

Lived Experience Advisory helps people living in poverty reclaim their voices

'We're not trying to change the world, we're just trying to improve lives, little by little'

Project Coordinator

When Barbara stood up as a guest speaker at a provincial All-Candidates' Meeting this past June, she told the audience:

"I have moved 25 times in one-and-a-half years. I have been caught in a vicious cycle of homelessness. I go to food banks. All my furniture is donated. I live on gift cards from the county. I'm outraged this could happen to others like me."

Barbara is in her 60s. When her husband of 42 years died, leaving her with no social supports, she was plunged into a cycle of homelessness.

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When Thereasa addressed staff at the Help and Legal Centre of Northumberland, she explained she lays awake at night worrying about when she can no longer juggle monthly bills.

"Will I be unable to feed my son and daughter when she's home on weekends? Will I be unable to afford transportation to my son's therapy? Will I lose my place? And with no shelter in Northumberland County, will I be on the street with my son in foster care?"

Thereasa, the mother of a 12-year-old son with autism and an 18-year-old daughter in her final year of college, suffers from grand mal seizures. Both kids are thriving.

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These are fragments of the complex stories that make up the lives of 10 individuals who participated in Green Wood Coalition's *Northumberland Lived Experience Advisory* (LEA) this past spring and summer. Funded by Trillium, it was designed to help people struggling with poverty to reclaim their voices by sharing their stories with those who can effect change.

The first phase of the LEA comprised 10 weekly, four-hour workshops teaching participants effective story-telling skills. Then, equipped as "experts of their own stories," they presented them to 10 different social service agencies, community and government organizations and non-profit groups.

"Our goal was to encourage people to share their stories, to walk in their truth, while feeling it's going to make a difference," says Green Wood Outreach Worker Nicole Whitmore who developed and coordinated the project. As a result, a strong consensus emerged as the pilot neared its end: **this work must continue; these voices must not go silent.**

GREEN WOOD'S WORK CAN INSPIRE OTHERS

Based on its experience with the Northumberland Lived Experience Advisory, Green Wood Coalition has published *We are our stories*, a manual for empowering individuals with lived experience to reclaim their voices as agents of change.

The manual offers a 10-week curriculum with activities and discussion points to help organizations start their own Lived Experience Advisory.

Green Wood, too, is paying it forward. The Northumberland Lived Experience Advisory was inspired by the work of others, such as Voices from the Street Toronto and a manual shared by the Roots/ Routes to Women's Empowerment and Leadership Program. Let's keep this good work going.

AN INTERVIEW

David Sheffield reflects on how Green Wood's new location can help to achieve its mission

How big a deal is moving to the new location at 4 Centennial Drive, Port Hope?

It is and it isn't. We didn't enter the year expecting we'd have to leave a space that's served us so well for the past three years, so getting used to the idea, finding a new location and making the move took emotional and physical energy. But now that it's done, we're all embracing the possibilities.

What are those possibilities?

That's what I've been giving a lot of thought to. The move isn't about developing a new direction or new vision; we're very solid about what we're doing and why. It really comes down to thinking about how this move will expand and improve on our existing work with fewer space limitations.

First, you can't escape the fact this is a house, a real home for us and the community, where we can welcome people in the true spirit of hospitality. From a physical perspective, there's a kitchen where we can prepare meals and sit and eat together, a fireplace and living

room to gather around and share our stories. Upstairs are smaller rooms for office space and workshops.

This space will support the transformational change Green Wood makes in the lives of our community. Whether that's individuals who need support or those who offer it, our core purpose is to counter social isolation with belonging. The 'why' is belonging. The 'why' is creating a space where everyone has a place to go. All of us want a place to belong.

For the full, unedited interview, please visit www.greenwoodcoalition.com

Transforming Lives

WrapAround teams empower and support individuals in change

Nine individuals dealing with a tsunami of complex needs: early trauma and its aftermath, drug and alcohol dependency, mental illness, homelessness.

Nine individuals supported using an approach that empowers them to design their own solutions.

NINE LIVES TRANSFORMED.

This is the impact of Green Wood Coalition's WrapAround program for its nine participants, thanks to funding from Northumberland United Way. Using an individualized approach, a Green Wood facilitator worked with each participant to assemble a team that "wrapped around" the person, helping them to problem solve and tackle issues as they led the way.

"I've worked where change is imposed and have not seen success," says Nancy Richardson, one of Green Wood's six trained facilitators. "But when people get to drive change

themselves with meaningful support, they know what they want to change. That's when change happens."

The numbers speak for themselves. At the program's end, 100 per cent of participants said they had greater awareness of their mental health issues and were better able to cope with them and other challenges. 100 per cent felt supported.

The human side also speaks for itself. A young, single mother of two who entered the program with no job and insecure housing has moved into a three-bedroom apartment, is employed in construction and looks forward to being sponsored as an apprentice by her employer who values her work.

"WrapAround empowers individuals through the support they feel to create change and resolve their problems," says Richardson. "I can't even describe how important that connection is."

"When a person who has been marginalized doesn't have to defend their place at the table – or their humanness – they're experiencing true hospitality."

David Sheffield

BELONGING

We have a lot on our minds as we send you this, our 2018 semi-annual report. It could be that the homeless situation, so visible this summer on the streets of Cobourg, has never felt worse. It could be that we're living in a political climate that is actively hurting our society's most vulnerable citizens.

As we prepared to move into our new home this summer, packing up the memories that define Green Wood, there have been moments of reflection. Emerging clearer than ever is the fact that the power of a diverse community like ours is inextricably tied to understanding the why behind everything we do. We eat together, create together, stand alongside one another in times of struggle, each one of us meeting our need for belonging.

This is what unites us. This is what makes our differences pale in the face of everything that makes us the same.

CHANGE! X12

When it comes to giving, many of us are stuck in a rut. We give at Christmas time, when we're rushed and over-extended by the holiday season.

But there's another way to help the charities you care about: Monthly Giving.

Monthly giving offers a steady and predictable source of funding to help small charities, like Green Wood, better plan programs and take on new projects without having to worry if enough money will come in to support the work.

Our campaign is called Change! X12 because Green Wood connects with the most

vulnerable members of our community on a deep level, making transformative change in their lives. Here's how it works:

- If you normally donate once or twice a year, take the same amount but split it over 12 months. You can choose to receive monthly or annual tax receipts.
- Monthly giving is strategic for you and streamlined for the charity. It helps you plan, once a year, how much you want to give to charities and not have to think about it again. For the charity, once set

up, monthly giving occurs automatically, saving on paperwork and administration.

- Nothing's carved in stone! You can change the amount or cancel monthly giving at any time.

If you'd like to talk about monthly giving, please contact:

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