

Community Living targets healthy, informed community

By Brock Weir

A sense of community is something people take for granted all too often; but sometimes those for whom becoming a full part of the community is something easier said than done are can often be left behind.

That is a problem Community Living Newmarket-Aurora has sought to address, and continues to address, nearly 60 years after establishing roots in the area.

Community Living Newmarket/Aurora is a charity supporting people with intellectual disabilities living in the two municipalities. They provide direct support to their clients, family members, and try to build awareness of people with intellectual disabilities throughout all levels of the community.

With support programs which provide mentorship, employment opportunities, and other supports to help people live independent lives, their mission is to help people live to their fullest potential within ?an informed community.?

This year, Community Living will be able to expand both their support and outreach as one of the participating community partners in Magna's Wild, Wild West Hoedown. In honour of the 25th anniversary of one of York Region's biggest parties, 25 local charities and community groups were selected to divide all proceeds raised through the annual Hoedown push. The 25 groups will be tasked with selling raffle and event tickets and last year these efforts raised over \$540,000 split amongst 20 groups.

With their share of the pot, Community Living plans to build upon their mandate, but also expand sensory art programs, literacy initiatives, and employment skills.

?Our goal in having a community where everybody belongs is to give people an outlet,? says Colleen Zakoor, Executive Director of Community Living Newmarket/Aurora. ?It is for using it for activities, it is about removing barriers, particularly the financial barriers to things like cooking groups and learning to make healthy lifestyle choices too. We're going through a program about living well and we also have a lot of people who want to be in the community. It is about individualized support, music lessons, dance lessons, and things that are over and above what we take for granted.?

Ensuring their clients have an outlet extends far beyond simple community programs. They recognize that everyone needs a bit of a chance once in a while from their regular environments and providing this outlet is something they continue to take on.

Community Living focuses on adult clients, but they are often there to tackle youth making that transition to adulthood, such as intellectually disabled students who come out of the high school stream often in their early 20s.

?That is a big area which needs specialization,? says Ms. Zakoor. ?We have some folks in that youth area who are not fitting in anywhere.?

In these cases, even the little things, such as providing their clients something as simple as the latest pair of ear buds or something trendy, can go a very long way in fostering a sense of belonging. So too can going the extra mile to ensure their clients have access to accessible vehicles to help them get around the community, something that is often out of reach to local families financially.

?Families have a terrible time trying to figure that out,? she adds. ?Who has the means to provide a vehicle where you are able to get a wheelchair in and out that is not mobile? It is about accessibility. It is about including folks you may not think of, or you might think are being taken care of.?

For more information on how to support Community Living through ticket sales, visit www.clnad.com. For more on Hoedown itself, visit www.hoedown.ca.