

by ERAINA HOOYER/Ponoka News
Morgan Robinson, left, and Kirsten Jones are two of the people that slept outside with only cardboard as shelter to raise money for the Champion's Centre.



PONOKA NEWS

Sleep Out brings help to homeless

By Eraina Hooyer - Ponoka News

Published: October 08, 2008 10:00 AM

Updated: October 08, 2008 10:48 AM

Old cardboard boxes recently filled a downtown parking lot for the purpose of raising money for a good cause.

The Champion's Centre hosted its first annual Sleep Out Challenge in Ponoka in efforts to collect funds for the Champion's Centre.

Those who participated in the event slept outside under their simple constructed cardboard shelters to experience the feeling of homelessness and support the Champion's Centre.

Approximately 40 people took part in the event and raised about \$5,000, exceeding their goal of \$4,000.

Cardboard constructions took up the Bowker Funeral Home parking lot right next to St. Mary's Anglican Church and the event went from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.

Kirsten Jones was one of the many that spent the night under a thin piece of cardboard and was excited to be a part of the event.

"It's good to raise awareness about homelessness and that there are people that need a place to live," said Jones. "I've seen homelessness firsthand in Vancouver and it's great to be able to raise awareness of it right in Ponoka."

Morgan Robinson also braved the cold and believes that the event was a positive experience.

"It's a really great cause," said Robinson. "It's important to draw attention to the issue of homelessness and hopefully by doing this in Ponoka we can encourage others people to get involved in similar things in their own community."

Each person that participated was given a piece of paper with a situation on it regarding homelessness such as spousal abuse, drug addictions, money and job problems, etc. There were about 30 different possible situations designed to increase knowledge of some of the causes of homelessness.

A speaker was also brought in at the beginning of the event. Rick Chapman, from Inner City Pastoral Mission in Edmonton, spoke to the group on homelessness and kicked off the evening.

Jeff Hangar, chair of the Champion's Centre Local Advisory Board and organizer of the event, was pleased with the turnout and believes that it is an important event to be involved in.

"It's connecting people for just one night with being homeless," said Hangar, "It's not so much the sleeping part that is the problem, but the waking up."

Hangar was also the one who came up with the idea to do the Sleep Out and says that once he had the idea, things began to fall into place.

"I thought, how can I get people involved and raise money at the same time," he said. "I came up with this idea and then the venue came to me as well. It was perfect. It's right beside the RCMP station and near a church that can provide a washroom."

The Champion's Centre Inc is an organization with its focus on serving the needs of individuals who require help with living on their own. The barriers the tenants may face include health issues, mental illness, economic obstacles, brain injuries, blindness and other impediments. The individuals of the centre have a supportive room and board setting and are assisted in various areas of life.