

The homeless experience in North Perth – what, if anything, can be done?

‘We don’t want charity but we need charity. We don’t want to feel like you feel sorry for us but we want to feel like you feel for us’

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This is the final instalment in a four-part series of articles allowing local homeless people to discuss their experiences in the community. For their protection aliases are being used. In this instalment, people dealing with homelessness and precarious housing discussed possible solutions to some of the issues they face day-to-day. This article contains language some readers may find offensive.

As the population of North Perth grows, issues many residents associate with urban centres are starting to be noticed close to home. Homelessness is an issue which is not new to Listowel but until recently it was easier to overlook. It is now a visible aspect of the community, even if some of the homeless living here wish they could remain invisible.

Andrea Charest, executive director of It Takes A Village, the free store in the heart of Listowel, arranged a gathering of some of the people dealing with homelessness. Sitting around a large table in the back of the store, they enjoyed pizza and talked about their perspective of what is referred to as the “homelessness problem.”

When the conversation turned to solutions to the problems leading to homelessness in North Perth the thing which was on the tip of everyone’s tongue around the table was the lack of affordable housing in Listowel.

“The lack of affordable housing is a problem and that is something town council should address and good luck to them because I would not want to deal with that problem,” said Ichabod.

He feels the people living outside are in the same boat as everyone else who is looking for a solution to homelessness. They are at a loss for a single solution to solve the issue. There is a wide variety of reasons people end up living outside.

“What do you do?” he asked. He suggested leaving people alone as one solution.

The people living in camps in North Perth feel their tents are as much a home as anyone’s brick and mortar dwelling. One morning Ichabod was woken up by a social worker who was unzipping his tent

to look inside. The social worker had called out Ichabod’s name a few times and when he did not get a reply promptly he was just going to open his tent “and have a snoop around all (his) stuff.”

“They need to figure out how you go about monitoring someone but not encroaching on their existence either,” said Ichabod. “Usually every month, whether you have a place or not they give you \$395 for street allowance for food,” said Red.

Recently several people living precariously in North Perth had their allowance cut off.

“For two months I had to fight tooth and nail for it,” said Red.

Addiction is an issue which many people in the community are dealing with so access to harm reduction packages is important, even to people outside of the homeless community.

“Those girls over at Public Health are awesome,” said Ichabod. “You go in there and you don’t feel judged.”

Charest reminded everybody she has signed an agreement with Public Health and now harm reduction packages are available at It Takes A Village.

“They’re excited to have someone else doing it and at a place where people don’t feel judged,” she said. “I am so honoured they are willing to do it with us because we can go from them being open a couple of hours one day to Tuesday to Friday.”

“That was the worst part of it because if you slept in that day you were screwed for a week,” said Ichabod.

It’s easy to lose track of the time or the day when sleeping in the woods. It’s not a place with easy access to electricity or Wi-Fi. Charest mentioned a survey being conducted by the University of Guelph with the Salvation Army and United Way about the ways COVID-19 has impacted the community.

“As the Salvation Army and the researchers are gathering data, they are gathering data from a middle-class demographic, not folks who can’t get their supplies,” she said. “It’s a very unrealistic reporting of how COVID affected people because you are only getting responses from certain tiers of the community – that drives me crazy.”

Ichabod said Listowel already has one of the things they need to get by. He said a place like It Takes A Village is the type of thing

they want.

“A place where people can come without fear of judgment, even if it’s just to touch base with other people to say I am still alive,” he said.

If Charest does not see one of the regulars dropping by the Village for a few days she puts the word out to make sure they are OK.

“The reality is, how do you know someone is missing if you don’t know they are missing,” she said. “When we look at issues like the missing and murdered Indigenous women, so many women went missing because nobody knew they were missing.”

“Nobody cared to look,” said Ichabod.

If people have a desire to help it was suggested they make donations of gear, warm clothes and dry socks.

“A \$12 tarp, that goes a long way because you can make a roof out of that,” said Ichabod. “There’s a lot of things you can do with a tarp. It’s a handy thing. A rope is not something most people can make by themselves but it’s a requirement for setting up a camp.”

“So people are seeing something which makes them uncomfortable and when people are uncomfortable it motivates a change, not always a good one but it gets the conversation going.”

– Andrea Charest
It Takes A Village

Hygiene packages are another item they said they like to receive.

“That is one thing I do like that those outreach workers brought,” said Ichabod. “A little hygiene pack with some soap, a razor – those things are awesome.”

The next suggestion was one everyone sitting at the table agreed would be helpful.

“Somewhere to take the garbage,” said Ichabod.

“No doubt because we can get in shit when you try to put it anywhere,” said Red. They said finding a place to dispose of garbage is a major issue they face all the time.

“You can’t burn it,” said Ichabod. “You don’t want to leave it in a big old garbage pile because it looks like hell and I’m out there because I enjoy nature but if I take a bag of my garbage and I put it in one of the garbage cans along



Colin Burrowes Photo

Although the camps where the local homeless community live may purposely be located in stands of trees hidden from view, they are only a short walk from new subdivisions on the south side of Listowel. Josey gathers firewood to cook herself dinner in the shadow of North Perth’s prosperity.

the trail they take the can away.”

They suggested having a couple of unlocked dumpsters or garbage cans which the public can access.

“We have to search around to find dumpsters that aren’t chained down and it’s because of what people do out here with this one,” said Ichabod.

He was referring to the overflowing dumpster in the parking lot at the corner of Argyle Avenue and Inkerman Street in downtown Listowel.

“This is not your fucking garbage dumpster,” he said. “People are driving across town to dump their garbage in that dumpster. It’s constantly overflowing. It looks like hell. Then people complain about that and act like it’s (Charest’s) fault.”

Charest recently made a

my kids,” said Red. “That’s the reason I stay here.”

Charest said the Mayor of North Perth, Todd Kasenberg, contacted her to let her know municipal washrooms are closing for the winter and he asked if she thought it would affect anyone living outside. She told him it would be best to let people who are living outside answer that question so at the latest discussion in It Takes A Village, she asked Josey what it is like as a woman dealing with matters like menstruation.

“I’m knee-deep in the thick of it right now actually,” she said. “We need mirrors. We need washrooms. We need running water. I thought electricity was going to be the thing I missed most being outside, it’s not, it’s running water.”

She said she has two friends in town who let her shower, but she doesn’t want to be a burden.

“I like to have a shower every day but do I want to go to my girlfriend’s house every day and make her take an hour out of her day so she can sit there while I shower?” said Josey. “No, I don’t want to do that. So I use any public washroom I can get into.”

Using washrooms in businesses is not always an easy thing for her to do. She gave an example of a time she went into Domino’s Pizza last winter to put on extra layers of clothing to deal with the cold weather and the manager chased her out of the washroom.

