

LAKESIDE HOPE HOUSE nominated by Lorna Ronald

Lakeside HOPE House is a well-established poverty relief organization and care provider in the Guelph area advocating that poverty, food insecurity, inequality, health and community are all interconnected. They currently offer services and programs to over 1100 households per year and have assisted over 5100 households since their inception in 2012. They challenge stigmas surround poverty and allow community members to maintain dignity while providing them with tactical skills developed in a community environment. The focus is not about “hand out, but hand up” by creating long term skills to facilitate self sufficiency. Approximately 30-45 new household intakes are received each month and are community funded.

The Community Backpack Project, in partnership with the Guelph Neighborhood Support Coalition. is a program in need. Children in our community have been under additional stress and challenged during the pandemic and starting school is something they look forward to. Whether the school year begins virtually, live or a combination of both, HOPE House would like to provide needed supplies to children in poverty across the community to assist them to thrive and learn. New this year is an online application form and additional supplies to support at home learning. There have been 895 registrations as of June 30th. The goal is to provide 1500 new, fully stocked backpacks to children at a cost of \$45,000. HOPE House receives NO government funding for this project and relies on community sponsors in order to provide students with confidence, excitement and readiness to learn – HOPE!

I visited HOPE House in downtown Guelph and was impressed with the volunteers and staff who provide a caring, respectful atmosphere to those in need. I was introduced to the organization through a client who volunteers at the centre. The environment at Hope House is a friendly, positive and caring one in a family setting. Children in poverty are especially vulnerable to stress and judgement. I believe that education is critical at an early age and giving children more opportunity to achieve their goals will benefit our community as a whole.

I learned of a few stories from recipients who spoke of the benefits of the Backpack Project:

One parent was speaking of how she was trying to manage the clothing, shoes, boots, etc. and how much it meant to her children to be able to choose a new backpack for school that contained needed supplies for school.

Another mom is starting a new job, stressed about the demands of working and household tasks plus preparing children for school. Without the support of HOPE House, she would not have been able to provide her children with a new backpack. She was worried her children would be stigmatised by other, more privileged children. With the children receiving their backpacks and her starting a new job, they are ready to begin a new year together and have a fresh start.

A young lady spoke of how HOPE House helped her family when she was younger and how happy she was when she received a new backpack. Now she visits HOPE House to volunteer and give back.

It is documented that youth and children living in poverty have poorer educational outcomes compared to wealthier peers leading to struggles with truancy and dropout. We can change that by giving children HOPE in our community and contributing to an excellent cause.

Thank you for your consideration and interest.