

Community and Staples join forces to make Back to School sweet for kids in need

By Brock Weir

It's Back to School season and, if you're a parent, you're probably being run off your feet to make sure everything is just right for your kids as they prepare to hit the books once again.

But for many families in the community, it is a stressful time of year as they try to make ends meet while making sure their kids are as best equipped as possible to start the year off right.

Giving these families in need a helping hand are organizations like the Optimist Club of Aurora and Welcoming Arms, who are once again partnering with Staples Canada's annual School Drive to make sure they have everything in need.

If you go through the checkout aisle at the local Staples, located on Yonge Street at Murray Drive, you will probably be asked if you want to make a contribution to the fund. Before you say no, consider this: all funds raised through this initiative will stay right here in the community.

Each year, Staples locations partners with local charities, schools, school board, and other local groups that demonstrate a need for financial support when it comes to securing essential school supplies or ensuring kids have a place in much-needed breakfast programs.

This year, nation-wide, Staples hopes to raise over \$1.7 million dollars through the campaign, which runs through September 4.

“Staples has been doing a Back to School supply drive for 13 years now, and Welcoming Arms has been our partner for the past two years,” says Dan Payne, General Manager of the Aurora Staples. “We still partner with the Optimist Club of Aurora as well, and Welcoming Arms is a great charity. They do a lot of great work in the community and are able to connect us directly to families in need that can't afford school supplies, and it is a great partnership.

“Our community is always very receptive and generous [with this program], so we have been able to be one of the top stores within our district in terms of funds raised and those go right back into the community.”

Once all the money has been tallied leading up to the September 4 wrap-up, Staples hosts a shopping day when people can come in to get what they need. Any leftover funds are used by the store to put together fully-packaged backpacks that are then ready to go for families that might use Welcoming Arms' services throughout the year.

Each year, during the Back to School Drive season, customers going through the checkout are asked if they would like to contribute \$1, \$2, or any dollar figure to the cause. If they do, it is tacked onto their bill. Last year alone, these community contributions clocked in at \$7,000, which went a long way for these kids.

“We're a community partner and we want to make sure we can give back to the community and support kids who might not be able to afford school supplies,” says Mr. Payne. “We really highlight to customers that it is a local partnership and make sure they feel we're supporting local kids and families in need, and we do so by explaining all that is needed through the program and customers are very happy and generous to help.

“We would like to be known as the Back to School destination and making sure kids can come in. It's an easy, welcoming shopping experience and, at the same time, we want to make sure families, if they are able to support that local cause, are able to do so through our partnership with Welcoming Arms.”