HAND IN HAND

A home is a feeling

By Lorraine Briscoe, treasurer, Brome Missisquoi Youth Foundation

For a child who has experienced instability, having a bedroom all their own – a place for precious belongings and that they can decorate to their own taste – can make a world of difference. So can sharing meals around a dining table or having a safe, spacious yard with a pool, grass and trees for play. This is where the Brome Missisquoi Youth Foundation (BMYF), a registered charity, comes in. We create an environment that feels secure and cared for- because every child deserves that.

The BMYF owns and maintains three purpose-built homes in Cowansville that provide this for children under Youth Protection or referred by the community ages 6-12 and 13-18. These two-story Houses of Hope each have eight bedrooms and two bathrooms for the children, a living room, kitchen and dining area as well as office space for the staff. The children attend schools in the area until they either return to their families, are matched with foster families, or turn 18.

For 28 years the BMYF has been quietly paying the bills for home insurance, municipal taxes, and upkeep. Other organizations provide the trained staff and specialized services for the children. Our role is to provide the place in which these professionals can do their work and the children can feel at home. Like any family home, these houses require constant care; something always needs to be maintained, repaired, replaced or improved, and we promptly get it fixed. In the past year, we replaced all the windows in one of the homes and had another completely repainted on the inside. When one home sustained a flood two years ago, we paid for new French drains and the related repairs.

Our good working relationship with the professional head of each home allows us to exchange ideas about how to make the homes more functional and comfortable for both staff and children. In addition to home maintenance, BMYF provides a generous budget for children's activities such as summer excursions, driver's education and gym memberships. In other words, we gladly take care of things that communicate a simple message to the children: there are people who care about you. As Cindy Favreau, one of the house managers, explains "Behind every activity funded and every project supported is an opportunity for a young person to grow, learn, surpass themselves and dream."

There is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes to deliver this message. The foundation operates entirely through the on-going commitment of dedicated board members, volunteers and the generosity of donors who believe in giving these children a strong foundation for their future. To date over 1,200 children have passed through these homes.

Two longstanding fall fundraisers have become much-loved community traditions. The annual bridge luncheon, held at the Town of Brome Lake community center, is looked forward to by approximately 100 people. The November wreath fundraiser involves the gathering of volunteers who have fun decorating 200 holiday wreaths which are pre-sold to the community. Our lively annual gala dinner and auction in May is also a sellout, bringing together 100 guests to raise over $20,000. The BMYF rallies the community for the sake of the children. Simply put, these homes exist because a community has decided that these children matter. For more information about BMYF or our FUNdraisers please visit our website https://hopespoir.ca



COURTESY

Teamwork and a few laughs: BMYF volunteers pitch in to install slats for a new pool fence at one of the homes