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Ms. Brenda Hogg
Regional Councillor, Region of York
Chair, Community Services and Housing Committee

January 17, 2008

Dear Chair Hogg,

I am writing to ask for 2008 funding for the York Region Outreach van for an additional two days a week, Saturday and Sunday. The Outreach van serves homeless people in York Region week-days, Monday through Friday, and offers hot food, clothes, some medical help, transportation to a shelter, etc.

As we all know, homelessness does not end on weekends.

In spring 2007 I met with Carolina Moretti and John Webster, Town Councillors for Markham, about the increasingly visible homeless seen in eastern Markham. It was agreed to find the most efficient way to help ease the problem. I did the research. I have worked on homelessness and its issues for twenty five years. In Montreal I was the moderator for a seminar on homelessness in 1989. It is conclusive - provide people with their basic needs, food and shelter, and crime goes down as does mental illness. Up front costs of providing housing may be high, long term the costs to society are much, much lower.

There are very few Out of the Cold nights in our region, and they are only available in western York Region. Toronto has downsized the numbers of beds they have for homeless people, which is why we are seeing more homeless in eastern Markham. There is a move afoot to open an Out of the Cold in eastern Markham; Taucha Inrig is working with her church congregation on how to move forward for next year. She has received help from Rehana Sumar, who runs Out of the Cold in York Region. Taucha is also in touch with Pamela Roth, who has volunteers from St. Patrick's church willing and able to help as well. Rehana Sumar is working Taucha and her congregation on security issues, and having a nurse available for basic first aid and care. But that is for next winter.

In the meantime, people are freezing and need help. After much research I met with Pamela Roth, Carolina Moretti and Rehana Sumar on November 19, 2007 at Markham Civic Centre to look at some ready solutions to help our increasing homeless, especially in eastern Markham where there are no services.

It was felt that the quickest and most immediately efficient route would be to add two days to the York Region Outreach van. Saturday and Sunday. It is run by Crosslinks (Marlene Berry Program Director - 905 713 0137 ext. 222) and LOFT (Jim Nason, Chief Operating officer). They say the best solution for an area as large as York Region is to have two vans, seven days a week. The territory to cover is huge.

Barring that, adding two days to the existing Outreach van would be a good first step. Jim Nason says the two extra days need to be ongoing, not just for one year, that:

- It will involve hiring up to 8 people,

- The cost will be between two to four hundred thousand dollars a year, and the funding needs to be ongoing,
- They are currently looking at funding for the upcoming year so the timing is good, and
- All funding for the current Outreach van program is from York Region.

For more precise numbers, you should call Jim Nason at 416 979 1994 ext. 234.

Perhaps one of the ways to fund the extra days on the van, or better, two vans, is through the savings York region currently is seeing with the multi-year elimination of the GTA Pooling transfer funds to Toronto for social services. Hopefully our politicians will direct these savings to York social services.

Montreal has le Bon Dieu dans la Rue which has vans that make regular stops throughout the night in Montreal. Private businesses have stepped up to the plate big time, actually funding the vans. Markham and York businesses may well be interested in partnerships. Le Bon Dieu dans la Rue now has, in addition to their vans, a couple of short stay apartments for multiple users as well.

Winston Churchill once said that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Please help in reaching out to our homeless population and providing them with a seven day a week Outreach van, equipped with hot food, clothes and medical assistance. It would be great to have shelter for them at night as well, but one thing at a time!

Thank you Chair Hogg for helping to address this truly urgent, needy problem.

Yours truly,



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cc. Jack Heath Regional Councillor, Markham