“He said I was getting high in his bathroom,” said Josey. “That’s a family bathroom. Kids use that bathroom. I might be homeless but I have a moral compass and I will never smoke dope in a bathroom where kids can potentially go in right after me. Are you nuts?”

Charest asked if they think there is a misconception about homeless people doing drugs in public washrooms.

“Absolutely, yes,” exclaimed Josey. “If you take more than a three-minute pee break in a bathroom people think you are getting high.”

This is an experience they said happens when they use most washrooms in

businesses.

“Across the board,” said Josey. “If you take more than a few minutes you are a junkie and you are getting high.”

Red said when he had the opportunity to speak to Kasenberg he asked if washroom facilities are made available, would they be able to withstand freezing temperatures.

“It was minus-52 out there one day last year,” said Ichabod.

According to Charest one of the gyms in town has given people access to showers on Wednesdays. It was something which was appreciated but it is not easy to organize. She would have to rally people up because they lost track of the day and time.

It was suggested that they be allowed to shower at the community centre at least one day a week.

Charest asked how they would respond to people who worry about letting them into a public building when they are dealing with issues like meth addiction.

“Give us a chance to prove we are worth a chance,” said Josey. “Don’t write us off.”

“The unfortunate part is if you open it to some you have to open it to all,” said Ichabod.

“I understand that but we have to be in charge of our walk of life,” said Josey. “We can band together and go forward, why do we always have to band together and go back? Why can’t we get on each other’s asses and be like, ‘yo listen, if you can’t respect it, hit the bricks.’ Why can’t we be in charge of our destiny?”

Charest mentioned that liability would be a key issue when asking for a building to be opened for use as a warming station.

“For example, let’s say someone had a profound mental health crisis in the arena, started smashing their head off the glass or whatever,” she said. “So now it’s a liability issue. So you see the different perspectives?”

“Absolutely, yes,” said Josey.

“So we need to show some people some viable options,” said Charest. “Show them why this is worth it.”

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The homeless experience in North Perth – an introduction

‘From my point of view, I’m a person. The only real difference is that your walls are harder than mine.’

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This is the first in a series of articles allowing local homeless people to discuss their experiences in the community. For their protection aliases are being used.

This article is an introduction to their experience; future articles will deal with their experiences with physical and mental health supports, police, and their own suggestions about what can be done to help.

As the population of North Perth grows, issues many residents associate with urban centres are starting to be noticed close to home. Homelessness is an issue which is not new to Listowel but until recently it was easier to overlook. It is now a visible aspect of the community, even if some of the homeless living here wish they could remain invisible.

Andrea Charest, executive director of It Takes A Village, the free store in the heart of Listowel, arranged a gathering of some of the people dealing with homelessness. Sitting around a large table in the back, they enjoyed pizza and talked about their perspectives of what is referred to as the “homelessness problem.”

Ichabod was quite open about his experiences and opinions. As he will tell you, he’s not one to shut up. Red kept himself busy drawing in a slightly water-damaged sketchbook as he shared his life.

When Monica arrived late, Charest asked what it feels like walking into town from where their tents are set up.

“It can feel awful,” she said. “Why do you think I’m an hour late?”

It’s not easy for any of them to pinpoint the moment their life turned upside down and they ended up living in a tent.

The area where several of them camp is not far from many of the new housing developments on the south side of Listowel. Charest asked them how they feel when they see those expensive houses each day.

“You daydream and start backtracking through all the choices you made,” said Ichabod. “You try to figure out where the point it all started to collapse is. I’ve been on both sides of the fence, I’ve had everything and I’ve had nothing.”

He listed everything he had before. The things most people strive for. He said he had a house, wife, kids, two cars and a big yard.

“It had its own set of stresses and problems to deal with daily,” he said. “I’ve also had nothing... At the outset of last winter,



Colin Burrowes Photo

As Red, a member of Listowel’s homeless community, joined in a round table discussion to share his experiences he kept himself busy drawing in a sketch book which had been water damaged in the rain. He said starting to draw after many years has been a good way to focus his attention.

I had nothing but what was on my body. My tent was burned to the ground, everything gone but I’d still choose this life – maybe I’m broken.”

Ichabod said his family tried to be there for him but they got sick of it after a while.

“They try to help you mould and conform but after a while, they either give in and accept you or they cut you from their life completely,” he said. “We weren’t a real communicating type of family growing up. We were like boys don’t cry, suck it up. That was my old man.”

Now Ichabod says he just lies to his mom any time she asks him where he lives.

“I’ll make something up,” he said. “She worries and she doesn’t need to be worrying all the time but she isn’t stupid either so she knows. She hears things from people. She knows.”

Red said he couldn’t be dishonest with his mom about his situation. She was young and it was like they grew up together.

“See I was the youngest of three and my parents were already old and jaded and bitter by the time I was born,” said Ichabod. “I’m the different one of the family. For Christmas dinner, we just all fake it at this point. I’m there for the pie.”

It’s hard to estimate how many people are homeless in the area. According to Red, there are only a few people who will stay outside all the time but there are a lot of people who are couch surfing.

“That is basically what most of the people do,” he said. “They mix it up so they move from this place to that place and back again. They’ve got something to offer this person for a week so they can stay on the couch for a week until they start getting squawky.”

He said he was lucky because he didn’t have to

resort to giving sexual favours in exchange for a place to sleep. This comment changed the course of the conversation because Charest pointed out that having to trade sexual favours for a place to sleep is much more common for women.

Monica said it was an awful fact of life and she was almost in tears speaking about it.

The consensus around the table was couch surfing is an easy way to ruin friendships.

“I can’t stand having to walk on eggshells around people,” said Ichabod. “It’s not your space. I’ll go out to the forest. Set me up there. I’ll be comfortable. I’ll have my entertainment. Nobody will bother me and I don’t have to kiss anybody’s ass.”

They have all seen close friendships fall apart over small irritations.

“It’s happened to me and it’s stupid stuff,” said Red. “The way they do dishes or something.”

Shoplifting is part of how they survive but theft is not something they speak proudly about.

“You try to remember, don’t steal from people,” said Ichabod. “For one, that’s a dick move. They don’t have insurance like a big conglomerate does to cover losses.”

Red said they try their best to keep theft low key and not go overboard because that will get them caught.

“There’s a whole barter system there but it’s a small town, it’s only a matter of time,” said Ichabod. “You cannot do that very long. I’m banned from Walmart. I can’t even go in there wearing a mask.”

The North Perth homeless community is large enough to have several smaller communities within it, with different levels of function among the people.

“For lack of a better explanation, we still have our faculties about us,” said Ichabod in reference to the

people at the table.

He told a story about a friend of his who is starting to become a common character in Listowel.

“He knows what he’s saying but nobody else does,” he said. “He’s highly schizophrenic.”

Last year Ichabod found this man camping right in the middle of the community trail.

