

Shine Through the Rain ramping up support for local families ahead of the holidays

Dealing with a life-threatening illness is a traumatic and taxing experience for any family, but as joyous as the holiday season is for some, it can also add an extra layer of challenges and stressors.

This is a reality that has been recognized by York Region's Shine Through the Rain Foundation and one they hope can be addressed, at least in part, through their Adopt a Family program.

The Shine Through the Rain Foundation was founded to help individuals and families affected by life-threatening illness with advice, guidance, and financial support "as they try to navigate emotional, physical and financial challenges that arise from a health crisis."

"The needs exist for our client families throughout the year, but certainly, as we get into the fall, people have their heat that they need, which is always a given, and we're hearing from our families and the healthcare professionals that refer them, that inflation is certainly adding to their financial stresses," explains the Foundation's Laurie Docimo.

"There are increased utility costs, and with the Christmas holidays coming, while it is nice to have toys under the tree and gifts for the kids, it's [sometimes] the last thing they can afford. We hear from families that while it is nice to have the gifts, they can't even think about that. If someone wants to help, of course we're happy to receive gifts of toys and gift cards to favourite toy stores, but what's more important to them is to know that their rent that is already overdue is taken care of, their basic utilities, they would appreciate having those overdue bills taken care of. Of course, they're worried about putting food on the table year-round, but especially during the holidays, they're just so much more aware of what they do not have."

The Foundation's Adopt a Family Program during the holidays is ideal for a company, organization, group of friends, or even an individual who wants to help make a real difference in the lives of their neighbours and members of their community, says Docimo.

"If they want to help our different families, we have the capability to match them with a suitable family and we can focus on the local area and whatever their budget is," Docimo explains. "For \$100, we can purchase a grocery gift card to the family's closest grocery store so they can select foods appropriate to their personal preferences, medical needs, cultural and religious preferences, whatever they would need and like."

"The families that we help are the families that are falling through the cracks. There are very few other charitable programs available to the people who come to us, so by helping our client families we're giving them a hand up so they do not fall through the cracks. We cover the basics: the patients who are referred to us, they are living with a life-threatening illness and the expenses of that, increased expenses such as chemo pills to take at home is costly. Not everybody has private health benefits. OHIP does not cover all medications nor assistive devices and income is lost."

In addition to their Adopt a Family program, also in the works to spread some holiday cheer is a Paediatric Christmas Party coming up on December 17, which is a way for kids with a family member who is currently in treatment, to attend with their families and meet their peers.

Most of the people who have attended in the past have been kids whose parents have been the patients.

"When one of their parents is diagnosed, they're impacted as well and they suffer as well ? financially, socially and emotionally," says Docimo, noting that while there is no cost to attend, there are other costs on the table for the organization that the community can help with. "We send some toys or gift cards for each child attending and we really need some people ? companies and donors ? to help us cover the costs so we can send a child to this party with their families at no cost to them."

But as urgent as the needs are now, Docimo stresses that the time immediately after Christmas is among the most difficult for clients and their families.

?We will still have an Adopt a Family program for the winter because?when the Christmas holidays are done and over with, people move on and don't stop to think that the needs are still great. After Christmas is when most families, whether they are facing a life-threatening illness or not, is when they see increased utility bills; we'll often see an increase in more of our families being overdue on their basic utility bills because it's usually so much colder in January and February. Of course they're already ill and it's really important for them to remain reasonably comfortable.?

For more information on the Shine Through the Rain Foundation and various ways you can help, visit shinethroughtherain.ca.

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