

## Yellow Brick House, Enercare partner to help brighten kids' lives



**By Brock Weir**

More than ten kids were inside Yellow Brick House, perhaps peeking through the curtains, as the adults did their thing outside. They could see the progress unfold, waiting impatiently for their chance to give it a whirl.

But one little straggler was a bit late coming back to the shelter from school on Thursday afternoon and, as he rounded the corner into Yellow Brick House's backyard, he paused as his eyes widened.

His verdict? "This is so cool!"

If they had been in earshot, it would have further warmed the hearts of the nearly 20 volunteers who came together during the school day to build an expansive new playground from the ground-up.

The new playground was constructed in partnership with The Fresh Start program, Enercare's program of corporate giving, which puts together kits for women and children leaving shelters like Yellow Brick House to start their new lives afresh.

Thursday's build, however, was something new and something big for the program, and it was a challenge they were all too happy to meet.

The results were inaugurated by a host of dignitaries including MPP Michael Parsa, Councillors Wendy Gaertner and Rachel Gilliland, and Yellow Brick House Executive Director Lorris Herenda, keeping speeches to a minimum so as to not prolong the excitement for the kids inside.

Here at Yellow Brick House, we provide life-saving

service and prevention programs to individuals, families and communities that have been impacted by violence," said Ms. Herrenda. "Specifically, here at the shelter, we provide a safe haven for women and children to escape violent and abusive homes. When they come to our shelter, they are basically coming with the clothes on their back and they come here and they are scared. They are uncertain about the future. They are worried about their children, worried about what tomorrow is going to bring. They come to the shelter really unprepared for what the shelter? They are starting from Ground Zero. You can only imagine the amount of courage it takes for a family to leave their home and come to an unknown situation.

"But it doesn't take very long that they are here and the women and children are amazed at the amount of care they receive not only from staff but also from the community. The Fresh Start program that we have been in partnership with since 2016, has assisted over 75 families with the Fresh Start kit since its inception. These women and children feel empowered. They finally feel that somebody cares for them, supports them, and they actually start planning a vision to live a life that is free of violence. Once again today, Enercare showed to the women and children how much they matter, how much you care, to make this shelter a safe place and a fun place for the kids by building this playground. We are just extremely proud of.

"This is going to make over 100 children a year happy at this shelter because that is how many children come to us every single year at this location."

At the time of Thursday's build, thirteen kids were calling the shelter home, sharing 25 beds and seven cribs with fellow residents.

"This is about giving people who are transitioning from temporary housing or temporary circumstance into a regular or more permanent situation, provided with the necessities," said John Rebick of Enercare. "This is a perfect offshoot of this. Yellow Brick House is our inaugural charity partner. They had a requirement for a new playground and it seemed like a perfect fit for what we're trying to do? in providing a better and safer space for the kids who are in this shelter.

"For me personally and for the volunteers and organization, it is about giving back to the people in difficult situations and provide them with things that will make their circumstances that much better, really step back to see how fortunate you are in your own life to be able to help those who might be going through a more difficult time to be able to pull themselves out, empower them and be able to right what is going on in their lives.

"I couldn't be more excited and honoured speaking here today. The Fresh Start program is our signature corporate responsibility program allowing us to give back to the communities we live and work in, and the Fresh Start kits are kits of necessities and some luxuries, clothing,

bedding and kitchen utensils that allow people who are transitioning from shelters and transitional homes into homes of their own.

?Today is even more exciting because this really is unique. It is a whole new fresh start. Take away an old playground structure and put in this beautiful new structure. Here, we had our ambassadors here, our Women in Leadership, to help put this together so that this can be a fun, safe place for children who are escaping violence and we couldn't be more honoured to support this? and to allow your funds to help more women and children in need and allow this to be a better space. Thank you for allowing us to help.?