

Investments will help victims of human trafficking get the support they need

By Brock Weir

A nearly \$4 million investment into will help victims of human trafficking access the services and supports they need to recover from York Region organizations.

On Friday, Jill Dunlop, Ontario's Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues, announced an infusion of \$3.8 million over the next five years to two Newmarket-based organizations: BridgeNorth and Cedar Centre.

Their community-based programs will help the organizations create two new programs to provide more young victims and survivors of human trafficking in York Region with access to the supports they need.

These new programs will help more people who have experienced sexual exploitation heal and rebuild their lives, said Minister Dunlop in a statement following the virtual announcement. Victims and survivors of human trafficking need specialized, trauma-informed supports to help them recover. Providing more dedicated services for children and youth will help address critical needs in this Region. With their share of the pot, BridgeNorth will provide a survivor-led peer mentoring and day program for children and youth, providing supports from early intervention through to stabilization, transition and reintegration.

Cedar Centre will provide trauma-specific, rapid-response therapy to help children and youth who have experienced sexual exploitation.

Our government has made it a priority to end human trafficking and protect our most vulnerable from this terrible crime, said Newmarket-Aurora MPP Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier of Ontario and Minister of Health. We are proud that this investment will create new critical programs in Newmarket to provide victims and survivors of human trafficking with the help they deserve and support their recovery.

Last week's announcement is part of Ontario's \$46 million investment to increase supports, with a special emphasis on survivor-led programming.

Voices of survivors and those with lived experiences are being heard, says Cassandra Diamond, Survivor and Founder of BridgeNorth. For years, we have been asking to have peer-led services, and today, because of our government's strong and wise leadership, it is a reality.

Added Alison Peck, Executive Director of Cedar Centre: We are very excited by this opportunity and humbled by the trust in us to work in partnership with the government to provide this critically-needed service for children and youth who are at risk of, or have experienced human trafficking in York Region.

More than 70 per cent of known human trafficking victims identified by police Ontario-wide are under the age of 25 and 28 per cent are under the age of 18, according to the Ministry.