

Aurora woman honoured for giving young mums a helping hand



By Brock Weir

Over the last two decades, there are few things Janet Metcalfe has found more satisfying than seeing a young mother come into her own.

She recalls meeting one particular young woman who walked through the doors of Rose of Sharon Services for Young Mothers who probably wouldn't have been described as having that ?Earth Mother? look. She had, says Ms. Metcalfe, minimal skills on how to bond with her baby, first dropping the infant off with people like Ms. Metcalfe and going off to participate in programs designed to instill these maternal skills.

?I noticed over the year she was with the program that she was clearly trying to put into practice the things she was being taught and seeing what the other mothers do,? says Ms. Metcalfe, an Aurora resident. ?She would come back, give the baby a kiss, and say, ?Mommy loves you.? At first, you could see it wasn't something that was exactly heartfelt, but over the year it became something she felt she really meant. By the end of the year, she had bonded with her baby, was a loving mother, and was doing all the right things.?

This story is not a unique one.

Ms. Metcalfe has a raft of similar observations just like these under her belt. It all comes with the territory of volunteering to work with the children participating in the program.

This past fall, however, Ms. Metcalfe says she was ?flabbergasted? to receive some unexpected recognition for simply doing the work she does ? one of two Aurora residents honoured by Governor General David Johnston with the Caring Canadian award at Queen's Park, part of the Canadian Honours System.

It's a long way from first becoming involved with Rose of Sharon after learning of the organization through a church newsletter.

?I really just appreciated the fact they were kind of intervening to break a cycle of low education and low-paying jobs because I think these young mothers are now getting an opportunity to finish high school ? and that seemed like a good thing to me!? Ms. Metcalfe recalls. ?They were also learning good parenting skills and other life skills through the program Rose of Sharon offered, so I thought their children were going to have a much better chance than they would if these mums had to drop out of school and not have all the support for raising their own children.?

Working in their Child Development Centre, Ms. Metcalfe says she has seen the demand for such services holding steady and, perhaps, might now be greater than ever. While Rose of Sharon serves all of York Region, every jurisdiction would benefit from the

services they provide the community, she says.

?These babies will have a much better chance,? she says. ?Some of these teenage mums come from perfectly lovely families and have, for whatever reason, found themselves in the position they are in. A number of them haven't experienced good parenting themselves and are not getting the family support they need. Rose of Sharon provides them with a better role model.

?There are social workers there who will give them their support, they get peer support from each other, and it surprises me that a lot of them say they still get called unpleasant names at school. You would think in this day and age that would be long gone, but apparently it is not. At Rose of Sharon, they feel accepted, loved, and it is always moving to [hear them say] how Rose of Sharon ?saved my life' and gave them the love, support, and acceptance they weren't experiencing before. That has got to be important for the whole community.?

To help spread the love, the ideal Rose of Sharon volunteer is someone who really cares about both the mums and their babies, and has an accepting attitude free of judgement. They certainly don't need any more than that, she notes.

?I am grateful to have had the opportunity to volunteer with them,? says Ms. Metcalfe. ?One of my problems with accepting this award was not feeling at all deserving of getting any kind of award for what I do there because I get so much more than I give. I get a community: they are a wonderful, really warm, loving, caring community ? and I get to play with babies every week! Who would want to leave [after 20 years] if you have a place like that to go every week??