

Joshua Group gets \$25K boost

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Poverty Money will help repair bus, feed children in need

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SAINT JOHN • A sizable donation from 100 Women Who Care Saint John means Bobby Hayes can feed more of the city's most vulnerable children.

The group voted to donate \$25,600 to the Joshua Group on Tuesday, a month after Hayes, the organization's founder, said it was running out of money. Without much left in the group's bank account, the group was faced with qualms over how to repair a broken down bus, feed a steady flow of hungry children and install a \$65,000 ventilation building needed to finish the group's new building on Peacock's Lane.

"It took a big load off our shoulders for now and it will certainly help us get back on track," Hayes said on Wednesday.

"It's a big worry to think you're not going to be able to feed the kids."

While the group isn't out of the woods yet financially, Hayes said the money covered the repair bill for the bus, will help pay for roof repairs and buy groceries. It buys the group time to launch a child sponsorship program that Hayes hopes will provide more steady funding in the future.

"It would be so nice to be independent and not have to worry about buying pancakes, syrup and milk."

The \$25,600 came from a group of local women who gather together four times a year to pool their money to help one cause.

Three organizations – the Joshua Group, KV Outreach and Shining Horizons Therapeutic Riding Association – made short pitches to the women on Tuesday night.

After listening to the presentations, the women cast votes for which charity



Bobby Hayes of the Joshua Group talks about the stall in plans to finish building the group's headquarters on Sandy Point Road in August.

PHOTO: KATÉ BRAYDON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL ARCHIVE

they'd like to support and the winning charity receives the money.

"It was a really emotionally packed night," 100 Women Who Care Saint John co-founder Debbie Rathwell said. "All three of those were really deserving."

But the Joshua Group showed a critical need for money right away and that swayed the votes in its favour.

"They don't have a voice of their own," Rathwell said, describing the children who are part of the Joshua Group. "They're just so innocent and put in these horrible situations and so helpless. I think that spoke for itself."

Two weeks ago, a report commissioned by a coalition of Toronto community associations revealed Toronto and Saint John are tied for the worst child poverty rates in the country, with 29 per cent of kids living below the line. The statistic comes from tax data from 2012.

That statistic, Rathwell said, was likely fresh in the minds of the women casting their votes.

She hopes the money will put a big

dent in the Joshua Group's financial woes.

"Hopefully it's going to put some food on the table for these kids that don't deserve to be hungry."

As the winner of Tuesday's vote was revealed, the crowd erupted in applause. Hayes was near tears.

"You have no idea what you've just done," Hayes said. "You've certainly put us back on the playing field."

As the children roll in for the group's weekly Sunday morning pancake breakfast, a foundation of the Joshua Group's weekly routine, Hayes relishes telling the kids about the donation.

Most, he said, are happy if they have something to eat. Wealth to them is enough money for a bag of chips and a bottle of pop. They don't grasp the importance of the \$25,000, but they'll be grateful to see programs and meals continuing.

"These kids are looking for someone to help them," Hayes said. "At this point in their life, it's us."