

Tweens and teens continue giving back through 100 Youth Who Care



By Brock Weir

Women might Care and Men might Give a Damn, but local youth are staking out their own claim in giving back through 100 Youth Who Care ? York Region.

The local group, an offshoot of 100 Women Who Care and 100 Men Who Give A Damn, celebrates its second anniversary this week marking two years of bringing young York Region residents together four times a year, with \$10 in their pockets, looking for an opportunity for their buck to go the extra mile.

100 Youth Who Care has its foundations in 100 Kids Who Care. That early iteration provided a solid start for the current incarnation. 100 Youth Who Care was a natural evolution for young adults.

Each meeting sees the youth come together with their \$10 bill and selecting a quarterly recipient from the myriad charities, non-profits and organizations in York Region is a process driven purely by the youth.

?Each youth who wants to present [on a charity] puts in the names of organizations they think deserves the money on a ballot and we put it in a box,? explains 13-year-old Sydney Cooper, a student at Aurora Grove Public School. ?Two, sometimes three names are drawn and [the nominators] of those three groups make a presentation. All the youth, even if you didn't put a name in the ballot, write out which charity they think deserves the money and the organization with the most voters gets the money. So far, we have donated to Welcoming Arms, Blue Door Shelters, CCAA, the Newmarket Food Pantry, Abuse Hurts, Autism Ontario, 360 Kids and the Starlight Children's Foundation.

?We chose a \$10 minimum donation [per member instead of the \$100 required for each member of 100 Women Who Care and 100 Men Who Give A Damn] because no kid has that amount of money to give four times a year. If you can't get \$10, you can always sell lemonade or cut a neighbour's lawn. We felt that was a reasonable amount and, when we have a lot of youth, it actually raises a lot of money.?

To date, they have raised a total of \$3,500 over eight meetings.

As the youth steer the meetings, parent mentors like Sydney's mother Jenny look on with pride.

As a mom, giving back to the community is something Jenny has tried to instill in her family, as it was in her when she was growing up.

?Once I had children and they were at an age where they could understand that concept, I really felt inspired to do something where not only my children would have that opportunity to experience the joy of giving, but bring like-minded families and youth together,? says Jenny. ?We are really proud of our members and we just feel really inspired by the youth. It is incredible to see not only their passionate hearts to give back, but they leadership skills they are developing as a result of 100 Youth Who Care.

?While there are parent mentors like myself, we're simply here to help and provide some guidance. Our youth do a phenomenal job. They run the entire meeting, they do all the administration, the sign-ins, they have the presentations ready on a Power Point and we sit back. It has been incredible to see and we have certainly seen a ton of growth within the group over the last couple of years; youth that were, at one point, literally unable to speak in front of people and not wanting to do it at all are now the first to be

volunteering and up there speaking.?

Youth also learn a lot about the community in the process.

Once the \$10 contributions are tallied and the donation made to the lucky organization, representatives from the group come to the following meeting to show the youth where their money went, how it is being used, and how they are having their own positive impact on the world around them.

?I've learned it is really important to give back,? says Sydney. ?Not everyone has the same amount of things that I do or my friends do because at school, at least at our school, it is really small, everybody has food, everybody has a home, but it has taught me that not everybody has that and there is a lot of people and kids who aren't as fortunate as we are.?

This week, the 100 Youth will mark their anniversary with a presentation to the local chapter of 100 Women Who Care, celebrate with a cake, and brainstorm ways to spread the word. As they look towards their third anniversary, they are hoping to build their membership because, as Sydney says, the more people they have contributing, the bigger impact they can have on York Region.