

### The Need:

Most Correctional Facilities in Ontario are a combination of units which include two groups of individuals: 1) those who have had a trial and been sentenced, and 2) those who are remanded (waiting) for trial. The remanded group form at least two thirds of the prison population in Ontario. The remanded wait months, or sometimes years, for their pre-trial and/or trial. At that point, they may find the charges dropped; or they are found guilty, but released for time served while in remand. This is a loophole in the community support system as they are just “shown the door”. For individuals who have served sentenced time, there are programs in place to assist them upon release. There is nothing in place for those who were in remand and are released without serving sentenced time. They may have been arrested in the summer wearing shorts, tee-shirts and sandals, but released in mid-winter, and given back that same clothing which is totally inadequate for the cold. Many also have nowhere to go due to the length of their incarceration.

The loophole referred to earlier is real, and it is significant. There is a need for appropriate seasonal clothing (and basic health and hygiene supplies) for those who have no family or friends to help them when they are released. The Hamilton Wentworth correctional facility currently experiences a very high rate (86%) of individuals who were released, but reoffend and return to prison. Many are recharged in the first few days after being released for petty theft, such as shoplifting.

This Program provides material assistance for the individuals to cope with the immediate “after prison” environment in which they find themselves. We believe and hope that this initiative will offer dignity and comfort to those assisted in knowing that someone cares about them.

### The Prison Release Kits:

These kits include toiletries, T-shirts, underwear, socks, towel and a store voucher. In the case of the Hamilton-Wentworth facility, a store voucher would be included for the SSVP store on Barton Street. Those released would use the store voucher to buy seasonal appropriate clothing. Before Covid the kits were being assembled by students at the three Burlington Catholic High Schools monthly. I take this opportunity to give the teenagers some insights into the correctional system and how it works. The program has been well received by them. During Covid restrictions family groups have been involved in assembling the kits. Currently, arrangements are being made to restart the program in the high schools in the new year.

### Implementation:

Up to this point, the program has been funded mainly by sponsorship from the St. Paul the Apostle SSVP Conference in Burlington. Also contributing, The Halton Particular Council, and a grant from the SSVP Ontario Systemic Change Committee. Also, the assistance of members of SSVP store on Barton Street has been invaluable. The Dunnville SSVP Conference has also sponsored thirty kits. The St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Women’s League and private individuals have also donated to the program.

The first set of kits was delivered Nov.25, 2017 to Hamilton Wentworth Detention Centre. Social workers employed by the prison identify those prisoners who will be in need/homeless upon

release and inform the prison Volunteer Coordinators. They then place a kit in the prisoner's property locker so they will receive the kit when they pick up their property upon release. The Maplehurst Correctional Complex has been included with assistance from the John Howard Society in Milton. Released prisoners can pick up kits at the Society's Milton office or the society will assist those in need at the courts in cooperation with their bail program.