

Helping those in need one shovel of snow at a time

By Brock Weir

If you're looking to have an impact on someone's life, it could be just be one shovel-full of snow away.

That's the message of Neighbourhood Network, the Aurora-based volunteer organization serving Aurora, Newmarket, East Gwillimbury and Georgina as they forge ahead with their volunteer snow removal program.

It is a service that connects able bodied people in the community with low-income seniors and persons with disabilities who would otherwise have trouble getting in and out of their homes after heavy snowfalls. If you're in need, and you meet the eligibility requirements, volunteers clear a path to your door, shovel the ends of your driveway which might be blocked by a passing snow plow, as well as sidewalks.

Potential recipients of the service must receive a seniors' tax credit or have a disability document.

‘If we don't live within those [boundaries] there is no way we will be able to meet the demand and miss those who are truly in need,’ says Steve Hinder of Neighbourhood Network.

Founded in 2008, Mr. Hinder says the program is the brainchild of John Taylor, Regional Councillor for Newmarket, who said the town had received numerous requests from seniors and persons with disabilities who ‘felt like prisoners in their own homes’ during the winter.

‘We knew there were people in the community who had someone living around the corner who would be more than happy to come around and help them out,’ says Mr. Hinder. ‘Our goal is to identify where those needs are and where the resources are and hook them up. The community has all the resources it needs to address these community issues and they just don't know one another exists. Our role is to put the two of them together.’

Anyone who is able and wants to have a real impact on the lives of others are ideal volunteers for the service, he adds.

‘The neat thing that has developed from this over the years is there have been some relationships where a senior living on their own, and a young person shows up and shovels snow and they have almost adopted them,’ says Mr. Hinder. ‘They all have hot chocolate together and develop a relationship and that is pretty cool.’

‘It is really grassroots community development.’

For more information on the program, visit www.neighbourhoodnetwork.org, or call 905-726-3737.