

Pillow case project aims to make women feel pampered this Christmas



By Brock Weir

Sisters might be doin' it for themselves, but Aurora's Benlolo sisters are doin' it for their sisters in the wider York Region community ? one pillow case at a time.

Lexi Benlolo, a Grade 10 student at King's Country Day School (CDS) and sister Amanda, a Grade 9 student at the same school, are hard at work this week putting the finishing touches on a bumper load of pillow cases they hope will spread some holiday joy and brighten the lives of local women in need in the process.

?We think feeling good is the foundation of making lives better,? says Lexi.

And so, with the Pampered Pillowcase program, they are putting this feeling into action along with the Women's Centre of York Region.

?Last May, we were discussing how grateful we are for everything we have, how much we have, and how lucky we are to have that,? she says. ?We tried to come up with an idea on how we could give back to the people who don't really have that, but wanted to do something different and innovative that no one has ever thought of. This is a little bit different than all the other charities that kind of give the necessities to the people in need. We thought, what about doing something for the things that aren't necessarily necessities, but things that make people feel good??

Initially pitching their Pampered Pillowcases to Belinda's Place, the upcoming shelter for single women in Newmarket, they got a tremendous reception but, unfortunately, this new facility was not slated to be up and ready in time for the holiday season. Not to be deterred, the sisters then approached the Women's Centre of York Region who jumped at the opportunity to take part.

The Women's Centre quickly provided them with a list of 40 clients they thought would love receiving some treats in the Pampered Pillow Case and such was the demand, the Centre soon had 30 more clients on a waiting list to take part.

Through these lists, the Women's Centre provided the sisters with a few clues on what would really brighten the day of their clients, including sizes for fresh pairs of pyjamas and slippers. The rest was up to them.

?We're girls and young women, so we thought of things that would make us feel pampered and we put that towards what we put in the pillow cases,? says Amanda.

But they certainly weren't alone. Buoyed by the reception they received from the Women's Centre of York Region, they took their idea back to CDS where it too was embraced by the community.

"We have CDS on board, we have community members on board, and so far it is looking pretty good," says Lexi, noting they pitched their idea to the school's Social Justice Club who joined them in brainstorming ideas on how to promote the product.

"Since we wear uniforms, there are dress-down days where you get to wear your regular clothes by donating a certain amount. Each dress-down day goes to a certain charity and this year, the Christmas charity they are supporting is the Pampered Pillow Case. They gave us a donation and we were able to fill about 20 ? 25 pillow cases from Country Day School.

"I think what we are most looking forward to is getting the reactions from the women and seeing how these women enjoy these pillow cases and, if they do, seeing how it all comes together because this is kind of our baby. We have been working on it for so long. Every night we come home from school and put together pillow cases, tag pillow cases, go through things, and we hope this will have an impact on their lives. It's sisters helping sisters."

With Lexi and Amanda considering this "their baby", they are hard at work ensuring that while they fill each and every pillow case before the end of this week, they are laying the foundation for the program to continue well beyond their time at CDS. Their Junior School, for instance, is taking on the project next spring for a special Mother's Day drive, enabling a new round of Pampered Pillow Cases, and then there is Christmas 2016.

"We're hoping this continues on throughout the years," says Lexi. "When I graduate, it can be passed onto Amanda and then hopefully our little sister Avery will be able to take it over. Hopefully this is a growing thing and something that lasts beyond one year. We're hoping for a big future with this."