“Someone called the cops on him because he was peeing in the middle of the trail,” he said. “His explanation was he did not want to accidentally pee on a bug’s head. He’s like a monk that way but he did not know to just get off the trail because he doesn’t think that way. He doesn’t think ‘oh I might get robbed’, because he would never fathom to do that to someone else.”

Temporary housing is available for them but they have to go to Stratford – and temporary means two weeks.

“That would be the Rosecourt Motel and honestly, I’ll stay in the bush thank you... at least out there I stand a chance,” said Ichabod.

Red described his two-week stay in Stratford as ‘brutal’.

During that time away from their tent in North Perth, all their personal belongings are unwatched and unmaintained for two weeks.

“What do you think is going to be there when I get back?” asked Ichabod. “Not a damn thing and whatever is left is going to be rotten and destroyed by the elements. It does not take long.”

Whenever Red gets offered temporary housing now he refuses to go.

“I’m OK,” he said. “I don’t want to go for 10 days and be stuck again.”

Since Charest has started sharing stories on the Village Facebook page, there has been more community acceptance for the local homeless community.

“It’s noticeable,” said Ichabod. “But it’s not by any means where it should be. From my point of view, I’m a person. The only real difference is that your walls are harder than mine.”

He said just like anyone else living around here he cooks food, eats meals, does chores, cleans his dishes and tries to keep his area tidy.

“Well, maybe not as tidy as it should be all the time but I know some bachelors who have what they call houses and my stuff is in better shape than theirs,” he said. “I do everything they do regularly. I’m no different than them so I don’t think there should be any stigma but that’s a dream world and this, of course, is the real world.”

Ichabod said if he knew how to fix the homeless “problem” he would not be where he is in life.

“That’s the biggest problem, a lot of us don’t know how the hell we ended up like this, let alone which way to go to get out, so screw that, sit down, start a fire, you are going to be there for a while,” he said.

Red said after living outside for a while people adapt to it.

“You get used to the weather a bit more and when you go inside it’s like you feel almost claustrophobic,” he said.

After he thought about it he said some people don’t adapt well and can’t catch onto what they need to do to survive. There is at least one member of the homeless community who Red and Ichabod are worried about because they don’t think he will be prepared for winter. They check in on him and give whatever advice they can but they are worried.

“But he doesn’t have a choice,” said Red.

Ichabod said mental health issues are the primary reason people are ending up homeless.

“One of the best things I have ever heard, it’s an idea I had never been able to put into words, ‘you can have a mental health issue and not have an addiction but you can’t have an addiction without having a mental health issue’ because there has to be something which is driving a person to want to alter their perception of the world around them,” he said. “There’s got to be something and chances are they don’t know what it is but there has to be something that makes them not like experiencing the world without some sort of buffer.”

In his experience, people with addictions aren’t using drugs for fun, because they are lazy or for pleasure.

“It’s not like that,” he said. “Most of the time it shuts off some sort of pain or something that is bothering you for a while. It’s not about seeking pleasure, it’s about seeking relief.”

Everyone around the table agreed that the conversa-

tion around homelessness needs to be a conversation about providing mental health supports in the community.

“In my experience, I have yet to meet a single person who is homeless without some sort of underlying mental health or addiction (problem),” said Ichabod. “You don’t just wind up there because you are an asshole. Assholes have houses all the time.”

Red laughed out loud, “sometimes they do.”

Charest sometimes hears the argument that homeless people are being invited to this area.

“We’re not inviting homeless people here,” she said. “Just because you say it out loud it doesn’t mean you are walking with your sandwich board saying – ‘hey all homeless people.’”

“I can’t stand having to walk on eggshells around people. I’ll go out to the forest. Set me up there. I’ll be comfortable. I’ll have my entertainment. Nobody will bother me and I don’t have to kiss anybody’s ass.”

– ‘Ichabod’

“They were already here, you just can’t ignore it anymore and now you are angry about it,” said Ichabod. “We just want to be able to go to the places that everybody else can go to without being looked at like you are a piece of scum and I choose those words very carefully because I was referred to as a piece of scum.”

Charest asked where this happened because she wanted to go into the store and give the person who said it a piece of her mind. She is very protective of the vulnerable population in Listowel.

“We’ve learned this,” said Monica. “That is why we tell her the story but we won’t tell her where it happened.”

Ichabod said usually he can dismiss comments but that time it stung.

“She didn’t know I heard it,” he said. “So that’s how she feels.”

“It’s not something she said just as an attack just to hurt me in an argument because people will do that, they’ll say things intentionally to hurt and for some reason that doesn’t bother me at all but she feels that way and she has never met me or spoken to me... they think I’m scum. Why? I don’t get it.”

LOCAL NEWS

North Perth, North Huron Family Health Teams plan to amalgamate

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LISTOWEL-WINGHAM – The boards of North Perth and North Huron Family Health Teams have unanimously agreed to proceed with an amalgamation to join the two teams. The decision was preceded with a full review by legal counsels to ensure there were no impediments to integrating the two teams.

“It is a natural fit for the two teams to join,” said Karri-Ann Cameron, chair of the North Huron Family Health Team. “These teams have been working very closely together for over 10 years to ensure our communities receive the best possible care.”

“For almost two years, the teams have had a shared leadership model which has demonstrated the value of streamlining our operations while focusing on strengthening our clinical

capacity to deliver strong programs and services to benefit our shared communities,” said Rob Martin, acting chair of the North Perth Family Health Team. It is hoped the transition will be smooth and patients won’t notice much change in service. One thing which will change will be the name of the amalgamated clinics.

“We want to recognize the two teams coming together and becoming one organization so we won’t be able to maintain the two separate names,” said Mary Atkinson, executive director for the two family health teams. “It’s just part and parcel of an amalgamation and we also want to recognize part of our catchment area also includes South Bruce. So our Lucknow and Teeswater offices also draw patients from South Bruce. I don’t know what the name is going to be.”

The next step for the board is to form a subcommittee of both boards to work



Dan McNeen Photo

Alex Petter and the Culinary Fool Catering Company had the delicious eats covered for the Listowel Memorial Hospital Foundation's gala appreciation dinner, distributed to sponsors and donors via pickup drive-thru at the Elma Memorial Community Centre in Atwood on Oct. 30. The annual gala itself was cancelled due to pandemic restrictions, but that didn't stop the Foundation from recognizing over 200 of its biggest community supporters with a top-shelf meal. Over the first nine years of operating the gala, the LMH Foundation has raised over \$6 million for hospital upgrades and initiatives. Pictured is the Culinary Fool ensemble of Carrie Henhoeffer, Judy and Alex Petter and Toban Zaryski post-dinner prep.

through the final details. “We’ve done a lot of background work over the past 10 years to align our two organizations so this was just a natural evolution,” said Atkinson. She wanted to reinforce that it will be business as usual and sharing clinical expertise should increase access to services for the communities services by the clinics.

