

Area families going through life-threatening illness supported by Shine Through the Rain, Magna

Area families who are experiencing financial hardship while going through a life-threatening illness, are receiving some extra support to make ends meet this year thanks to Shine Through the Rain, and some help from Magna International.

The York Region-based Shine Through the Rain Foundation, which supports adults, children, and families cover unexpected costs related to their health journey, is one of ten local organizations this year to share in the Magna Community Fund, which was established by the auto parts company to continue to support community non-profits following the end of its Wild West Hoedown tradition.

Shine Through the Rain's share of the pot is expected to help an estimated 10 families in covering costs related to medical, parking and transportation, as well as to prevent evictions, avoid the disconnection of utilities and more.

"When low-income families are facing life-threatening illness and they're on the verge of that happening, we're going to pay their overdue rent, pay their overdue utilities, send them grocery gift cards to their preferred grocery stores, and pay their medical parking and transportation," says Shine Through the Rain's Laurie Docimo. "That way they can focus on recovering from their life-threatening illnesses, focus on recovering in their own homes rather than fearing the worst, such as eviction, utility disconnections, wondering how they can afford their groceries, and how to afford their medical parking and transportation."

Clients, she explains, are typically referred to Shine Through the Rain by healthcare professionals, particularly social workers in hospitals like Southlake Health and SickKids.

While Shine Through the Rain tries to serve as many applicants as possible, demand is increasing, and this is a trend Docimo has noticed coming out of the Global Pandemic.

"Prior to the pandemic, even though it was five years ago, normally for every one client we could help, we had to decline one because there was never enough funding. Usually, it was about a one-to-one ratio for every one client approved we declined one client, but since COVID the demand is quadruple the request."

The applicants who are denied, she says, certainly meet the criteria, but the funding just isn't there.

"It's troubling," says Docimo. "It's disturbing because, of course, we want to be able to help everybody who needs the help, but unfortunately there's increased demand and never enough funding out there. We'll support each client usually up to \$1,500 a year. It doesn't sound like a lot, but it actually does seem to help prevent financial ruin. We may help someone on the low end, [such as] \$100 for a grocery gift card or a gas gift card, up to \$1,500 and that would be to pay overdue rent, overdue utilities, or even hospital parking costs and medical transportation.

"How we prioritize people is the greatest need. If we have to make a choice between say a grocery gift card at \$100, for example, versus preventing an imminent eviction where a client has a pending, here's the date of eviction or utility disconnection, we prioritize those clients' families. The averages really vary anywhere up to \$1,500."

There are many ways for the community at large to help Shine Through the Rain close some of the gaps they're seeing.

There are currently six volunteer opportunities that would make a world of difference for the organization, and they include: taking shifts at Newmarket's Bingo World & Gaming, for those 18+, which supports the Foundation; in office administration; in fundraising; in taking a place on their volunteer Board of Directors; those who can help boost their presence on social media; and individuals who can help facilitate connections with likeminded organizations.

Individuals, groups and businesses can also help sponsor a family or contribute to their Christmas Hamper Program, which sees those looking to contribute paired with local families in need.

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

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