

Kettle Campaign aims to raise tens of thousands for valuable community services



The jingling of bells at malls, plazas and shops used to be a sure sign there was a Salvation Army Kettle nearby.

In recent years, due in part to the global pandemic, some electronic taps have been added to the festive soundtrack as passers-by were able to use their plastic to contribute to the cause ? but nothing beats a person-to-person interaction at the Kettles, say campaign organizers.

Now that the Salvation Army's annual Christmas Kettle Campaign is underway, the local branch of the service organization, Northridge Community Church, is looking for volunteers to staff Kettles for the balance of the holiday season ? all to benefit programs that serve the community.

?The Kettle Campaign is our number-one fundraiser for services throughout the year, not just for Christmas,? says Angela Covert of Northridge Community Church. ?It's not just for Christmas, it's specifically for our services and programs, not the church focus.?

While tap technology was a welcome addition to the Christmas Kettle Campaign at the height of the global pandemic when finding volunteers to run them was rather more difficult, Covert says that while taps still bring the money in, \$200 is lost for every Kettle shift that is not filled by a human.

?The upside of the taps is they can be used when someone is not there,? says Covert. ?What I want to see is how many of these taps are being used, which they are, when people aren't there. They definitely aren't used as much as when no one was there. Those taps are beneficial for when we definitely don't have someone there, but someone should always be there.?

Last year, the local Kettle Campaign raised \$27,500 through taps, which they were grateful for, but now that it's easier this season for volunteers to be on Kettles with the lifting of public health restrictions, they're hoping to hit a fundraising target of \$35,000.

?Taps aren't outpacing the money, the cash is what we see the most and are seeing an increase,? says Covert.

The funds collected over the course of the Kettle Campaign do not go into church coffers or religious initiatives, she stresses, but rather to community programs that are run out of Northridge in Aurora, as well as their location at Newmarket Plaza, near the Salvation Army Thrift Store.

One such initiative is called Pathways to Hope, sponsored by the Salvation Army, which matches individuals with others in the

community who might be ?in need of certain kinds of guidance in their life? with an eye to goal-setting.

?An individual might need financial goals, education goals, family-related issues, etc. Work, employment housing,? says Covert. ?At our Centre in Aurora here, we have our mental health workers ? two psychotherapists who do one-on-one counselling and group work virtually as well as in person ? we have our emergency food bank, and that is for individuals who have already used their local food bank within our region but find themselves short during the week. We see that increase and people make appointments once a month for that.

?We have our youth and children program that are non-church, things like our Scouts program, our Munchkin Mornings for little ones, day camps throughout the summer, where we also sponsor children to the overnight camps at Jackson's Point, and more. We also have grandparent groups for a lot of grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren full-time, along with Grief Share, a program for individuals going through grief as an adult.?

Additional programs, such as their Homelessness Prevention Program, which helps offset the cost of hydro, gas, and housing for people in need, receive funding from the Regional Municipality of York.

?We see a lot of people from different religious groups and the Salvation Army clearly states on our website that we are across the board and are at many tables,? says Covert. ?Our counsellors will work with that person in whatever needs they have. We don't expect anyone to attend our church just because you received services, and we service everyone in the community.?

As the local Kettle Campaign continues, Covert and Northridge Community Church are looking for people to step up and help run the Kettles in two-hour shifts. For more information on how you can contribute, contact Angela Covert at Angela.Covert@salvationarmy.ca.

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