

# **Creature comfort donations can make all the difference**

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Fifty bars of soap, 22 tubes of toothpaste, nine tubs of body lotion and 15 baby wash cloths: these are just a few of the nearly 350 goods-in-kind collected by WomenAide in support of Etobicoke's Ernestine's Women's Shelter last week.

They may sound like simple, necessities of life for some, but for a woman fleeing a life of violence, such 'creature comforts' oftentimes make all the difference, WomenAide founder Tracey Cairns said at a low-key collection event held at her Humber Valley home last Thursday evening, March 12.

"Women who seek refuge at abuse shelters like Ernestine's are fleeing domestic violence, sometimes in a panic. They often arrive with nothing, so things like a new toothbrush, toothpaste, a bar of soap and a bottle of shampoo can come in handy," she said.

And given the current state of recession, such donations are appreciated now more than ever, said Ernestine's fundraiser Sayurie Naidoo. The 14-room shelter is currently housing 15 women and 16 children, as well as offering continued support to families who have taken the next step into housing, so every little bit helps, she said.

"This kind of support is especially important at the moment because of the economy; we're always in need of goods-in-kind because often these women will leave their homes with just the clothes on their backs. And even when they leave the shelter, many come back to make use of our food bank," she said.

"So, a lot of that help comes from the community - through community groups, churches and schools, who come together to collect products, food and clothing for us."

Cairns, who has held such collection drives four times a year since founding WomenAide in 2006, said she was drawn to the cause by her empathy for women in such situations.

"It was always something I wanted to do. I've got a real soft spot for women suppressed verbally and physically by their husbands," said the married mother of two. "My goal is to support and to reward these women for choosing freedom."

In trying to set a good example for her three-year-old daughter and five-year-old son - to 'be the change' she wants to see in the world - Cairns has inspired her friends and neighbours with her contagiously generous attitude.

"I'm just glad to be a part of it," said event co-host Julia Meffe. "So many times we'll gather for a Pampered Chef party, but this way we save money and support a good cause. With these times the way they are now, that's especially important. Anyone can check their pantry for a spare box of Kleenex or tube of toothpaste; you don't need to spend \$100."

"I was immediately impressed with what she was doing," added Rosemary Stiglic. "I've always wanted to help out a women's shelter - it takes a lot of courage for women to leave that kind of situation - so if there's any way I can help, I'm happy to do it."

For more information, go to [www.womenaide.com](http://www.womenaide.com)

