

Helping women back on their feet

Basketeers push to reach 1,300 basket goal; sponsors now needed

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It may just be a basket to some, but for women who have fled an abusive relationship, it means a new start.

That's why Toronto-based volunteer group the Basketeers is making a push to hand over 1,300 baskets this year to women starting a new life in a new residence.

And they're more than just baskets; they're filled with items that a mother can use around the apartment, a huge help for those who have nothing when they leave a shelter.

The Basketeers is looking for groups or individuals to "adopt" baskets and fill them with household items to help women starting over.

As of Oct. 7, a total of 781 baskets had been created, far short of the goal. But there's still six weeks before a major get-together where basket sponsors and shelter representatives meet, explained Cheryl Stoneburgh, Basketeers founder.

"This year we're behind," explained Stoneburgh, adding last year the group amassed 1,154 baskets. "I don't know if the economy's catching up with us a little bit, it's hard to tell."

But she's confident the goal will be met.

"Even last year when things were difficult we had a 20 per cent increase (in baskets)," she explained. That number is a long way from the group's humble beginnings 11 years ago, when it garnered 14 baskets.

The Basketeers now support 26 shelters, 11 of them in the Greater Toronto Area, and are expanding their reach beyond the city's borders; Thunder Bay was just added to the Basketeers roster, said Stoneburgh. The list of shelters supported by the GTA and Area chapter of the Basketeers includes Honeychurch Family Life, Resource Centre, Florence Booth House, The Red Door Shelter, The Toronto Community Hostel, Halton Women's Place, Women's Habitat, The Jean Tweed Centre, Interim Place, YWCA Toronto,

and Family Transition Place.

It was at one of those recipient shelters that Stoneburgh met Lisa Dickson about seven years ago, when Dickson was an acting manager at the Red Door Shelter. Dickson now volunteers with the Basketeers.

Dickson explained the baskets were a huge lift for the women leaving the shelter during her time there.

"They really felt like they were being considered," she said. "It's a huge expense to start up an apartment on your own, a lot of them when they're fleeing abusive relationships (are) entering into the next apartment with nothing."

While the target number of baskets is increasing each year, that doesn't necessarily mean more women are seeking shelters, explained Dickson. It means the Basketeers are reaching more in need.

"(Stoneburgh) is not serving 100 per cent of the Toronto shelters yet, but she's pretty darn close," said Dickson.

One of the goals of the Basketeers is to give women the self-esteem to not return to the abusive relationship.

"Obviously the basket alone isn't going to change it... but it's the first step towards the woman feeling more positive about herself," offered Dickson.

"It's one of many small pieces of the puzzle to build her self-esteem and let her know she's worth something, and there is a bit of support out there."

All Basketeers chapters have their own drop off locations for the baskets, on the same day.

This year that day will be Saturday, Nov. 20, with the GTA and Area drop off at The Salvation Army Mississauga Temple, 3173 Cawthra Rd. in Mississauga from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Stoneburgh called that event "a massive coffee party" for sponsors.

The baskets have been "decorated to the hilt" by the donors and "it's like looking at a garden of baskets, it's pretty awesome," she said, adding



Staff photo/ IAN KELSO

JOIN THE CAUSE: Cheryl Stoneburgh, founder of The Basketeers, says they're looking for groups or individuals to adopt baskets and fill them with household items to help women starting over.

shelter representatives are on hand to answer questions that day.

Students help donors unload the baskets from their vehicle that day because the baskets can be heavy, some even with microwaves strapped to the bottom, she said.

It's an opportunity for high school students to earn mandatory volunteer hours, she added.

Those interested in creating a basket can register at www.basketeers.ca and an empty basket, donated by Rubbermaid, is dropped on their doorstep.

"To me (the baskets) are like building hugs... (the woman in need) knows all these people, strangers, are sending help and thinking about her," said Stoneburgh.

POLICE

Young girl sexually assaulted

Police are urging parents and caregivers to be extra vigilant of their children following the sexual assault of a young girl at a 22 Division area apartment building on Saturday.

According to police, the unnamed young girl was approached by an unknown male suspect in the Dundas Street West and Royal York Road area residential building at around noon.

The suspect followed the girl into the elevator, began a conversation with her, then sexually assaulted her.

Const. Wendy Drummond characterized the assault as a "touching" and said the girl sustained no physical injuries.

Police are now searching for the suspect, described as white, in his teens or early 20s, approximately 5'8" and 130 pounds.

He was wearing a white shirt, green baseball hat and white shorts at the time of the assault.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Detective Constable Sarb Sidhu at 416-808-2205, Crime Stoppers anonymously at 416-222-TIPS (8477), online at www.222tips.com, text TOR and your message to CRIMES (274637), or Leave A Tip on Facebook.

- Cynthia Reason

EVENTS

Poetry launch

Alderwood poet Domenico Capilongo will launch his new collection of poetry downtown next week.

The launch party for the jazz-inspired *hold the note* will be held on Tuesday, Oct. 19 at 7 p.m. at The Supermarket, 268 Augusta Ave. (College Street and Spadina Avenue). To learn more about Capilongo, visit <http://domcapilongo.googlepages.com>



Elect
Rajinder LALL
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