

# Red Cross goes where needed most

HEATHER DESVEAUX

✉ hdesveaux@gmail.com

When responding to a house fire in the Annapolis Valley, volunteer emergency teams from the Red Cross mobilize to the scene with essential items like food, water, blankets, hygiene kits and trauma teddy bears for children.

"The teddies are a great way to provide comfort for them. The fire department is there to respond to the event. We're there to respond to the people," said Laura McNamara, the emergency management co-ordinator for the western region, which covers between Annapolis Royal and the Windsor area from the Red Cross Service Centre in Kentville, one of eight centres across the province.

March is Red Cross Month, a time to recognize the work the organization does to extend compassion to those who are the most vulnerable following a disastrous event, such as a house fire, flood or when other extreme weather events leave them without shelter.

The Red Cross hospital bed program and the health equipment loans program (HELP) also provide beds and medical aids for free to people dealing with illness or injury, in order to help them stay in their home or be mobile. With a medical referral, clients can access a number of walking aids to help, from canes to walkers. Other equipment that can be borrowed for three months includes wheelchairs, bath seats and benches, commodes and toilet seats, crutches, bed handles and more. It also provides personal flotation devices for swimming and boating activities.

The Red Cross also needs help in the form of people's time and donations. "Some days, we're flat out," said Rhonda Milne, the



Laura McNamara holds up one of the trauma teddy bears the Red Cross organization gives to young children involved in emergency events. McNamara is the emergency management co-ordinator at the Red Cross Service Centre in Kentville, covering the western region from Annapolis Royal to the Windsor area.

Heather Desveaux

Kentville Service Centre's co-ordinator. On average for the HELP program, they have about 190 pieces of equipment going out per month and almost 400 transactions with that equipment as it's being returned.

Volunteers are needed to work at the reception desk, manage, clean and repair the equipment at the centre Monday to Friday. Volunteers to co-ordinate HELP contribute more than 300 hours each month and some will soon

be marking five-, 10- and 20-year milestones. The oldest is Una Hatt, who, at 87 years old, still helps with the front desk when she can.

"Training support is not only available, but it's also mandatory so the organization can ensure the highest safety standards," said Milne. "But otherwise, we have no other expectations other than an ability to help."

Milne said certain times of the year are busier than others, such

as slips and falls on ice increasing the need for walkers during the winter. There also tends to be more house fires caused by heating sources. The organization recorded 31 house fires where five volunteer teams assisted 82 people in the Valley region from April 1, 2018, to Feb. 28, 2019.

The Kentville Service Centre also values the great partnerships they have with others in the community to extend what they can provide beyond temporary provi-

sions and shelter, said McNamara. Value Village in New Minas provides credit to Red Cross clients for clothing, household goods and housewares at a value of \$900 that is valid for one month following the event that's impacted them, which is often around the time people are ready to set up their new home. "But in order to get that, they have to be our clients first," stressed McNamara.

The Red Cross is mandated to help only within the first 72 hours of a disaster, so she said it is critical they are called — usually by the fire station or the RCMP, but can be called by anyone — right away in order to deploy the additional help and resources people need, which also includes getting needed prescriptions filled and acting as a referral for other agencies. The Kentville Service Centre is also the first in the province to offer ComFurt Kits for displaced cats and dogs, which include their necessities such as food, litter, leads, toys and a blanket.

McNamara said they are also exploring partnerships with local search and rescue teams.

"It's a good fit because, with their training and what they're prepared for, they're already in the mindset of response. We see them as the right people for the right job," said McNamara.

"Whether people are donating their time or money, it always goes where the greatest need is."

The Red Cross 24-hour emergency response line is toll-free at 1-800-222-9597. HELP equipment requires a medical referral to be sent to the centre. For more information and assistance, contact the centre at 902-678-0415. Hospital bed delivery needs to be co-ordinated through Continuing Care at 1-800-225-7225.