

?Holiday Helpers? will help families get the essentials this season



Families who struggled to make ends meet last Christmas before inflation began to march upward are likely in an even tougher position as the holiday season approaches this year.

Needs in the community continue to grow and organizations like Neighbourhood Network are looking for ways to keep up with the demand.

Neighbourhood Network's Holiday Gift Drive is now in full swing and receiving special emphasis this year is the Holiday Helper program.

For \$250, a Holiday Helper will provide the most urgently requested necessities for a local family in need, each of whom has been referred to the Aurora-based volunteer organization by partners and non-profits within the community.

?Needs are just growing and growing,? says Neighbourhood Network's Tanya Dennis. ?Here, our goal is to help as many people as we can [but] this year our approach was a bit different. Our ?Helpers' are bags that are filled with necessities such as, but not limited to, laundry soap, liquid soap, some towels or cloths, personal hygiene items, toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, body wash.

?The reason we're taking this approach is because over the last few years the wish list that is coming in from our families have been necessities. At the beginning it was on such a smaller scale and it was for toys and different things like that, but due to the rise in food insecurities and the rising cost of anything, we took the approach that if we can create as many holiday helpers as we can, we're going to provide necessities ? which is what people are asking for. Our goal is to distribute hopefully up to 100 Holiday Helpers and then we're also taking family wish lists and we're trying to offer those to families or individuals who have never received support from our holiday gift drive in the past. Those who have, we're hoping to offer them the Holiday Helper.?

Ms. Dennis says it has been especially difficult to see mothers, for instance, simply ask for household items this year. It's an indication just how difficult the struggle is. The ?conversation? has changed and ?so many families in our community are falling through the cracks.?

?We never want to turn anyone away. The important piece in our holiday gift drive is individuals must be represented by a partner agency of ours, other not for profits or charities that are partnered with Neighbourhood Network because we do not have the capacity to vet these families and with numbers growing and growing it is becoming a very big job,? she shares.

?We're so appreciative of all the support we've had in the community and we look forward to another successful holiday gift drive. We've become very lucky. It seems that every time we have a need come in we have the proper people in place who are just reaching

out to all of a sudden support. It has worked out really well in the past, we're hopeful it will work out again this year, but we're trying to support more people than we ever had before, which is a challenge. We're optimistic we can make it happen and we're going to make the holidays happier times for lots of families in the community.?

For more information on how to become involved in the Gift Drive, visit nnetwork.org.

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