

Go the extra mile for your neighbours in need this winter with Neighbourhood Network



By Brock Weir

After York Region had a relatively easy winter last year, this one is making up for lost time, giving residents no shortage of opportunities to get outside and clear away significant snowfalls, one shovel-full at a time.

But, across York Region, there are many seniors and those with mobility challenges for whom a winter snow event can mean several days ? or longer ? housebound with no alternative.

Neighbourhood Network, however, is looking for a few good, reliable volunteers to provide these important alternatives for people in need through their Winter Snow Removal Programs.

Currently, Neighbourhood Network has matched 21 senior clients with volunteer shovellers in the northern York Region communities in which they serve and, in Aurora alone, there are seven seniors still waiting for that perfect match to give them a helping hand when the snow flies, particularly in the areas of Petermann Street, Stiles Avenue, Deerhorn Crescent, and Hill Drive. Through their Winter Snow Removal Program, Neighbourhood Network connects community volunteers ? often, but not limited to students ? with low income seniors and individuals with disabilities who can't do the heavy lifting themselves. Matches are ideally within walking distance, but if you're a have car, will travel kind of person, so much the better.

?We would love to get to a place where a neighbour sees a need and goes to help that neighbour,? says Steve Hinder of Neighbourhood Network. ?I am sure the majority of people, if they had an elderly person or someone in need on their street, you are going to go next door and do it, but we're looking for ways we can encourage that to be the norm.

?It used to happen all the time and I think it is key when we have a lot of growth and new residents showing up. They came here because of the great community sense and feel, and I am sure that is part of what the draw has been, but we need to maintain that ? and in order to maintain that, we need to look for others to help their neighbour out.?

Neighbourhood Network often hears a familiar refrain from people they first try to engage in volunteerism: how busy and stressed they are with their current situation. They say, however, volunteering can prove to be that piece in your life that puts everything else in balance.

Lisbeth Goodyear, who has spearheaded the Winter Snow Removal program for Neighbourhood Network for seven seasons now, can attest to this. As the program continues, she has seen these wintery volunteer matches stand the test of time, continuing on without any assist from Neighbourhood Network with each passing year.

?I think [the returning volunteers] feel good about what they are doing,? says Ms. Goodyear. ?They become friends with their senior. Before the holidays, one of the volunteers called me up to say he would be gone over the Christmas break and was not going to be able to shovel for his senior, but he said to me, ?She makes the best peanut butter brittle ever! so, she's obviously coming out and giving him treats and they have become friends.

?[This service] is really a requirement. The seniors can't pick up the snow at the end of the driveway and they really can't get their cars out. That's the feeling of being trapped. How can you not go out to get your groceries or go out to get your drugs? In some cases, if you need help at home, the nurses and the home care people won't come through the snow because it is a danger to them.

Now, you have someone who is really trapped in their home. Without the snow shovellers, they would be trapped.?

For more information, including a complete list of streets in Aurora, King, Newmarket, and East Gwillimbury in need of volunteer snow shovellers, visit www.neighbourhoodnetwork.org. You can register as a volunteer online, or by calling 905-726-9779.