“As you can imagine we have patients who live in Listowel and see a doctor in Wingham and vice-versa,” said Atkinson. “As we know transportation can be a huge barrier to accessing care so this way, just even in that small example, patients will be able to see a clinician in the location where they live which will be a huge bonus. We have a fairly elderly population, we also have a significant Anabaptist population so

being able to give them some choice where they can see a clinician such as a dietician or a mental health counsellor is a real service to the community.” Since the board just passed the motion to amalgamate, they are now dealing with the small details such as creating a new budget and a new program and services plan for the Ministry of Health to approve. “So there will be machinations at the government

level to see this through but we feel very supported by the Ministry of Health,” she said. To support the integration process engagement sessions will be conducted with patients, staff and the community. “We’re hoping we will be able to start the new organization April 1, 2021. Our goal is to have our documents to the ministry by the end of December,” said Atkinson.

Homeless experience – Part IV

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“Help them to think a little differently so that you guys are the agents of change instead of being the recipients of decisions other people made.”

“Instead of the victims we are the survivors,” said Josey.

Charest told them this series of newspaper articles is an opportunity to be the educators and teach people about their situation. Residents of North Perth are starting to become aware of homeless people dealing with mental health issues publicly and it’s something that makes them uncomfortable. She hopes awareness will have some positive repercussions and there will be a rallying cry to help people before they end up on the street.

“So people are seeing something which makes them uncomfortable and when people are uncomfortable it motivates a change, not always a good one but it gets the conversation going,” she said.

Along with the discussion of warming centres, Charest asked if they would appreciate community meals and hot soup. “There are all kinds of them in Stratford,” said Red. “Every day you can get something.”

There are plans to offer meals in Listowel. Charest said COVID sidelined those plans but they are getting back on track now.

When asked how comfortable people are attending community meals, Josey said there is a variety of opinions because it depends on the person’s situation. She said some people may not attend community meals or use a warming centre because of their insecurities and hang-ups about their situation, whether it is being homeless or just going through a rough time and needing assistance.

“The first couple of times it’s nerve-racking,” said Ichabod. “After a while,

you get to see the same faces there. There is a camaraderie.”

Charest raised concerns some people may have and asked whether people have to use drugs to participate in things like that.

“If someone is struggling does using help them get through those things?” she asked.

“I know with some drugs that is one of the major hook factors that it... removes any inhibitions,” said Ichabod.

Charest repeated her point that she wanted members of the homeless community to take a leadership role. She has seen them get involved in It Takes A Village and they also want to be involved in the solutions to problems they face.

“You don’t want to just sit there and have someone dole out things and take pity,” she said.

“We want to be involved absolutely,” said Josey. “Even in a little way.”

“We just want to feel like we earned what we’re getting,” said Ichabod.

“We don’t want charity but we need charity,” said Josey. “We don’t want to feel like you feel sorry for us but we want to feel like you feel for us.”

The participants in the conversations documented in this series of articles are people who have ties to this community. They have families, friends, and children in North Perth they care about.

The question has been repeatedly raised by residents and by councillors during North Perth council meetings of where these people came from. The answer to that question is easy. They came from within this community.

How they got where they are today and what can be done to make sure the homeless community does not continue to grow? Those are much tougher questions to contend with.

Driver arrested at RIDE program

NORTH PERTH – An impaired driver had their licence was suspended for 90 days and their vehicle impounded for seven days after encountering a Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (R.I.D.E.) program in North Perth last week.

Just after 11 p.m. on Nov. 4, Perth County Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) officers were conducting a R.I.D.E. program on Line 87 in the Municipality of North Perth when a driver entered the checkpoint. During the course of the investigation, officers formed the opinion that the driver had consumed alcohol. A roadside screening device test was conducted which resulted in a fail.

The driver was arrested and brought to

a local OPP operations centre for further testing, where two samples of breath provided were more than double the legal limit.

As a result, Matthew Alexander, 34, of North Perth, has been charged with: Operation while impaired – Blood Alcohol Concentration (80 plus); driver fail to surrender licence; fail to surrender permit for motor vehicle; fail to surrender insurance card.

A 90-day Administrative Driver’s Licence Suspension (A.D.L.S.) and seven-day vehicle impoundment was initiated as per statute. The accused is scheduled to appear at the Ontario Court of Justice in Stratford at a later date to answer to the charges.



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The homeless experience in North Perth – encounters with the police

'Talk to me first. Ask me to leave. I will pack up and I will go. Please don't just jump to the cops. Please, please, please because I end up in cuffs every time.'

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This is the third installment in a series of articles allowing local homeless people to discuss their experiences in the community. For their protection, aliases are being used. This article discusses their experiences with policing in North Perth and contains language some readers may find offensive. In the final installment, sources will give some of their own suggestions and discuss initiatives being engaged to help them out.

As the population of North Perth grows, issues many residents associate with urban centres are starting to be noticed close to home. Homelessness is an issue which is not new to Listowel but until recently it was easier to overlook. It is now a visible aspect of the community, even if some of the homeless living here wish they could remain invisible.

Andrea Charest, executive director of It Takes A Village, the free store in the heart of Listowel, arranged a gathering of some of the people dealing with homelessness. Sitting around a large table in the back of the store, they enjoyed pizza and talked about their perspective of what is referred to as the "homelessness problem."

All of the people sitting at the table who are dealing with precarious housing and homelessness also had stories to tell about encounters with the law.

Josey grew up in Stratford but it's not a place she likes to return to. Even if she is living outside in North Perth she said it's better for her here.

"Stratford is *Bad News Bears* for me," she said. "Every time I go back I end



Colin Burrowes Photo

Harm reduction packages containing sterile drug paraphernalia are available in Listowel through Huron Perth Public Health, It Takes A Village and Pharmasave. Harm reduction strategies are effective in reducing the spread of diseases such as HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and other blood-borne infections and reduce the number of needles discarded in the community.

up back in jail. It's where my roots are. It's where my street life started. I've got all my connections there."

When she is in Stratford she ends up being around crime and drugs, and then she ends up back in jail.

"The last time I was there 19 days and I was back in jail," she said. "I had been out of charges for over a year, out of jail for over a year and I went back not even a month and I was back to jail."

Josey did not wake up one day with plans to be a criminal.

"One night I was this woman who went to bed and I had everything I ever wanted and needed and could dream for and the next morning I woke up and it was all gone," she said. "My ex-husband kicked me out of the house with my six-year-old son and we started living in hotels."

A friend took them in but eventually, she kicked them out, giving them only one day's notice.

"I was going to be homeless again with my son so I called my ex-husband and I begged him," she said.

"I said the Children's Aid Society is going to come and take him from me and I'm not going to be able to stop them so you need to come and you need to take him and save our son."

She told her ex-husband she did not care what happened to her but he needed to save their son.

"So he came and got him and I've been struggling ever since," she said.

It's been nine years since that night.

