Hope Story – New Hope Youth Centre, Thunder Bay ON
Update – December 9, 2025

A Journey Shaped by Faith and Service

The Urban Abbey plays a crucial role in the city's Winter Emergency Overflow Plan, serving as a vital "third line" shelter when other facilities reach capacity during extreme cold. Each night, the Overflow provides 25 additional beds, ensuring that people have warmth, food, and basic support instead of being left outside in life-threatening temperatures.

At the Overflow, Ciara signs guests in, assigns beds, and serves oatmeal, granola, tea, and hot chocolate. The work is exhausting and emotionally heavy. Some nights she sleeps only three or four hours. Many guests arrive carrying grief, trauma, or deep frustration. Still, she returns each day with compassion, working hard and saving what she can to buy Christmas gifts for her friends.

Although school and work have prevented her from being as involved at **New Hope Youth Centre** this year, she still drops in whenever she can. The Centre remains an important place of connection for her, a community that has shaped her faith and supported her growth over the years.

The most meaningful part of her year, however, came through her continued involvement in **Warrior Leadership Summit (**her fourth year attending) and her first time serving with the **On Eagles' Wings (OEW)** team. OEW travels to different reserves to share testimonies, play basketball, offer Cree food, and encourage youth who have experienced deep hardships.

Ciara was nervous at first. Some First Nations communities still carry profound wounds connected to Christianity, and OEW was not welcomed by some elders for nearly 30 years. She understood the tension many people feel between their Christian faith and their traditional practices. Through OEW, she learned to slow down, listening first, earning trust, and sharing her faith gently and respectfully.

Her passion for serving others comes from her own story. As a child, the foster care system tried to take her and her siblings, but her mother fought fiercely to keep them together. She remembers the fear children feel when faced with the system, and those memories motivate her desire to advocate for families today.

Ciara's faith grew gradually over time. She attended Bible school as a child, but only in recent years did her faith become deeply personal. Her grandmother who prayed with her and sang with her laid the foundation. Though her grandmother has since passed

away, Ciara still feels close to her whenever she prays to Jesus. Her faith has been strengthened through Warrior Leadership Summit, New Hope Youth Centre, New Hope Church, and mentors who have walked with her.

This year, she feels she has grown significantly, learning humility, realizing that life does not revolve around her, and discovering more of who God is calling her to be. Travelling with OEW, hearing others' stories, and connecting with youth who have lived through experiences like her own helped her understand herself in new ways. During their time together, playing games, sharing meals, and speaking honestly about trauma, grief, and hope, she found a deeper sense of belonging.