

New Aurora, Newmarket, and Georgina moms top demand at Rose of Sharon



By Brock Weir

Rose of Sharon provides services for young mothers to young families throughout York Region, but when it comes to the number of people coming through their doors, Aurora is among the top three municipalities that come to use their services.

The Newmarket-based non-profit has lent a hand to young moms since its inception nearly 30 years ago and, for the second year running, it has been named one of the 15 community beneficiaries of the annual Wild, Wild West Hoedown, hosted by Magna International next weekend.

Rose of Sharon provides help for young women and, more recently, young fathers as well, to learn how, and what resources are available to help them raise their children and form strong family bonds. With Aurora leading the way with Newmarket and Georgina with families in need, proceeds from this year's Hoedown will have a direct impact on the community.

?When we applied to Hoedown, we were really thinking about one program specifically, and that is our Mothers Matters program,? says Melissa Robinson of Rose of Sharon. ?The program works in collaboration with Children's Aid of York Region (CAS) and we get moms who are at risk of child welfare involvement, or have child welfare involvement, work alongside the CAS to understand what they need to do and what is being asked of them by their workers to improve their parental capacity.

?It is very strength-based and it is to encourage young mothers to raise secure children.?

A significant chunk of the program focuses on parenting skills, attachment, and reducing isolation that might be felt by young mothers who are experiencing the same challenges in their lives. The program currently runs twice a year but with their share of the Hoedown pot, they hope to increase support not only to existing programs but also get a third session off the ground.

?The biggest thing with our moms is really to get them to a place,? says Ms. Robinson. ?One way the money is supportive to us is that transportation is a huge barrier to service for a lot of these moms. If we can get them to a program where they are not isolated, that is really important. Sometimes there is a lot of embarrassment for them, there is a lot of judgement towards them, specifically to young mothers. If they are in any kind of difficult situation, we want them to really come out to programs to feel confident as parents, be with other parents of the same age. It is difficult for a mom that is 17 or 18 to be in the same program as a 35 year old. They are in very different ages and stages of their lives and they have different issues.?

With Aurora, Newmarket and Georgina appearing to be the communities in biggest need of Rose of Sharon's services, they aim to support any women that come to them from their teens to the age of 25. As to why these numbers are trending higher in York Region's northern tier, Ms. Robinson says they have a few theories. Talking to those who come into their programs, they find those

in the southern tier typically take advantage of programs offered in the evenings or at different times because these mothers are often working or in school.

In recent years, Rose of Sharon has also found a growing interest in their services from young dads, often looking for counselling alongside their partners or co-parents.

?It is great,? says Ms. Robinson. ?When you're talking about family strengthening strategies and keeping families together, albeit they are young, it doesn't matter, but it is a great way to put forward the effort together. The challenge we find now is our services are directly to the mums and we know that when we're supporting mum, we're supporting the father or any other immediate family members.?

After a recent pilot program based in Georgina focusing on healthy relationships, communications, and how to co-parent, they had a great reception from eight couples looking to build this family bridge. Now the big question is whether they will be able to take this program out of the pilot stage into something more substantial.

?It comes down to resources, so a long-term vision for us is to either look at more joint initiatives with agencies that have some of these programs, or be a lead and expand it to fathers and more couple counselling for families. It's not just about young mothers, but others who are helping her care for her baby.?

A full weekend of Hoedown celebrations kicks off with the finals of the 2014 Hoedown Showdown on Friday, September 12, and the main Hoedown event on Saturday, September 13. For ticket information, visit www.hoedown.ca. For more information on Rose of Sharon, visit www.therose.ca.