"I always said I could not live without my kids and this is just proof of that," said Josey. "I'm slowly, slowly just trying to snuff myself out I guess. Sometimes you go so far you don't know how to go back."

Josey doesn't know where the threshold is and she feels it's different for everyone but there is a point she has arrived at and now it's hard to go back to living inside.

Less than a year ago she had a place to live, a job and she had her kids back on weekends.

"I was doing great then I had to leave town to go to court," she said.

With the court decision that day, she ended up losing everything and was homeless again.

"I was just trying to do the right thing," she said. "Normally I'd jump court because I don't want my life to twist upside-down when I go. Every time I go to jail I come out and I have even less than when I went in and less than I had the last time so I get scared and I don't go... I feel like I'm damned if I do and I'm damned if I don't at this point."

Josey said she feels lost every day in North Perth. Charest asked if that works for her.

"It does and it doesn't," said Josey.

"She cries a lot," said Ichabod.

Just because she feels Stratford is bad news for her, it does not mean she hasn't had her share of run-ins with the police here.

"I've been arrested in this town almost more than I've been arrested in my home city and I lived in my home city for 31 years," she said. "I came here knowing I had nowhere to go but I left (Stratford) having nowhere to go. So no matter where I was, I was going to be homeless in a tent somewhere and I had people here, so I came."

When she first arrived she had her tent set up in an area they call the 'Frog Bog.' To get there you have to follow the Maitland River out of the northeast side of Listowel.

"It's back out of the way," said Ichabod. "People have to specifically come to find you there."

The police were called by a private citizen who was concerned because a homeless woman was staying out in the bush alone.

"I got arrested out of that," said Josey. "They came to help me but I left in the cruiser. So my thing is, if people are worried about us, talk to us."

She emphasized she does not mean that if they are seen wielding a knife or otherwise being a danger to people, that people should just walk up and talk with them. If that is the case she said people should "call the cops."

"But, if I don't see you unless you come to see me if I keep to myself and I keep up my area and I am just surviving, please don't call the cops on me," she said. "Talk to me first. Ask me to leave. I will pack up and I will go. Please don't just jump to the cops. Please, please, please because I end up in cuffs every time."

Red said there are a few police officers who, since Charest started sharing stories about the homeless community on the internet, have changed their attitudes somewhat. He has had incidents where they will do something nice for him such as offer him a Big Mac and fries re-

cently. "I never get this," said Ichabod. "I've got to get out and walk around more."

Red said that is not the way it always is or has been in the past. It used to be if he saw the police he started packing because he knew he was going to get kicked out of the spot he was living in or he was going to be arrested.

"A little bit has changed but if they can charge you they'll fricking do it," he said.

Just before Christmas last year Ichabod received what he referred to as 'a nice set of shiny bracelets' as a present from the police.

"It turns out I was on somebody's land who had a problem with it," he said. "I was literally on the furthest back corner of unused land. I had no idea it was their land."

He said he was woken up and when he came out there was a gun pointed at him.

"Shit got hairy," said Ichabod. "It was a bit of an uncomfortable moment."

"Treat us the same way you treat the guy in the three-piece suit. Just be fair, be impartial and don't come at us with prejudice... I still feel like there was very little reason to come out of my cabin with a gun pointed at me. I get uppity when people point guns at me. It's rather uncomfortable."

– *Ichabod*

Concerning this subject, Charest said she received a call from a woman last year who told her she has a reputation as the woman to call in these situations.

The woman said one of her neighbours was driving by on his tractor and he thought someone was camping in the corner of her property. The woman didn't want them there because of liability if they hurt themselves.

"She said, 'I don't want to tell them to leave because what if they come to my house and what if they come after me,'" said Charest.

All she could tell the woman to do was to make the best decision for herself.

"So you guys are on the receiving end of a service the municipality pays for which is policing," said Charest. "For that, give your feedback on ways they need to improve their policing concerning peo-

FEATURE

ple living in precarious situations."

"Just don't be dicks," said Ichabod. "It's a really simple concept. Treat us the same way you treat the guy in the three-piece suit. Just be fair, be impartial and don't come at us with prejudice... I still feel like there was very little reason to come out of my cabin with a gun pointed at me. I get uppity when people point guns at me. It's rather uncomfortable."

Charest said if people see someone they think is in a crisis they call the police because they don't have anyone else to call.

"A lot of them are scared of that kind of stuff, defending themselves, they are scared of what is going to happen," said Red.

"The police?" asked Charest.

"Yes," he said.

"So they get these calls, they respond to these calls, but they don't have the tools," said Charest.

"Respond to the calls like it is a distress call," said Josey. "Don't respond to it like it's..."

Ichabod cut her off mid-sentence.

"This isn't *Die Hard*," he said.

"Right," she said. "This is someone who needs your help... you are going to someone who needs to be helped, not someone that needs to be policed."

Charest asked if any of the people sitting at the table would feel comfortable sharing any experiences where the police came to them based on a mental health call.

"What I'm wanting to find out is if you have any first-hand experience of how they respond to a mental health crisis?" she asked.

"Handcuffs," said Ichabod.

"Always, clear across the board especially in small rural communities like this one," said Josey.

"Their agenda is safety first," said Red.

"Not even," Josey disagreed with Red.

"It's a big misconception – protect and serve," said Ichabod. "They are there to protect and serve the best interest of the governing body that's in power at the time."

Charest said she has received an email from a woman who has been hired by municipalities to survey about police services.

"What I want to understand is if you sat on the board to advise policing of what is needed for the community, what would be needed?" she asked.

Ichabod said he'd sit out this question because of biases he has developed through his experiences.

"I don't know," said Red.

"I'm nice to the guys out here and I'm telling you I haven't been beaten down by them in years. Honestly, after they stopped arresting me every couple of weeks I was nice, cracking jokes."

He said when he gets anxious he starts joking and it has helped him deal with police.

Continued on page 12



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Driver airlifted following collision east of Bluevale

HURON COUNTY – At approximately 11:30 a.m. last Friday, Oct. 30, Huron County OPP, Huron County Paramedic Services and North Huron Fire Department responded to a crash scene located at the intersection of Amberley Road (Huron County 86) and Brussels Line (Huron County 12) east of Bluevale.

The preliminary investigation indicated the driver of a compact car was attempting to cross Amberley Road on Brussels Line when their vehicle was struck by a sport utility vehicle that

was travelling eastbound on Amberley Road.

The driver of the car was airlifted to hospital with life-threatening injuries. One of the occupants from the sport utility vehicle was transported to a local hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

The intersection was closed for an extended period of time while police conducted their investigation.

Any person with information regarding this crash should immediately contact Huron OPP at 1-888-310-1122 or (519) 482-1677.



Contributed Photo
The VON Perth Huron office in Listowel was generously recognized by the local Dominos Pizza location on Nov. 2 for its continued dedication to clients in Listowel and the surrounding area. Pizzas were donated to ADP, nursing, administration, transportation/Meals on Wheels and Wellness for Seniors program staff. Pictured from left: Marie Downey (Dominos), Heather Padfield (PSW-ADP) and Jane Williams (PSW-ADP).

