

"Is it one of these women," I wonder as I stand in line at Zehr's.

It couldn't be the new employee at work, could it?

Maybe it is the little boy and his Mom, sitting behind me at Tim Hortons.

All around us there are people living with abuse. Yes, people in Cambridge are LIVING with abuse. The very least we can do is read about it so we are better informed.

The news is filled with stories of abuse and domestic violence - Ray Rice, Jian Ghomeshi, Bill Cosby, but everyone seems to think abuse is an isolated incident that happens in another community. Certainly not in Cambridge, right? Unfortunately abuse knows no boundaries and has no socio-economic patterns. Employed, unemployed, educated, uneducated, old, young...no one is immune.

We are fortunate to have an organization like Women's Crisis Services in our community. Operating in Waterloo Region for over 35 years, Women's Crisis Services' mission is to empower and support women and children to move beyond violence and abuse by providing safe shelter, education and outreach services.

Let's look at just how serious an issue this is in Canada.

Did you watch Super Bowl 2015? Even based on their expandable seat rate, the University of Phoenix Stadium would not be able to seat the more than 80,000 women in Canada who are abused every year. Just think about that stadium overflowing with Canadian women who are victims of abuse every year.

It is a serious issue and it is here in our own backyard. Waterloo Regional Police respond to over 6000 calls of domestic violence each year. We know from the women who come to our shelters that very few call the police, which means that the over 6000 calls are just the tip of the iceberg. It isn't just women who live with abuse. According to the report "Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children", over 350,000 children in Canada witness or experience family violence every year. Did you know that Women Crisis Services has the equivalent of TEN primary classrooms of children come through their shelters each year? Need help visualizing that? **Please watch our video on YouTube - "WCSWR How Many Is Enough"**

Are we prepared to let children in our own backyard live with violence and abuse? Safety should be a right, not an option.

Kathryn McGarry, MPP for Cambridge, spoke at a recent Women's Crisis Services event. She shared the story of how on her first day of work as a nurse, a 6 month old baby girl was admitted with rope burns around her neck. Kathryn said she grew up very quickly that day. She spoke passionately about the need for keeping women and children safe and urged our community to support the Haven House Campaign.

Cambridge desperately needs to re-build Haven House. Haven House was built in 1991 as an 11-bed shelter and now on any given night, serves 30+ women and children. Women's Crisis Services is re-building Haven House and we need your help. We have the land and we are anxious to start building but we need the support of our caring community. Please

donate to our campaign. Please help women and children be safe and move beyond a life of violence and abuse.

We have the ability to do something NOW that will serve our community for years to come. It isn't just the thousands of women and children coming through the shelter who you'll be helping. The counselling and support WCS provides ensures that we can break the chains of abuse and help generations of families to come. It is that transformational.

In addition to shelter, we provide counselling and therapy that is so critical to break the chains of abuse. We provide traditional counselling as well as innovative programs like music and pet therapy.

This week when you are out in the community going to work, buying groceries, stopping for coffee or picking up your kids, I encourage you to pause and look around you. There are people around you in our community living behind closed doors in an unsafe, violent and abuse environment. We can help them.

We need personal and corporate donations. **Please visit www.wcswr.org/donate or call 519-741-9184 x 2038** to help this important campaign, ensuring that women and children in our community get the help that they need. Please join us in saying that you will keep people in your own backyard safe from violence and abuse.

When you give, you can go to bed each night knowing that women and children in your own backyard are sleeping safely in the shelter. They are safe because of you. Thank you for your help and compassion.

By Sara McLennan, Chair of the rebuild Haven House campaign for Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region.

