

Mobility Maze puts everyday challenges into perspective



By Brock Weir

Whether you drive, bus, cab, or walk, getting to your ultimate destination is something people all too often take for granted ? but local accessibility advocates encouraged people to see the other side of the coin Wednesday in the Mobility Maze.

Over 25 residents, stakeholders and lawmakers were put in wheelchairs, assigned walkers, and tethered to blocks mimicking having an aid dog by their side. After some brief instructions and getting a tentative handle on moving about in their chairs, manoeuvering their walkers, or making sure they had everything they needed for their furry set of eyes, they left their own names and identities at the door to live the day in the life of an individual for whom this is a regular and often challenging part of their daily life.

?People might have had different ideas or expectations going into the event and at the end of the day what we wanted to do was raise awareness,? said organizers. ?All the scenarios acted out today are based on real life scenarios that have been provided to us through surveys from community members.

They were speaking to participants in a debriefing session the Community Centre following the Maze where people who completed their challenges spoke of their experiences and what they learned. ?Susan ?, as portrayed by political advocate and blogger Darryl Wolk.

The Newmarket resident said going through the challenge put many of concerns he has getting around the GTA into perspective.

?The first thing I noticed is I used to complain if I had to wait five minutes for the subway, but people might not be able to go to routine doctors' appointments,? he said, of a day in Susan's life, relying on the guide dog as his eyes, navigating transit and noisy traffic to get to her appointment.

?You might find yourself in a situation where you are constantly waiting. I can't imagine walking with all those horns and distractions and having to rely on the kindness of strangers ? and at the end of the day I missed my doctor's appointment anyway.?

?It was the tension of wondering what is going to happen now,? added Debbie (A.K.A. Susan 1). ?Someone here might help me get to the next location, but what is going to happen then??

During the maze, Mr. Barker joined two other wheelchair users at the ?customer service? desk, doling out transit cards and some often inconvenient schedules to users looking to book a trip on Mobility Plus. While he admits he was hard on some of the people in the lineup, it is something he said he encounters all the time.

?[I wanted people] to understand the challenges we're facing and understand that we're not asking for the moon,? he said. ?We're just asking for regular, every day service like everyone else to go to work, or go to the movies with friends. We're just asking for what normal, everyday people go through and we can't get that. We want to know why.

Wednesday's Mobility Maze, however, was observed and participated in by members of Mobility Plus. They took exception to some of the scenarios that were handed out to. They have heard some of those concerns, said manager Sharon Doyle, and opened up lines of dialogue, but to no avail.

?A lot of what they said happened doesn't really happen,? she said. ?We have had meetings with them, they have made some insinuations, we have gone to some meetings to try to diffuse that, we thought we had put it to rest, and they still rear their ugly heads.?

One exaggeration, she said, was the time it takes to book an appointment, noting that people can book from seven days prior to the appointment or up to a day before the requested trip. There were, she added, a lot of ?untruths.?

While Ms. Doyle did not participate in the challenge, scheduling and dispatch supervisor Shelley Ayres did. She said people in the customer service booth were asking ?incorrect questions and giving way out there times for booking trips? that does not reflect the reality. When asked if she saw any value in the Maze, she said she did not.