The homeless experience in North Perth: police encounters

Continued from page 10

“If I can get them laughing they can’t laugh at me,” he said. “I just put on the salesman, the salesman goes on, you know what I mean? I’m telling you since it’s like that there are so many times they haven’t even arrested me.”

“They arrest me every chance they get,” said Josey.

They started a frenzied discussion about a particular police officer who has retired from the North Perth Police detachment. They allege that officer was particularly bad for harassing community members of the homeless community.

Charest said she gets a little edgy and protective when she

sees names printed in the police briefs of the *Listowel Banner* or on the Wingham Free Press website. It stigmatizes people and affects their opportunities to change their lives.

“One of the things I think people have a misconception of is someone who uses meth is synonymous with someone who sells it,” she said. “From a policing perspective tell me about that. Do you feel that the police see that differently?”

“Most of them all see it as the same,” said Red.

“We’re all painted with the same brush,” said Josey.

According to Ichabod, most of

the people who “deal” in Listowel are not predators looking for kids to sell to.

“A lot of the time it’s just they happened to have a little extra money so they bought in bulk that time,” he said.

“They just help a couple of friends out,” said Red.

“It never goes outside the circle,” said Ichabod. “It gets dangerous anytime you try to go with someone you don’t already know.”

Charest changed the direction of the conversation, letting one of the people sitting at the table know she had sent an email to the Crown attorney on their behalf to support them while they deal

with a recent warrant issued for their arrest for missing a court date.

In the email, she told the Crown attorney about the work It Takes A Village does with folks who are navigating addiction, mental illness, precarious housing, profound poverty and food insecurity.

She encouraged the individual to turn themselves in at the North Perth OPP detachment and told them to advocate for themselves because of the psychological weight of time management, lack of transportation, mental health and substance use support when one is living homelessness.

“I have to believe these social determinates have to be considered when looking at the reason why someone may fail to appear,” she wrote in the email. “On this side of the fence, I see (them) on an almost daily basis and regard (them) as a (person) who reflects with remorse on (their) past but has great potential with the appropriate supports to forge a life (they) will be very proud of.”

She offered to appear in support of them as they move along through their most recent charges, and suggested It Takes A Village would be a good supportive environment for any court-ordered community service hours.

SUDOKU

PUZZLE NO. 793

	8			4				2
7					3			1
9						6	7	
2				6	9			
	6			2		3		5
	3		1			9		
								9
5	2			9				
				4				2

LEVEL: ADVANCED

HOW TO PLAY:

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 only once.

Each 3x3 box is outlined with a darker line. You already have a few numbers to get you started. Remember: you must not repeat the numbers 1 through 9 in the same line, column or 3x3 box.

ANSWER TO PUZZLE NO. 792

6	7	5	2	9	3	1	8	4
9	8	4	6	5	7	1	7	3
2	3	1	7	4	8	5	9	6
5	1	8	9	3	6	2	7	4
7	9	6	5	4	2	8	1	3
4	2	3	7	1	8	9	6	5
1	6	9	4	7	3	5	8	2
3	5	7	8	6	9	4	2	1
8	4	2	3	1	6	7	9	5

CROSSWORD

PUZZLE NO. 57

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13						14		
15			16							17		
			18						19			
20	21	22				23	24					
25						26						
27			28	29			30			31	32	33
			34				35			36		
	37	38								39		
40						41	42	43				
44						45				46	47	48
49						50				51		
52						53				54		

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ACROSS

- 1. Hooting bird
- 4. Forest-floor plant
- 8. Plays a role
- 12. Named before marriage
- 13. Scheme
- 14. Oxford or pump, e.g.
- 15. Timeless state
- 17. Covert suggestion
- 18. Aware of
- 19. Pounds
- 20. Microwave, e.g.
- 23. South American animals

- 25. Purpose
- 26. Brick house
- 27. Flawed
- 30. Blush
- 34. In the lead
- 36. “___ Got to Be Me”
- 37. Most unusual
- 39. Went in haste
- 40. Door hardware
- 41. Capture
- 44. Author Read
- 45. Aptly
- 49. Butterfly catchers
- 50. “___ the Night”
- 51. Potato bud
- 52. Small fly

- 53. Appear to be
- 54. Modern

DOWN

- 1. ___ of a kind (unique)
- 2. Not dry
- 3. Mr. Marvin
- 4. “Huckleberry ___”
- 5. Amend copy
- 6. Related again
- 7. No
- 8. Chagrined
- 9. Beijing’s site
- 10. Pincers
- 11. Establishes
- 16. Ely or Howard

ANSWER TO PUZZLE NO. 56

A	R	S	D	O	P	L	F					
L	R	E	W	E	R	I	O	I	A			
P	O	L	E	M	E	R	E	L	O	I		
S	N	E	K	C	I	C	H	E	T	O	H	
S	C	A	R	V	A							
S	B	B	S	E	T							
R	P	U	R	A	L	I	T					
R	E	S	T	E	R							
S	H	E	I	R	O	N						
D	E	S	O	S	E							
N	E	B	E									
S	O	G	R	E								
A	T	S	T	R								

CROSSWORD PUZZLE ANSWERS USE AMERICAN SPELLING

Look for the answers to this week’s puzzles in next week’s Listowel Banner

The homeless experience in North Perth – access to health supports

‘Just because we might be addicts it doesn’t mean we don’t have actual medical needs... I have extremely high blood pressure and I haven’t been on my meds since I got out of jail’

COLIN BURROWES

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This is the second in a series of articles allowing local homeless people to discuss their experiences in the community. For their protection, aliases are being used. This installment deals with their experiences with addiction, physical and mental health supports, and contains language that some readers may find offensive. Future articles will discuss their experiences with police and their own suggestions about what can be done to help them out.



Colin Burrowes Photos

As the leaves fall off the trees, Ichabod says it’s harder to keep a camp hidden along the banks of the Maitland River. That’s okay though, because he says it will soon be time to find a warmer campsite on higher ground. The cold air settles in the river valleys first. (Below) A look inside the tent Ichabod and Josey share.

As the population of North Perth grows, issues many residents associate with urban centres are starting to be noticed close to home. Homelessness is an issue which is not new to Listowel but until recently it was easier to overlook. It is now a visible aspect of the community, even if some of the homeless living here wish they could remain invisible.

Andrea Charest, executive director of It Takes A Village, the free store in the heart of Listowel, arranged a gathering of people dealing with homelessness. Sitting around a large table in the back of the store, they enjoyed pizza and talked about their perspective of what is referred to as the “homelessness problem.” The discussion turned to physical and mental health and where homeless people can go when they need support.

