



35 Years of Community HOPE - A Retrospective

Inspired by hope for a brighter future, for families and for community, 35 years ago Family Transition Place (FTP) was founded by a fiercely determined group of community members committed to creating a safe space for families in transition. From its roots on Hillside Drive, to the current location at 20 Bredin Parkway, over three plus decades, three themes have remained constant: the impact of violence on families, the incredible resilience of women and the importance of community. A community provides support, educates and empowers future generations to help break the cycle of violence, and working together, a community helps inspire hope for a brighter future.

As our community has grown, so too has FTP's capacity to care for families in a variety of ways. Former Board Chair Penny Dainard once observed, "The community went from people being sceptical about the need for a shelter," to supporting an agency that "is always evolving," and one which "serves the needs of our community in many areas." While Hillside Drive aided the primary purpose of housing women and children leaving family violence, today, in addition to shelter, FTP offers a range of counselling and support services in Orangeville, Bolton, and Shelburne. Programs exist for both women and men and an in-school program offers children a vision of what healthy families and communities look like.

Founding board member Lynda Lockyer described FTP's early years, including the process behind establishing the shelter. After sending out "surveys to area doctors, ministers, lawyers etc., to establish whether there was in fact a need for a women's shelter, we were blown away when the (it) was full in less than a week." Today, some might argue with FTP currently housing up to 24 women and children, progress has been slow. For the staff, volunteers and Board members however, many of whom have been a part of FTP for many of those 35 years, FTP instead proudly continues to shelter women and families while also supporting them with addictions or trauma counselling, individual and group counselling, rural response initiatives, transitional housing supports and so much more.

Additionally, it's reasonable to suggest FTP has had a broader and more hopeful impact on the community as a whole. For those who work or volunteer, being a part of FTP has, according to Lu Clark, "impacted how we raised our family and caused us to continually point out examples of violence and inequality in sports, life, and especially in the media." Others shared, "no part of my life has not been touched by this work," and that the work has both changed and enriched them. Some "got involved due to interest in engaging men to stop violence against women," supporting FTP's assertion that violence is

a community issue we all must work toward resolving. Said another community member, FTP's "positive attitude and commitment to the women, children, and men they work with can't be compared." These are inspiring and hopeful messages. They suggest FTP's 35 year commitment to promoting positive and healthy relationships has had a broad and powerful impact across the wider community not just amongst the families it serves.

Throughout the agency's evolution as a service provider, its values have consistently been "inclusive and progressive." Marianne Breadner shared that the agency "had a huge impact for women and children in our community [and] it also educated and enlightened medical professionals, police, and school staff in a big way." As a result, today, there is a much broader understanding not only of FTP's role but also the community's, in helping prevent violence against women and in addressing systemic underlying causes.

People we spoke with commented that current Executive Director (ED) Norah Kennedy, and her approach of recognizing the role men need to play in addressing the issue of domestic violence, has also been one of the most significant changes in recent years. Fundraising initiatives like the "10 Guys, 25 Ties" campaign are a reflection of this transition from family violence being a "women's issue" to one where we recognize men too must be advocates for change. Further, FTP's youth education programs—designed to teach kids what healthy relationships look like—have now reached over 50,000 students at 40 area schools representing another crucial step toward eliminating violence in the future.

Staff and volunteers shared that "women call us back and say thank you...one woman who called to say thanks is now a child protection worker and attributed much of her success to her time at FTP." Another had this to say: "besides having a safe environment to go to when needed, I think education about the issue of woman abuse and its impact on children was one of the most important things. Women learned they were not alone and they had choices. They were being heard. It did not take long for FTP to reach out to the community with educational events as well. We worked with other agencies and started to develop individual protocols, quickly realizing there had to be a community response. I feel FTP has always kept current—if not one step ahead—of the issues and changes impacting women and woman abuse."

It's clear from these comments, that the theme of community is consistent, highlighting how truly important a role we all play in supporting women and families in transition. Perhaps this might be considered the single biggest change in FTP's 35 year history. In contemplating the milestone anniversary, Norah Kennedy commented, "When I took on responsibility for heading up FTP I was very aware that I was assuming the legacy from women of strength and vision. During my tenure, we have worked as a team to build upon the foundation they laid, expanding services, evolving to meet the ever-changing needs of the people we serve. I wish I could say we will not see another major milestone anniversary, because we have done our work so well that we are no longer needed. Sadly, I suspect we will continue to be a community fixture for a long time to come." While this may prove true, it shouldn't take away from the significant progress made over these past 35 years, or from the feelings of HOPE that have inspired a true shift in the community's core beliefs about violence against women.

Founded by a small but mighty group of committed individuals, housed in a small home on Hillside Drive and now an important and central agency advocating for women and families, FTP continues to offer safe space for people leaving domestic violence. Today however, it's also a space for people learning about the prevention of violence against women, for counselling, education and so much more. People know FTP as cutting edge and collaborative. That the services have changed is undisputed, but the values central to the core of FTP? They haven't changed at all. FTP continues to provide safety, support, and hope, "building healthier communities – one relationship at a time."



This article was written by Sheralyn Roman and was adapted from the article: *35 Years of FTP*, which was included in the 2020 edition of FTP's *Celebrating Women* magazine. Sheralyn owns *Writing for You*, helping entrepreneurs succeed in business using words that work. She speaks regularly on the topic of communication and sits on several boards (including FTP's), volunteering primarily with youth-oriented non-profits.