

Kerry Bear brings warm and fuzzy fundraising to Kerry's Place Autism Services



By Brock Weir

You can spread the warm and fuzzies across the country ? while helping a great cause in the process ? through the Kerry Bear Challenge.

Launched this week by Kerry's Place Autism Services, the Kerry Bear Challenge throws down the gauntlet to individuals, companies and organizations to spread the love with a \$30 minimum donation which will help hundreds of people across southern Ontario living on the Autism Spectrum (ASD) access the resources they need.

For each donation of \$30, Kerry's Place will send you ? or the person of your choice anywhere across Canada ? a plush ?Kerry Bear,? a cuddly teddy bear sporting a snazzy Kerry's Place t-shirt.

?Money raised from selling the bears goes directly to support Kerry's Place services and programs across all regions,? says Kate Tansley of Kerry's Place. ?This year, the price point is \$30 ? historically, it has been a \$100 donation ? and that is because we want more people to engage and enjoy the Kerry Bears. They are very squishy and very fun with their little t-shirts, so we wanted to make sure we were able to do something that would be at a more accessible price point and would allow more people to be a part of the challenge.?

Among the first to be a part of this year's Kerry Bear Challenge is Mayor-Elect Tom Mrakas, who received a Kerry Bear of his own on Wednesday morning from Ms. Tansley and Kerry Brown, Fundraising Assistant for Kerry's Place Autism Services.

?Dollars raised from Kerry Bears support all programs and services,? Ms. Tansley said. ?Whether it is social groups or respite, different programs, whether that is an educational program for families, siblings, grandparents, or teachers or anybody to come in, we offer programs for people to come in and learn about ASD and we also have social skills building groups. Then, of course, we go into different age groups. We've got a camp. Our young adults programming also would have the social skills building, the resume writing, the jobs training, and helping people integrate into the community so they can become fully committed members of the community, participating in ways that are comfortable for them. It is also educating people who would be hiring those folks so they know how to best interact with somebody with ASD in the workplace.?

The Kerry Bear initiative typically comes out twice a year, first in World Autism Awareness Month and again in the holiday season. Christmas, however, is the main event and a time when Kerry's Place encourages companies and groups to get in on the act and help make a difference.

?People in the office could have a little breakfast bar, everybody could bring in a little buffet-style dish and contribute a certain amount of money to share lunch together,? said Ms. Tansley. ?If you have a CEO or a senior manager, maybe you want to pie them in the face and everybody's raising money. Maybe you want to have, in lieu of your staff party, or you want to cut back on your holiday staff party and say, ?we're going to do without the holiday extravagance this year and make a donation to Kerry's Place by using some of those funds to support people with ASD.' Those are just some of the ideas people do.?

But, you have to act fast. If you want to receive your Kerry Bear in time for Christmas, or have it delivered to someone else across the country in time for the festive season, Ms. Tansley encourages everyone put in their donations by the middle of December, or

visit Kerry's Place online to register individual fundraising events and initiatives.

More information can be found at kerrysplace.org/kerrybears.

?I am honoured to be presented with a Kerry Bear,? said Mayor-Elect Mrakas. ?I am looking forward to continuing the tradition of having the bear in the Mayor's office and I think the work Kerry's Place does is extraordinary for our community. I think that we're all proud that they reside here in the Town of Aurora.?