

Easter Seals pandemic efforts still goes a long way

Families who care for their children with disabilities know a life an average person wouldn't.

There are many challenges, including mounting costs to ensure their child has the right tools and resources to be able to do things that they otherwise wouldn't be able to do.

This year, human generosity and kindness might be rated higher than a normal calendar year.

It takes a lot to support others in need and blanket their hardship with solace and tranquility when you just might be going through your own.

"I've had a couple of guys, men who have broke down and cried. They're just not in a good place and they're doing the best they can," says Charlene Myke, Development Manager for South-Central Easter Seals Ontario.

Children have been struggling with isolation and online schooling.

This year's efforts, including the recently-held York-Simcoe Celebrity Hockey Classic, will help kids experience things we often take for granted.

Coming to an event like this is quite eye-opening to learn how much of an impact Easter Seals has had on their children and the support the organization has received from the hockey community.

For the York-Simcoe Celebrity Hockey Classic this year, Easter Seals has raised \$183,775.

Emceed by Sportsnet's Ken Reid, this virtual event saw over 60 participants online, including former Toronto Maple Leafs stars Wendell Clark and Doug Gilmour, as well as assistant coach for the Montreal Canadiens Kirk Muller.

"It means a lot to have each and every one of you involved with Easter Seals at any time, but especially, this year," said President of Easter Seals Kevin Collins.

"Your participation is sincerely appreciated and I can't thank you enough. Earlier this year, we reached out to all of our past participants to be our hockey heroes for Easter Seals kids and our families. Everyone here answered that call."

Normally a two-day event featuring table-top hockey games, prizes, food and actual hockey games, this year was carried over Zoom.

The night began with a presentation from children who have benefitted from donations, expressing their thanks. Following that, a tribute video to the late Dale Hawerchuck was showcased. The Winnipeg Jets legend was heavily involved in the Easter Seals community.

Participants, were divided into teams for their fundraising campaigns and teams had the chance to interact with one another in "break-rooms," in the Zoom call to discuss the former NHLer they were going to draft.

The more money you raised, the better overall pick you had. The player selected can be invited to a future event that team wishes to host. Many names appeared, including P.J. Stock, Al Iafrate, Duguay and more.

Children had the chance to hear funny stories from Muller, Gilmour and Clark on the Hot Stove section of the night. All three legends opted to appear in break rooms as well to interact with members of all teams.

In a relaxing hour and a half of an event where participants had the chance to see what Easter Seals can do. Everyone even had the chance to hear from 2020 Provincial Ambassador Daniella Altieri, who raised \$10,000. The Grade 11 student has a stretcher, a wheelchair and a cane for her every-day life.

?People who have registered this year, and the people who are raising money, are seriously the people that have never quit on our kids. Some of these guys have been in on this tournament since day one and they haven't quit,? Myke told The Auroran.

Easter Seals continues to support families and vice versa. It is a tight knit community of people whose goal is very clear. Many people have benefitted from the support this charity has provided.

?Years ago, I had a couple of braces and a bike walker ever since I was five or six years old. I went to Easter Seals camp. That's the biggest thing they've done for me. I did go to therapy and they covered costs for that at 10 years old,? Gary Wright Humanitarian Award winner Brent Morning said.

Other children, such as Casey McKay, who graduated with honours from Humber College and is still heavily involved with Easter Seals has seen his life head in the right direction.

The efforts from this charity is unprecedented and what they do for families is noble, especially now, in a time where spirits need to be brought together and supported.

But, for Easter Seals, this year will be the only year this event can be held virtually.

Myke and Development Officer for Easter Seals Ontario Andrea Peterson said they got lucky to have this classic over Zoom. Next year, much like other events, need to be face to face.

For those interested in donating to Easter Seals, you can head to easterseals.org to place your donations.

By Robert Belardi