Community helps Neighbourhood Network make holidays merry for more than 90 families

Community members have stepped up to help Neighbourhood Network meet unprecedented demand for their annual Holiday Gift Drive.

At the end of last week, Neighbourhood Network, which serves the communities of Aurora, King, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, Newmarket, and Whitchurch-Stouffville, said community support for their Holiday Gift Drive has enabled them to sponsor 90 families this Christmas season, but 16 families are still in need for support.

Their asks are not huge, says Neighbourhood Network's Erin Cerenzia, Manager of Community Relations for Magna International, but essentially boil down to some of the very basics of life we take for granted.

?We are blown away by the support from the community, as well as from our colleagues from Magna,? Cerenzia told The Auroran. ?It's the most requests we've ever received, and we're incredibly grateful with the support we have received. We have a few families who are single parents ? mothers and fathers ? who have young children ranging in age from the youngest being two-years-old to the oldest being 13. We have a few families who are also single-parent families who have teenagers or older children who have special needs that require a lot of financial care and support for their medical needs on behalf of families.

?The thing that is always the most unusual or surprising to me is the fact that people are wishing for what we would consider just basic necessities, so more than ever on wish lists this year we have wishes for food, toiletries, cleaning products for the house, toilet paper. 10 years ago, we had a lot of wish lists for specific toys, games or books for children, but now we're really just looking for ways to get through the holiday season just with those essentials. If we can provide that, and then additional gifts and Christmas cheer on top of that, that is really our goal.?

It's not just families with kids who are in the minds of Neighbourhood Network this time of year. Their Holiday Gift Drive also accounts for local seniors who are also in need ? financially, medically, and otherwise.

?When we're thinking about how the community can support a couple of key pieces for us ? gift cards to grocery stores or businesses where there is an opportunity to purchase food, that is always helpful, and gift cards to restaurants are also very helpful. Warm clothes, winterwear like socks, mitts, hats, and scarves, all in a variety of sizes, would be of huge help and assistance. We also suggest gift cards to places like Amazon and Walmart where there might be an opportunity, specifically with single parents and single seniors, to purchase a variety of types of items from those stores. They might be able to purchase a book, a board game, or items from their home because these types of gift cards reach a whole variety of available items for sale.

?We take such pride in the work this Holiday Gift Drive program offers back to our community and these are necessities and essentials for life. We also take great responsibility [in this because] it is critical support they are looking for.?

If you would like to contribute, it's not too late.

Donations will be accepted through Friday, December 15, at Magna's Corporate Headquarters, 337 Magna Drive, Aurora, which is available 24/7.

Further information on what's needed at neighbourhoodnetwork.org or by emailing Lisbeth Goodyear at Lisbeth.Goodyear@magna.com.

?No contribution is too small,? says Cerenzia. ?We always encourage people in the community to give what works for you and your family and if you can give a $25 Tim Horton's gift card, you might feel that's not enough, but for some of these families who are on our wish list, that could be the only gift they receive. Every single contribution, regardless of the size or amount, has such a positive impact on our neighbours who are in need. I would encourage everyone to really think about what they are able to do and make a donation if they can.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter