County plans, funds and manages the County's social housing system. This includes issuing subsidies to 28 Non Profit Housing Providers (NPHP) within the County and for monitoring compliance with the Social Housing Reform Act. Each NPHP housing complex includes rent-geared-to-income units and market units. The residents of RGI units pay rent based on their monthly income. There are approximately 3,000 NPHP units County-wide. Approximately 60% of NPHP units are targeted as rent-geared-to-income units.

The Simcoe County Housing Corporation (SCHC) is owned and operated by the County of Simcoe. It consists of 1,235 housing units in 239 buildings and operates a rent supplement program for private landlords. Most of the SCHC housing units are targeted as rent-geared-to-income units.

The County also manages the wait list for residents wishing to rent a rent-geared-to-income unit within the County. As December 31, 2007, there were 3354 households registered on the County's centralized waitlist.

The County is also pleased to be participating in the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program which provides funding assistance for construction of new affordable housing units, housing allowance-rent supplement and home ownership down payment assistance for eligible individuals.

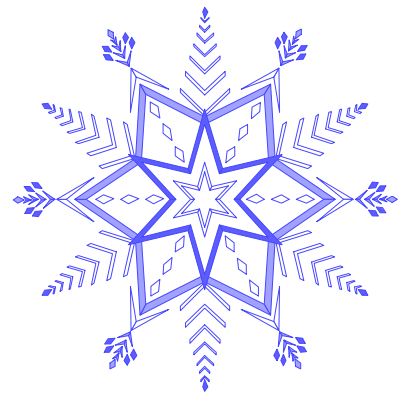
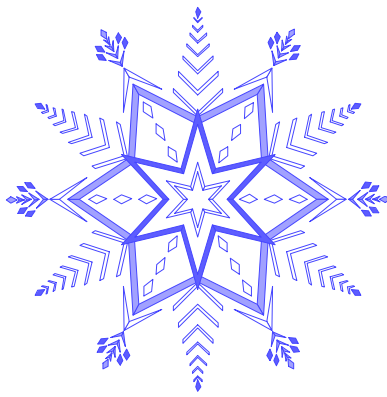
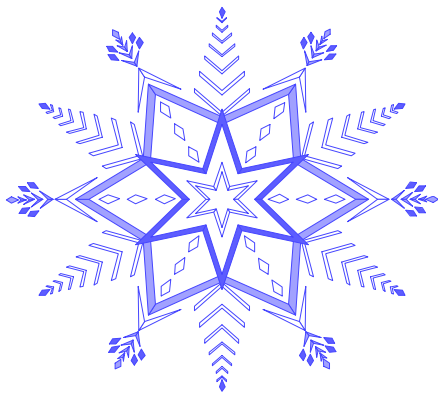
For more information on our programs and services please visit our website at www.simcoe.ca.

~ Cathy Kytayko
Director, Social Housing, County of Simcoe

I am the Housing Resource Coordinator at CONTACT, South Simcoe Community Information Centre. We offer free housing assistance and access to supportive services for those who are in danger of losing their home. As a housing worker I have met with single adults, single parents, families, seniors and youth. It is getting increasingly difficult for people to keep up with the skyrocketing price of living. Whether it is the price of gas at the pumps, the cost of heating and electricity or the price of groceries, the cost of living is increasing at a much faster rate than most people's income levels. It is especially difficult for single parent families and people with a fixed income. As these issues get worse, it makes the need for affordable housing even more urgent in our community. With an election on the horizon, we all need to keep the issue of housing at the front of our minds. We need to scrutinize all parties, and candidate's strategies regarding housing and poverty reduction. We can use our votes to show that this is an issue that matters.

CONTACT is currently located at our temporary location at 96 Victoria Street West, Lower Level. We will be moving into our new building located at 39 Queen Street East, in November.

~ Luke Allen
Housing Resource Coordinator, CONTACT



Holiday Countdown

As the air turns cold and the leaves begin to change, the thought of snow comes closer. With snow comes the joyful holiday season. At My Sister's Place we provide our clients the assistance to celebrate the holidays with the knowledge that we can help provide their families with support and enjoyable memories.

This year the Annual Children's Holiday Party will be held at the end of November and feature crafts, face painting, refreshments, games, and a visit from Santa. We hope that each child has a wonderful time and an experience that they can remember.

In December, women will be given the chance to come to My Sister's Place in order to "shop" for the holidays. This will allow women to reduce their stresses and fears that may be present during the holiday season.

If you would like to donate gifts or supplies for this year's holiday events please review the suggestions below:

- gift cards (music, movies, clothing)
- items for older youth
- video games, electronics, accessories
- sports equipment (all seasons)

In the spirit of working towards a community free from violence, we ask that donations be of a non-violent nature.

Should you have any further questions, please contact Kelly, Children's Services Counsellor at (705) 435-9400 extension 222.

Thank you for your support!!



As we prepare for this holiday season and the anticipated increase in delivery of services, we are asking community members to support our Holiday Fundraising Campaign. My Sister's Place is required to significantly fundraise on an ongoing basis to meet and enhance our programs.

While many families enjoy the festive spirit of warmth, caring and sharing, statistics reflect that many women and their children experience an increase in domestic violence during this time of year. Holiday celebrations, coupled with financial and family pressures, often contribute to increased domestic violence.

The South Simcoe community has historically been generous in their support of My Sister's Place. We thank you for your generosity and ask you to once again help us. All of your donations go towards helping the women and children that we serve and your contributions make a significant difference in their lives.

Financial contributions can be made payable to "My Sister's Place" and can be sent in the enclosed self-addressed envelope or you can donate online at www.mysistersplace.ca.

Recognizing that there are many celebrations at this time, best wishes to all for a safe and healthy season from the Staff, Management and Board of My Sister's Place.

Handwritten signatures:
Mary, Anne, Colette, Joanne
Noema, Heather, Kathy
Carol, Penny, Jane
Barbara, Pam, Kelly
Carlene, Susan, Colleen
Giselle, Evelyn
Carole, Carolyn, Shannon, Audie, Josh
Warren



What's Happening!

My Sister's Place would like to welcome four new staff members—Heather Lougheed, Patricia Giles-Tameanko, Collette Gallant and Julie Pendergast.

As a Seneca College student in the Social Services Worker program, Heather completed a successful second year placement with our organization in April, 2008. Upon completion, People in Transition, "My Sister's Place offered Heather a position within our Women's Program, and we were so pleased that she accepted this offer!

Patricia Giles-Tameanko has recently joined our team as a Women's Program staff member. Patricia is currently completing her final year of the Abused Women's and Children's Advocacy/Counsellor Program at George Brown College, as well as supplementing her education with Women's Studies (B.A.) from Trent University.

Collette Gallant is a recent graduate of Laurentian University, where she achieved her Honours Bachelor's of Social Work. Collette has a wealth of experience in advocacy, and developed a program to support women when they leave shelters. This program, previously offered at "Collette's Place" had the motto of "staying strong together".

Julie Pendergast is a recent graduate of Lakehead University, where she also achieved her Honours Bachelor's of Social Work. Julie has gained additional experience by working with the Children's Aid Society in Barrie, as well as working at a Gender Issues Centre in Thunder Bay. Julie has completed research, and co-facilitated workshops in the areas of domestic violence as well as the elimination of racism and discrimination.

All of these young women bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to their positions, which continues to enhance the essential services we provide to women and their children, who are seeking refuge from the violence in their lives.

As many of you in the community may be aware, a long term employee, Anne Ritchie, was involved in a very serious car accident at the beginning of August. Anne continues to improve on a daily basis, but her rehabilitation will be long and arduous as a result of the serious injuries she sustained.

On a positive note, Anne has returned to her community to begin the long, rehabilitative process! Anne's strength and resilience are truly a testament to her courageous spirit!!

All of us at People in Transition, "My Sister's Place" continue to support our colleague in this truly remarkable, and miraculous journey she is on!!!



Please remember.....

Geneviève Bergeron	Maryse Laganieri
Hélène Colgan	Maryse Leclair
Nathalie Croteau	Anne-Marie Lemay
Barbara Daigneault	Sonia Pelletier
Anne-Marie Edward	Michèle Richard
Maud Haviernick	Annie St-Arneault
Barbara Klucznik Widajewicz	Annie Turcotte

Each year on December 6th, Canadians gather to remember the fourteen young women who lost their lives at L'Ecole Polytechnique and all of the other women who have lost their lives due to violence. Please join us at the Town Square Courtyard in front of Community Service Centre South Simcoe at 7:00 p.m. as we remember these women and recommit ourselves to ending the violence. Refreshments to follow.

It is our custom on December 6th to remember not just those women slain at L'Ecole Polytechnique but also other women who have lost their lives due to violence. The following is a list of the women and children murdered in Ontario since January 2008 where the intimate partner was charged or committed suicide. Please remember them as well.

Stefanie Rengel	14	
Tashina General	21	pregnant at time of murder
Edyta Lewandowski	32	mother of one
Jane Doe		mother of 5
Nadine Parker	36	mother of 3
Valerie Ferguson	44	mother of 2
Ildiko Szava	46	mother of one
Karolyne, Gallasz	70	mother of Ildiko Szava
Carolyn Carroll	44	
Alicia Bateman	28	
Lien Angelis	42	mother of 2
Liana Matthewson	44	mother of 2
Karina Neff	31	
Yvonne Leroux	58	
Barbara Short	48	mother of 2

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our Guest Speaker, Huda Bukhari
ISAP Manager, Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture

At the Annual General Meeting of People in Transition Inc. “My Sister’s Place” on September 22, 2008, the Board was pleased to welcome our guest speaker, Huda Bukhari. Huda Bukhari is a Sudanese Muslim who has been living in Canada for 12 years. She has spent the past 11 years working to help immigrant women and is a survivor of domestic violence. Her topic for the evening was Cultural Diversity as it relates to Domestic Violence.

Cultural diversity is defined as, “the cultural differences that exist between people, such as language, dress and traditions, and the way societies organize themselves, their conception of morality and religion, and the way they interact with the environment.”

