

Gift card donations can spread sense of empowerment? this season: Neighbourhood Network



By Brock Weir

As they look over their ever-growing holiday wish list, Neighbourhood Network is seeing a trend throughout York Region.

The Aurora-based volunteer organization, which operates in Aurora, King Township, Newmarket, East Gwillimbury and Georgina, is now working hard on their annual Holiday Toy Drive. Working in conjunction with over 300 charities and non-profits in these municipalities, they are compiling lists of the most urgent and needed requests as donations pour in.

Near the top of the list? Gift cards.

“We are seeing a lot of requests for cards because a lot of the time, and I am sure anyone would sympathize with this, the clients who are in need of the gifts feel an element of embarrassment or disappointment and they want to go out and purchase things for their children,” says Neighbourhood Network's Erin Cerenzia. “Unfortunately, they are just in a situation where they are not able to do so. We are seeing a lot of requests for gift cards and parents or caregivers can take the card and go out themselves to purchase something they know their child really wants and it gives them a real sense of empowerment, allowing them to take part in that really joyous, precious moment of the holidays in purchasing something for someone you love.”

Through the Neighbourhood Network website, those looking to drop off gift cards or holiday gifts in general can log on to see a list of needs identified by these partner organizations to ensure that what they donate will be just right.

“Rather than just having people go out and purchase gifts and toys without really knowing where those items should be going, [this] makes it a really smart purchase that is actually going to go to a family or child, or individual who is really in need of that item,” says Ms. Cerenzia. “We are seeing a lot of requests for toiletries as well, basic things like toothbrushes and toothpaste, deodorant and things we might not necessarily associate as a nice gift to give someone, but they are actually a very big need.

“There are a lot of requests for items for seniors in need. A lot of time we forget because seniors are adults we think they don't necessarily need help, but there are a lot of appeals for items for seniors, whether it is clothing, scarves, socks, or even games like playing cards, dice, and small activities they can enjoy.”

That being said, gifts and toys are always welcome, and have been particularly identified by organizations such as Big Brothers Big

Sisters of York, Rose of Sharon Services for Young Mothers, and Blue Door Shelters.

?If you do choose to donate to Neighbourhood Network, we can guarantee that whatever you purchase is going to be given to, whether is a child, a teen, a senior, or a family, someone who is really in need of that item because we personally sort all of the incoming gifts and allocate them appropriately based on what our charity and non-profit partners have identified as their most urgent needs,? says Ms. Cerenzia. ?I would obviously never say choose us over someone else, but if you have struggled in the past and you feel that maybe you are making a donation and you are not seeing where that donation is going, you can always drop it off here and we can make sure it goes to a very deserving home.?

Donations are currently being accepted at Neighbourhood Network's Aurora office at 14988 Yonge Street. For more information, visit www.nnetwork.org.