

Mobility Maze builds awareness of accessibility challenges



By Brock Weir

The old saying goes, you can't truly know what someone experiences until you walk a mile in their shoes.

But what if walking is not necessarily an option and people have to make their way around in cumbersome wheelchairs or other challenging mobility devices, and then have to take on the added challenge of taking public transit?

That is something the Community Legal Clinic of York Region hopes to raise awareness of with their Mobility Maze, a three hour experiential and educational workshop planned for the Aurora Community Centre this June.

'We realised quickly as a group that many people are unaware of the difficulties many people face when trying to get to doctors' appointments, school, work, grocery stores, and special occasions and trying to access the community,' said Kim McKinnon of the Community Legal Clinic, which provides legal assistance to low-income York Region residents. 'Our group decided we wanted to do something on Accessibility Awareness Week in 2013 to highlight these difficulties in York Region and work toward a better transportation system in York Region for those of us with disabilities.'

The event will serve, she said, to highlight the many challenges and barriers that people face in the realm of accessible transportation, with a particular focus on York Region Transit's Mobility Plus service.

'The more people that are involved, the more awareness is created.'

The group got the idea from the Poverty Maze, which challenge community and business leaders to go through a variety of challenges faced every day by low-income or even homeless York Region residents to access services, shelter, and food in the wider community.

'The Mobility Maze will replicate as best as possible what it would be like to take Mobility Plus services in York Region from the point of application to the point of travel destination, making an appointment and travelling back,' said Ms. McKinnon. 'There will be booths set up and people will come in, get instructions on what will happen that day, and they will be given identities with a journey outlining where it is they are supposed to be going. They will then begin their journey and attend different booths to determine how to get to their destination and back.'

'Employers, doctors, places where people would go for appointments, grade school kids, and everybody is welcome to come and try and understand the difficulties people might face. It is opened up to whomever might be impacted or involved with anybody who has a disability and have to get to an appointment, or a blood test, or shopping, and we would particularly love medical people to come

out.?

One of the biggest challenges facing communities and people within them living with disabilities is trying to make the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) work and meet the objectives they are trying to achieve, she added. In looking at the broader guidelines and implication of the act, communities can sometimes lose focus of the people the act was designed to assist.

?In the attempt to follow the guidelines they are sort of not seeing the people, who it is impacting and their abilities,? she said. ?They are clumping people together as disabilities and they are not a clump. Everyone is an individual. One of the key things that is a problem we see is they are trying to do just a brush stroke when implementing the act and ensuring inclusivity and integration of the system without really looking at whether or not it is working.

?I hope with the Mobility Maze, people who can make a difference like community leaders and people with York Region Transit are prepared to sit down with the people and listen to them and make appropriate changes that will be beneficial for the individuals who have to ride the service and make it a fair and transparent process for people.

?If the Region is not willing to do it, there might be someone of influence who will say, ?Come on, get on board and let's move forward and get some positive change for people!?"

The Mobility Maze takes place at the Aurora Community Centre on Wednesday, June 5. Registration begins at 1 p.m. For more information, call 905-508-5018.