

International Women's Day: Voices of Strength

With Insights from Tracy Whitby, Executive Director

"While not all of the survivors we serve are women, the majority are," shares Tracy Whitby, Executive Director at Agape House. "International Women's Day is a powerful opportunity to shine a spotlight on the strength and resilience of women in our community. Every day, we witness stories of courage, determination, and success. IWD provides the perfect platform to highlight those stories—to celebrate not only survival, but growth, healing, and empowerment."

Women and families often enter shelter at one of the most difficult moments in their lives. "They have uprooted everything familiar to them and stepped into a new, shared, and unfamiliar space in order to be safe. That transition alone requires tremendous courage," says Tracy. Each day, women work alongside the shelter team to rebuild their lives—"setting goals, prioritizing next steps, navigating medical, legal, and housing systems, and often starting over; all while caring for their children and managing the many responsibilities of daily life."

Over time, transformation unfolds. "We see confidence grow. We see belief take root; belief that they can do this, and that they and their families deserve safety and stability. Watching that strength unfold is truly why we do this work," Tracy adds.

Recognizing International Women's Day also helps raise awareness about gender-based violence in the community. "For Agape House and our community, International Women's Day is closely connected to our largest annual fundraiser—the Purple Gala. This event brings together community members who want to see positive change. It creates space to share stories, successes, and challenges, and to work collectively to reduce the shame and stigma surrounding gender-based violence," explains Tracy.

"The Purple Gala is both meaningful and celebratory. It allows us to speak about work that is often confidential in nature, engage openly with our community, and build momentum for change, while also coming together in hope and solidarity," she continues. This year's event will take place at the Niverville Heritage Centre on March 7th.

Providing safe shelter, food, and clothing is only the beginning. "We offer comprehensive, wraparound supports throughout each stay. Our counsellors meet regularly with survivors to provide emotional support, advocacy, and guidance as they navigate complex legal, medical, financial, and housing systems," says Tracy. Weekly Domestic Violence Awareness groups help ensure individuals leave with increased knowledge about red flags, healthy relationships, boundaries, and personal empowerment.

Even after leaving the shelter, support continues. "Safe housing is often a primary goal, and once that stability is achieved, our support does not end. We continue to walk alongside individuals after they transition out of shelter to help ensure a positive and sustainable move into independent living."

Without sharing details, Tracy reflects on the remarkable strengths she sees in the women who come through the doors of Agape House: “Resilience. Bravery. Creativity. Flexibility. Determination. Even in moments of uncertainty and fear, women demonstrate remarkable strength. They problem-solve. They advocate for their children. They adapt. And they continue moving forward, often despite overwhelming circumstances.”

She leaves a message of hope for women in the community this International Women’s Day: “When women rise, communities grow stronger. Together, we can continue building a community where safety and respect are the standard, not the exception.”