Red said he has been to the hospital many times. “I’ve got lots of injuries,” he said. “I’ve got a lot of different ailments. Every time I went in there it was just the ignorance – ah it’s

this guy – I always felt out of place.”

Ichabod avoids Listowel Memorial Hospital now.

“They’ll say you are a pill seeker,” he said. “That’s funny because I’ve never even done pills in my life.”

He said Palmerston and District Hospital is good.

Red, on the other hand, was prescribed painkillers for years for a bad back. He said he feels safer leaving Listowel to go to the hospital. His habit eventually became an addiction, but for over 10 years now he has been on a methadone program. Well, most of the time he is. He has been feeling extremely sick over the past two weeks because his methadone was cut off, and he said methadone is essentially just trading one addiction for another.

“I’m hurting,” he said. “It’s 12 days now. I’m over the hump anyway.”

Red is still getting his methadone through his doctor in Toronto.

“That’s another thing in town,” he said. “A heavy

waiting list for a family doctor.”

He described it as “a pain in the ass” to get methadone in Listowel. For years, he has had to go to Toronto once a month to leave urine samples, and if he missed his appointment, it would be counted as a dirty test.

“Most people coming off anything, opiates, heroin – a dirty test is positive for any type of drug, so if you are taking them and still taking the methadone you can be cut off,” he said.

Charest, playing devil’s advocate in the conversation, asked why they don’t just get some help?

“Throughout my life, I’ve experimented with many different ways to deal and I consider myself one of the lucky ones – I at least know what it is I’m trying to stifle,” said Ichabod.

“I’ve tried lots of different ways and this is what works. Unfortunately, that thing that works for me has been deemed unfit and dangerous by some other peo-

ple and it’s been arbitrarily banned and controlled. I find myself at odds with an established system and I don’t care, I’m going to do me.”

He said life is not a video game and there is no reset.

“It’s my life,” he said. “I’m the one who lives one time... I’m not going to spend any more of it unhappy and uncomfortable than I absolutely have to... You keep making your policies, keep spending your money on policing. They are going to throw me in a cage for a couple of days and say, ‘bad, do as you are told’, and I’m going to say, ‘suck it because I’m going to do me.’ I don’t go out and harm other people to do it. I’m not dangerous.”

That said, Ichabod agreed there are very valid reasons why drugs like methamphetamine and opioids are controlled substances.

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m not promoting this in any way, shape or form,” he said. “It’s not even something I call a last resort.

It’s ‘OK, I’ve found myself here now I’m going to make the best of this because it seems to do what I want.’ I can understand if I was out there profiting from people’s suffering, that’s a different thing. Spend your policing time on that.”

Ichabod said he’s not out there scaring your children. Instead, he goes out of his way to stay out of the way and not be noticed.

“I don’t understand why I’m a problem that needs to have time spent during a town council meeting to address,” he said.

But Red did mention several things about homelessness which are problems, such as certain members of the homeless community who may not know how to get prepared to survive the winter.

“That’s where there is the problem,” he said. “I feel guilty leaving someone out there who can’t make it. That holds you back a bit.”

“There is that,” said Ichabod. “I never thought of that. Now you made me feel like a dick.”

“I’ve been thinking of that,” said Red.

Both of them agreed some people will need help in the winter.

“In the spring thaw you are going to find someone,” said Red.

Charest pointed out that it’s not easy to find affordable housing in North Perth, and if you are homeless it’s even harder.

Josey, another member of Listowel’s homeless community who decided to join the discussion, said she didn’t start doing drugs until her kids were gone and her life was upside down.

“I realized you can get in a door with a little bit of dope in your pocket,” she said. “It’s a foot in the door every time. I realized this and I’m thinking ‘wow, I have a decent connection. My best friend on the planet is one of the biggest dope guys in Stratford’ – I’m going to use this avenue to my benefit.”

So, at first, she kept a little bit in her pocket so she could get a place to sleep but then she started using it.

“That’s where I am at now,” said Josey. “It stopped being a foot in the door and now it’s an addiction.”

On that note, Charest mentioned It Takes A Village has started stocking clean supplies in the gear program.

“So you can get stuff at the health unit, the pharmacy or here now,” she said.

“It’s just one more place to be able to give people access, no questions asked. I keep that stuff in my office just because some volunteers may not be comfortable to give that out.”

“That’s good to know, especially in a rural community,” said Josey. “I remember before you had the needle exchange at the health clinic. It was a real big problem.”

Charest asked Josey how she manages to feel feminine while living outside.

“All these things the me-

FEATURE

dia says a woman is supposed to be,” she said. “How do you embrace any little tiny bit of self-confidence when you are living like that?”

Josey said she may not be the best person to ask that question.

“Honestly, and this is probably one of the things that drive (Ichabod) crazy, I don’t give a flying fuck what somebody thinks about me,” she said. “I will bend down and pick up a cigarette butt if I need a cigarette. If you don’t like me or you have a problem with me, that’s your problem, not mine.”

But she still does her makeup and hair and she wants to look pretty and still wants Ichabod to think she’s pretty.

“But I don’t care if (anyone else) thinks I’m pretty,” said Josey. “No offence, but if I lived by what other people think, I’d be stressed out. I would never be happy with my existence if I was worried about what everyone else was thinking because it would consume me. Our image is all people see because they don’t want to get close enough to know us.”

The people sitting around the table admitted they have a reverse bias and they are very wary of letting people into their circle.

“That’s where I am at now,” said Josey. “It stopped being a foot in the door and now it’s an addiction.”

– ‘Josey’

“Very much so,” said Red. “It’s an ‘us and them’ thing,” agreed Ichabod.

“Not just that but I have a big thing with humans in general, like I don’t like to let too many humans close to me because every time I do that’s how I get hurt,” said Josey. “The fewer people in your life, the fewer people are around to hurt you. I know that’s not necessarily the healthy way to be but that’s my jaded way.”

Members of the homeless community feel there is a lack of access to mental health supports locally.

“Maybe they are there and maybe we just haven’t found them,” said Ichabod. “Maybe they just need to advertise them better.”

Charest said there are resources available in the community.

“We have the mental health association here in town... for counselling, you can pick up the phone (and) you can call a crisis line,” she said. “You can get some counselling over the phone. Choices for Change, you can connect with them and you can have counselling over the phone concerning addiction and some of those concerns.”

“All these things the me-



Continued on page 13

LOCAL NEWS

Huron Perth provides COVID tracing assistance to Peel Public Health

COLIN BURROWES

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HURON-PERTH – Across the region, there is now a total of 143 cases of COVID-19, one active case and no hospitalizations or outbreaks in long-term care

homes, schools or childcare centres. Due to the low number of cases locally, on Oct. 26 Huron Perth Public Health started assisting Peel Public Health with case and contact tracing. “We will continue to assist until our help is no longer needed,” said Dr. Miriam Klassen, Huron Perth medical officer of

health. “As I’ve said before, if cases are high anywhere in Ontario then there is a risk to Huron-Perth. Helping other public health units is a way to not only help our fellow Ontarians but also to protect ourselves.”

