

Stuffed animals #Make150Count for Alzheimer Society



By Brock Weir

Lily Edmunds knows all too well the positive impact therapy animals can have on those living with Alzheimer's Disease.

The young philanthropist walked the walk with her own grandmother, and now, thanks to a grant to celebrate Canada's 150th Birthday in 2017, Lily is helping spread that positivity to the Alzheimer Society one stuffed animal at a time.

Last week, the 14-year-old St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School student handed over a veritable menagerie to the Aurora-based organization.

A three-year volunteer for the Walk For Alzheimer's, Lily is a recent recipient of RBC's #Make150Count grant program, which is aimed to inspire thousands of young people across the country to give back to their communities with a no-strings-attached cheque for \$150.

The only stipulation? Do something great with the dough.

Lily first learned of RBC's program at We Day earlier this year.

"I was surprised that I got picked because there are many other people, and especially because the contest had a higher age group, I thought there definitely would be people who would be doing way more advanced stuff," she says. "I was really happy that they messaged me and told me I got picked. I told them about my grandmother, who was battling Alzheimer's for a really long time and that I wanted to use my \$150 to help Alzheimer's in some way."

Her passion for volunteerism with the organization came through. Over the course of her volunteerism, Lily says she learned stuffed animals were a great way of providing therapy if true therapy animals – particularly dogs and cats – were unavailable or otherwise impractical for use.

"I looked up all sorts of realistic dogs and cats because they are a very common pet," she explains. "Then I got a message from the (Woodbridge-based toy company) Ganz and they said they wanted to donate 100 stuffed animals. They invited me to their warehouse sale, and I saw lots of realistic dogs and cats that would be great for me to pick up. I spent approximately \$250 on the stuffed animals and I spent a lot on a big stuffed animal dog for the Society. The [clients of the Alzheimer Society] were really happy to get them. Some of them thought it was a real dog and they were pretty happy. They talked to me a lot about their life stories and it was really entertaining to talk to them and see them play with their new stuffed animals."

When Lily's grandmother began her journey with Alzheimer's it was, of course, very difficult for her family but her grandmother

reassured them that "everything would be fine." Her parents told her about the Alzheimer Society and after looking at their website, the young athlete decided to put her passion for running into action, taking part in the Walk For Alzheimer's, for which she has been a significant participant and fundraiser for the past three years.

"I just like helping the Alzheimer Society and seeing people's faces," says Lily.

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive, degenerative and fatal brain condition with no known cause or cure, and is the seventh leading cause of death in Canada. In York Region, over 15,000 people are living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias; 1 in 11 are over age 65, increasing to 1 in 3 over age 85, according to the Society.

For more, visit www.alzheimeryork.com.