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## Hope House Hospice on hunt for new home

By Brock Weir

After more than 35 years serving clients in Aurora, King and Richmond Hill – and after more than five years in Aurora – Hope House Community Hospice is on the hunt for a new home.

Last year, Hope House, which serves clients with life-threatening diagnoses, their caregivers, and those who are bereaved, supported more than 600 clients. It's a sign that people are taking advantage of their services more and more and while some might consider that a success, it brings with it its own challenges.

Simply stated, they need more room to serve the individual than what is currently offered in the Industrial Parkway South building they share with Big Brothers Big Sisters of York, the Aurora Food Pantry and the York Region Food Network.

"When we moved here about five years ago, we had about three staff, probably all part-time at that point," explains Heidi Bonner, Executive Director of Hope House. "Now, there are seven of us so, from an office perspective, and space-wise, we have been really jam packed. In the beginning, our program was our volunteer in-home visiting program. In the years since, we have developed some wellness initiatives and the



Heidi Bonner, Executive Director of Hope House Hospice, is pictured above at their Aurora office in 2017 when they rebranded from Hospice King-Aurora. Now, they are on the hunt for a new home. Auroran photo by Brock Weir

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wellness programs are available to people who are diagnosed with an illness."

These wellness programs, she says, have grown significantly since its inception because they serve all three groups of clients – the people diagnosed with the illness, their caregivers, and the bereaved.

She estimates that nearly 95 per cent of the wellness programs serve clients in each of those three categories.

They aim to build capacity in these programs because they are group programs and "bring the maximum bang for your buck." They involve one facilitator and each facilitator can provide support for up to 10 people, supporting more individuals with less.

"Having private space for our clients and staff to meet is a bit of a challenge," says Ms. Bonner. "We don't have very many spots for that and those private spaces are a big piece. The current building is set up so that there may be a large amount of square footage, but the space can only be used for one program because there is no ceiling, sort of a studio area, so even though there are big spaces, only one program can happen at a time because of privacy – and the sound travels beautifully.

"A new space would give us the ability to offer more programs simultaneously and easier, and would also give staff more space to meet with clients and small groups to meet as well."

Both government support and increased awareness throughout the community are key factors in Hope House's growth. Community support demonstrated through fundraising endeavours have enabled them to put more programs into place, offering a menu with greater diversity for the community and, along with that, increased government support has enabled them to bring on more staff.

"With our wellness program, we're able to serve many people and we are fortunate that because of our

community and the way they support us, we're able to offer a great variety of programs for different needs and we're able to develop programs when the need arises. [Fundraisers like our Jitterbug Ball] have given us the opportunity to really support our community as best we can."

So, what exactly is Hope House Community Hospice looking for in a new home? It depends on what's available. They are asking community landowners if they might have a property available that would suit their needs, a property that could be leased "to gold star tenants on very good terms."

"We can turn your unused space into a heart of a community," says Leslie Hobson, Chair of the Hope House Home Hunt, in her pitch. "We are a registered charity with a stellar reputation. Do you have space to share in an existing facility for a wonderful entity that provides so much? Or a creative idea for another way for us to find a space solution? Let's talk."

"I've learned new skills, new understanding," said client Don, who has participated in Hope House's Picking Up the Pieces program and wellness services. "My family has benefited in so many positive ways as a distinct result from these new skills and learnings."

Adds Lisa, a parent of a participant of Hope House's Children's Bereavement Program, "My son and other children who had been born in the same position as he, or experienced a greater loss than he did...I feel it has made him more aware of others' feelings and what they have overcome. I think he is looking for answers himself on how to deal with things."

For more information on the Hope House Home Hunt, contact Leslie Hobson at [lesliehobson@sympatico.ca](mailto:lesliehobson@sympatico.ca). For more information on Hope House itself, visit [www.hopehouse.com](http://www.hopehouse.com) or call 905-727-6815.

