

Aurora residents pay it forward through Pass It On

Jorien Berg moved to Aurora a little over a year ago, but has already discovered its sense of community.

The elementary teacher is also responsible for creating an online Facebook group that shares, reuses and recycles items within the community.

Based on the idea that one person's trash is another person's treasure, the Pass It On group has had a domino effect, leading to several towns opening up their own chapters of the group.

It all started with Berg wanting to pass on an act of kindness she had received. "When I was living in Toronto, a woman I met through a group of mom friends in my neighbourhood gave me some amazing baby and kid items like a snowsuit, a baby gym, and clothing. I was so grateful she gave me these items she could have sold," recalled Berg, a mother of two.

Shortly after she and her family moved to Aurora, she was unpacking and realized she had way more than she needed.

"Inspired by that woman who gave me those amazing items for free, I decided to pay it forward and post some baby clothes and stuffed animals on Facebook marketplace for free. I gave the items to the first person who messaged me but, unfortunately, I later saw a sales post that included some of the items," said Berg, who says she wasn't pleased but knew that she did her part by giving the items away.

However, the experience led her to another idea.

"It got me thinking if there was a way to create a pure sharing community that was about reusing, recycling, and sharing. And a bonus would be getting to meet new people too! The name came to me right away: pass it on! And the first three rules came to me quickly too: Everything is free, no selling items you picked up for free from the group, and have respect.

"I also thought to myself 'who doesn't like free stuff? I loved receiving it and others must too so why not make a group around it,'" said Berg, who was on maternity leave when it all began.

Berg's idea took off and the members started trickling into the online group. Sometimes, she'd ask members to invite friends who would like this type of group and the idea around it.

"I would sometimes spot someone giving things away for free on Facebook marketplace and I would message that person directly and say, 'So nice of you to pass on [item]', and suggest my group as an outlet to post their free item. I would also share information at mom meet-ups, depending on the type of conversations we were having. At one point, I had new member requests daily and the group continues to grow today," said Berg, whose group has now grown into a community of over 1,800 members.

"The response was always very positive from day one and members continue to share their positive experience in the group, including their gratitude."

As Berg approached the end of her maternity leave, she knew she would need help managing the group. Having already made some friends from the Pass It On group, and local programs as well as other Facebook groups, finding her teammates became easy.

"A friend I met from the Pass It On group came to pick up baby blankets from me and we got chatting and instantly hit it off. I noticed she was very active in the group. I asked her if she'd be interested in helping manage the group and she said yes! Another friend I met through a mom's meet up also showed great interest in the group, so I also asked her for help and she said yes, too. I now have two amazing women managing the group with me: Naomi Attar and Katerina Kennedy."

Through the group and all the sharing that goes on within it, Berg couldn't be happier about her new hometown.

?Aurora is very much community-oriented. I have learned that we have a variety of people here from various socio-economic backgrounds, and some people have lots to give while others have lots they need. One member shared with me that Christmas happened for her family because of the group. Another member thanks the group for helping her downsize, while another saves items from going into the garbage and passes them on instead,? said Berg.

As the group continues to grow, Berg knows that members respect the group expectations, rules and values.

?They see how much the admins care and value the time and energy we put into keeping the group running smoothly. I hope the group maintains integrity, communication, respect, kindness, and humour!?

By Kinjal Dagli Shah