

## **2018 Award of Merit Recipient – Kathy Willis Bio**

Kathy Willis has been a strong feminist advocate in the anti-violence movement in Midland and throughout Simcoe County. Kathy is the Executive Director of Huronia Transition Homes (HTH), a charitable organization in Simcoe County working to end all violence against all women. She runs the women's shelter, La Maison Rosewood Shelter in Midland. Under Kathy's leadership, HTH has grown from a single program woman's shelter to a multi-program county-wide organization offering a women's shelter with specialized services for women who have been sex trafficked, a sexual assault counselling and advocacy centre, a children's program for children exposed to abuse against their mothers, and most recently a social enterprise *Operation Grow* (OG).

Her vision for Operation Grow was to build a program that went beyond conventional programs for women who have experienced violence and provides opportunities to mitigate the impacts of trauma, isolation and poverty. At the heart of OG is a vertical farm which uses cutting-edge and accessible technology where women are trained to grow lettuces, herbs and produce, in a climate-controlled indoor environment. Knowing that the project had to be sustainable, Kathy ensured that revenue from the sale of herbs and vegetables would provide sustainability to OG and help fund the programs and services of HTH. She is currently working on plans to grow the social enterprise even more.

Kathy is an advocate for the inclusion of all women in our community, and has fiercely fought to reduce barriers for all women accessing services, particularly women most marginalized in our community. She has been a leader in incorporating a harm reduction approach in La Maison Rosewood Shelter. For her passion and dedication Kathy has been honoured with many awards including in 2018 she received the Ministry of the Attorney General Victims Services Award of Distinction and she was Fierté Simcoe Pride's 2017 Person of the Year. She was presented the Woman of Business Award at the Meridian Women of Excellence Awards in September 2018.

Kathy is an inspiring and passionate speaker at community events in Midland that invite all members of the community and challenge men to do their part in ending violence against women, including the annual December 6<sup>th</sup> Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, Walk a Mile in her shoes, and a range of collaborative events and vigils to show solidarity with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women campaign, and in solidarity with those who have been killed and wounded as a result of hatred and bigotry and in support of those who seek equality, affordable housing, dignity and peace.

Kathy currently chairs the CAS-Violence Against Women collaboration committee in Simcoe County. In December 2010, Kathy was appointed to the Midland Police Services Board. She was elected as Chair of the Board in January 2013.