Previously, assistance was provided to Windsor-Essex earlier when there was a large cluster of cases in that region.

“The province has a provincial case and contact management tool we all use,” said Klassen. “We use it to refer cases and contacts to one another so our staff can remotely provide that assistance. So that’s one of the advantages of technology in this case.”

About half of the 12 staff members dedicated to case and contact tracing are assisting Peel Public Health at this time.

“If we have additional cases in Huron-Perth, we can add (more),” she said. “Be-

cause COVID response is a priority we have additional staff trained to do this work as well who could assist.”

At this time Klassen does not anticipate a surge in cases which would make it hard for Huron-Perth staff to meet the needs of the region but if it were to happen she said they would communicate that to both the province and Peel Public Health and tell them to look for other solutions.

“We have a lot of capacity because we trained so many of our staff as we were preparing for a second wave and while we were experiencing a second peak, I wouldn’t call it a second wave, but a second peak in the summer which was associated with the large cluster that spread from Windsor-Essex,” she said.

Klassen estimated there is now 60 staff trained to perform contact tracing if needed.

Discover More Flavour Farm Gate program to launch in spring

COLIN BURROWES

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NORTH PERTH – During the summer of 2020, the staff of the Perth County Economic Development and Tourism department applied for Tourism Industry Association of Ontario Regional Recovery Relief Funding to implement a variety of tourism projects across Perth County. The projects will encourage visitors and residents to safely support businesses across the region during the COVID-19 recovery. North Perth staff were informed and supported the funding application.

Funding was approved in August and a county-wide launch of a Farm Gate Signage program is one of the approved projects in the works.

North Perth council approved direction to staff to participate in the program agreement on Oct.

26.

The Discover More Flavour Farm Gate Signage program will build upon the current Perth County Farm Gate Map, with on-line delivery of the program and a re-printing of the physical map planned.

County staff are delivering the program on behalf of Perth County municipalities. To aid in the effective delivery of the program to participating businesses within its jurisdiction, North Perth will maintain ownership of the signs to deliver the program, and the County of Perth will maintain control of the Discover More Flavour program.

The signs will be stored, transported, and tracked by the County of Perth with support from the Municipality of North Perth.

“The proposal is that we would own the signs which would permit it to align with our current sign bylaw,” said Community Economic Devel-

oper Kimberley Kowch. “We’ve had lots of requests for the farm gate maps to expand.”

The number of signs North Perth will have may change over time, as new businesses join the Discover More Flavour program and existing businesses exit the program. Participation in the program is voluntary. The county will complete annual assessments of each participating business, and collect signage items from those who are no longer participating in the program.

“They are not doing a full launch and full promotion of this program until the spring,” said Kowch. “At that time they will be doing a lot of promotion on it. We’re hoping that if there are any additional businesses which are not captured online or on the map... we’ll be able to incorporate them for the reprinting as we do the more formalized launch in the spring.”

Homelessness: Health supports

Continued from page 12

Red said sometimes people just don’t know they should be looking for these supports.

“A lot of the time they say a crazy person doesn’t know they are crazy,” he said. “If they don’t know there is a problem why are they going to go get help.”

Charest asked if there are other reasons people aren’t accessing available resources.

“I didn’t know it was here but I’m not out looking for it either,” said Ichabod.

Josey pointed out some people do not access these resources because they don’t have phones or reliable access to the internet.

“Even when we do it’s usually Wi-Fi only,” she said. “There have been times when I don’t even come out of the bush for almost a month to get on the Wi-Fi to use my phone because I just couldn’t be bothered.”

Then Charest suggested walking into places such as the Listowel hospital to find out about supports.

“You want to walk into the Listowel hospital – are you nuts? No way, I will die first,” said Josey. “I have high blood pressure. I should be on medicine every single fricking day. I will not go back into that place. I’d have to be unconscious to go in there.”

When asked why, Josey said, “Because I smoke crystal meth and my teeth look like this.” She opened her mouth to show the damage drug use has caused to her teeth and gums.

“This has been a recurring theme for us,” said Ichabod.

“It’s awful,” said Josey. “They treat you like you are scum or less. It’s awful in there. I hate it. Don’t let them take your blood because they are going to test it for drugs and if you are on drugs you are not getting any help. They will send you on your way and tell you to come back when you are clean... It’s going to make me cry

just thinking about it.”

Charest said this discussion is important because it has been brought to her attention that the Listowel Wingham Hospitals Alliance is trying to find ways to make their facilities more welcoming.

“Don’t be so judgemental,” said Josey. “Just because we might be addicts it doesn’t mean we don’t have actual medical needs ... I have extremely high blood pressure and I haven’t been on my meds since I got out of jail. I worry about a stroke every single fucking day.”

Ichabod encouraged her to calm down.

“I will not go in that place,” she said.

With few exceptions, the experiences they recounted made them feel unwelcome if they needed medical treatment.

Charest said she has spent time sitting with people who use her phone to talk to a doctor so they don’t have to go into the hospital. She sits with them and supports them during the conversation. She asked if something could be set up allowing people to access resources without going into a hospital, would it make a difference? She suggested it could be done in a place where they are more comfortable like the Village.

“Yes, it would,” said Ichabod. “Just having that buffer of another person there as a support.”

“Having someone who you know supports you – they are on your side makes all the difference in the world,” said Josey. Charest offered to connect with the doctors on their behalf.

“I would be willing to go to bat for that,” she said.

Ichabod said that is not the first thing which would have sprung to his mind as a solution for one of the problems facing the homeless community, but he thinks it is probably one of the things which will do the most good.

“A simple fix to what is probably the biggest problem we have got,” said Josey. “Absolutely. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.”

Monkton Kinsmen donate \$20,000 for Confederation Park playground equipment

Contribution to fund one-fifth of total project cost

COLIN BURROWES

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NORTH PERTH – Council approved an agreement with the Monkton Kinsmen Club on Oct. 19, for a donation to help cover the cost of playground equipment at Confederation Park which has to be replaced for public health and safety reasons.

The Interim Manager of

Recreation, Amy Gangl, and the Facility Supervisor, Steve Wolfe, have been working with the Kinsmen on plans for the removal of the current equipment and a substantial donation towards the purchase and installation of new equipment for the playground.

The Kinsmen will provide a \$20,000 donation over the next five years towards the new equipment. The estimated total cost of the project is \$100,000 funded

by donation and reserves.

“I’m on the Elma-Logan recreation, arena and park committee,” said Coun. Allan Rothwell. “There is a lot of excitement to hear that the Kinsmen have stepped forward in a big way to support that community... and I’m sure there will be a lot of excitement in Monkton as this happens.”

Mayor Todd Kasenberg thanked the Kinsmen club for the generous contribution to their community.

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