Canada welcomes more than 200,000 immigrants each year from countries all over the world. While these newcomers are free to settle anywhere in Canada, many of them come to Toronto because they feel that they will be able to find work here. Of these new immigrants, approximately 20% are women and almost all arrive as dependents where their husbands are the primary applicants.

While domestic violence is universal, immigrant women face a number of other issues that make it much more challenging for them. After working with Arab immigrant women for the past eleven years, Ms Bukhari notes that there are many unique issues that are faced by Arab women.

Language is an issue for many Arab immigrant women. There is a limited amount of information available in Arabic and these immigrant women do not have English language skills. Often, this means that women who need help do not know what their rights are or that help is available.

Domestic violence is often exacerbated in Muslim homes because of changing family dynamics. Often the husband leaves the home, and sometimes the country, in order to find work, leaving his wife responsible for the family. When he returns, he is unhappy with her level of independence and the way the family operates.

Some Arab men may invoke their religion as a weapon against their wives. The husband may call upon an imam or sheikh to tell his wife that she is at fault or they may tell her that she is an unfit Muslim. She can be told that to be a good Muslim and to uphold the family’s honour, she must be quiet, docile and obedient. She may be refused education and training and she may be told not to get a job. If she does work, her husband may take her entire paycheque and control all financial decisions and information. Arab men may isolate their wives, claiming that God has given them the right to do so because of their position as head of the household. He may protect himself claiming that his wife would be violating her Islamic responsibility to protect her husband’s privacy should she tell anyone about the abuse. And if other tactics fail, he may use the children. Islamic courts will always give custody to the father. He can then send them “home”, marry them off or kidnap them.

So what can we do? We can understand that while domestic violence is a universal issue, immigrant women face additional burdens and challenges. We can be patient as these women may be confused. We can learn about other cultures. Some women may not be comfortable speaking about domestic violence because of their culture. We can be sensitive to the fact that women may feel shame. We can be wary of rushing in because if her husband finds out, she may pay the price. We can be sensitive to their needs but make sure that we reach out to them.

The board and staff of My Sister’s Place would like thank Huda Bukhari for speaking to us and for sharing her experiences with us.

Commemorating 20 Years of Service



Executive Director, Judith Stevens, presents 20-year pin to Carol McLean in recognition of her 20 years of service at My Sister's Place.

Saying Goodbye



Board Chair, Anne Skeates, presents flowers to outgoing board member, Sue Hopcroft. The board also said goodbye to Gord Peters, Lianne Picot, Colleen Lenaghan and Chandra Verschueren.



October was Women's History Month

November is Violence Awareness and Prevention Month

Women's History month began in 1992, and every year since its inception, "Ontario has participated in this special month by profiling the many achievements of women who make Ontario a better place to live."

Congratulations to our local MP, Helena Guergis, on her appointment as the Minister responsible for the Status of Women. Eleven women are now in the federal cabinet.

We need your support!

In order to continue to provide much needed services to women and their children in South Simcoe who are seeking a life free from violence, we need your donations. You can send cheques to PO Box 533, Alliston, ON L9R 1V7. Single or monthly donations can be made through Canada Helps on our website at www.mysistersplace.ca. Tax receipts will be issued for any donation of more than \$10. If you have gently used clothing, linens or other household goods, please call 705-435-3835 for information about where to drop these items off. 'In Memorium' donations can be made at any of the funeral homes in our catchment area.

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and may not necessarily reflect those of People in Transition (Alliston) Inc., "My Sister's Place." If you have any comments, questions or suggestions about anything you've read in this newsletter, please contact our Executive Director, Judith Stevens, by phone at 705-435-9400 or by email pitmsp@bellnet.ca.



Growing 'Trees for Shelter'

By Doug Skeates

"A most novel means of fund raising!!" was a remark heard from a 'customer' visiting our home and tree nursery in response to a newspaper ad about the availability of 'Trees for Shelter' in support of the women's shelter in Alliston, My Sister's Place. This support so far has amounted to about \$5,000 or more each year. While the primary purpose for selling trees is providing financial support for an urgently needed social service, establishment of future physical shelter as trees grow up around the home is of environmental benefit as well.

Board and staff of My Sister's Place hold a 'planting bee' each spring. Bare root nursery stock is purchased at cost from Somerville Nurseries in Everett. Flower pots are obtained from the Simcoe County recycling program. Soil is purchased and/or donated. The volunteers hold a one day workshop, mixing soil, filling pots and planting trees. A pot luck meal tops off a work / social event which makes it a community-building, fun time for all.

A very important third purpose to the exercise is promoting community awareness in the general public about the need for such services. Folks coming to buy trees are also interested in discussing the work of the shelter and the services available to women and children encountering abusive relationships in the home.

Potted 3 year old white spruce trees are just \$15
Contact Anne or Doug Skeates at 905-729-3337

Coming Events

November 25, 2008—The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

Saturday, December 6, 2008—Candlelight Vigil in the Town Square Courtyard in front of Community Service Centre South Simcoe at 7:00 p.m. Refreshments to follow.

November, 2008—My Sister's Place Children's Holiday Party

Sunday, March 8, 2009—International Women's Day