

## **The Importance of Community and Unity**

Going shopping as a kid, I've experienced many situations where I've been told by my parents that I could only buy a single toy, meaning I had to choose between a new Barbie doll or a fancy new arts and crafts set. At the time, this felt like the toughest decision and I remember feeling so upset that I had to miss out on one amazing toy no matter the option I chose. Now that I've grown up, I imagine being in a parent's shoes and having to choose between paying rent or paying for other basic needs that adhere to their child's overall well being. This is a decision that no parent should ever have to make. Although overwhelmed with choosing between toys at a young age, I now realize it is not nearly comparable to the decisions some families have to make when it comes to the basic necessities. With one in ten children living under the poverty line and single parents spending most of their income on shelter, much more difficult decisions have to be made on sacrificing some basic needs over others even though all are equally as important. There are many local charities in Halton that serve the community and provide assistance to families in acquiring basic necessities, improving the quality of life for many. Some of these charities such as Home Suite Hope, Halton Food for Thought and Big Brothers Big Sisters do an incredible job of tackling income inequality and providing the families within our community the ability to access various resources to fulfill basic needs, furthermore contributing to the overall well being of the community.

A huge expense that takes up a large portion of family income is rent and housing payments. However, aside from shelter and housing, there are several other local needs that urgently need to be addressed. Home Suite Hope is a charity dedicated towards finding home accommodation for families in order to alleviate some of the burden that housing and other

expenses put forth. Furthermore, the charity aims to lessen the financial strain from housing expenses that prevent families from obtaining the basic necessities they deserve (Fight For Hope, 2020). I can imagine, as a parent, one of the most important things must be to raise your children in a nourishing environment where they can be provided with more than just the basic necessities. However, the frustration of not being able to afford all the basic needs of your children is not something that any parent should experience. With help from Home Suite Hope and its partners, parents don't have to sacrifice any of their children's needs as they are able to spend their income on various necessities for their children such as nutritious foods and clothing, rather than just rent or housing. Home Suite Hope's remarkable contributions to the community are shown through the profound impacts they've made on Halton families. As stated by a participant involved in the charity program, the charity; Home Suite Hope has "given me hope to believe for a better future for my children and myself" (Fight For Hope, 2020).

Having a shelter and a safe space to sleep is undoubtedly crucial and important to everybody. However, when parents with limited income are spending a majority of money on shelter they are sometimes unable to provide their kids with other necessities such as healthy food options. Although parents may still be able to provide their kids with food, it may not always be enough or as nutritious. As children are growing up, it is very important that they are able to receive enough nutrients to be healthy and well nourished. Furthermore, having nutritious meals to fuel kids' bodies especially during school hours will help kids in reaching their academic goals and overall having enough energy to learn and play. Notably, 6.8% of Halton households are facing food insecurity, leaving detrimental effects on children's health (Halton Poverty Roundtable, 2018). In response, Halton Food for Thought is a charity dedicated

towards feeding students healthy meals to ensure that each student has an equal opportunity at academic success (Halton Food for Thought, 2022). From personal experience, I know that learning on an empty stomach is nearly impossible. Children especially, require lots of food and energy to be capable of developing the ability to focus, think creatively and achieve academic success. Rather than focusing on having an empty stomach, they should be able to focus on their learning, an important factor in the development of adolescents.

Children's early developmental stages of life are a crucial time that helps build stability and confidence that will serve them in the future, however living in poverty and facing adversities such as poverty can take a toll on their mental health as well as the potential and ambition of these kids in pursuing future aspirations. Not only is it important for kids' bodies to be well nourished, but their minds and mental health deserve an equal amount of attention. With financial boundaries and parents that are busy working to pay living expenses, children may lack those strong and essential relationships with their parent(s) that are immensely important to their overall well being. Big Brothers Big Sisters is yet another incredible charity that aids children in creating impactful relationships and helps kids obtain a bit of additional support from mentors (Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2020). In households facing financial hardship, parents are often super busy working long hours just to be able to afford the basic needs, and therefore are unable to spend as much time bonding with their children. Therefore, having these relationships with mentors provided by the charity programs, it will help children in receiving the support and care from surrounding role models that will help them flourish and succeed as they grow up into happier, healthier individuals that can contribute to their community.

Overall the three charities and various others in Halton are immensely important for the families in Halton and in general, the community as a whole. By working to provide every child and their family with basic needs such as housing accommodation, food or mental health resources, the overall well being of everyone is improved. With the help of these charities and hundreds of volunteers, the community has been brought together to help better the lives of Halton families and their children. After all, children of this generation are the future of our world and their well-being, whether physical or mental, is essential to their future and future generations. Whether impacted by poverty, illness, or other hardships, it is important we come together as a community to help one another because as Helen Keller once said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much" (Say, 2021).

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