

Pampered Pillowcase project is holiday success story



It was an idea spearheaded by three Aurora students to make the holidays just a little bit brighter for women in need, but now the Pampered Pillowcase project has gone international.

Founded by Lexi, Amanda and Avery Benlolo in 2014, the Pampered Pillowcase started off with a simple concept: filling a pillow case with toiletries, cosmetics, and a few other goodies to help women in need feel special at this time of year, working in tandem with the Women's Centre of York Region.

It is evidently a sentiment that is shared well beyond York Region as the sisters prepare to welcome a chapter in Tennessee into the fold, joining the ranks of other Pampered Pillowcase groups in Montreal, New York City, and Long Island.

?This is so amazing,? says Avery Benlolo, a student at King's Country Day School, of the project's growth. ?We have been able to put together over 1,000 pillow cases for women in need all across North America.?

Initially, the sisters spread word about their initiative with family and friends through social media, and the idea has simply snowballed from there. Just last month, they welcomed dozens of their peers to their Aurora home to put the finishing touches on another batch of pillow cases, filling more than 50 packages for clients not only of the Women's Centre of York Region but, for the first time this year, Jewish Family & Child.

?The whole idea of the Pampered Pillowcase is these are items that women would never even consider going out and buying for themselves,? says Avery. ?They are things that make women feel really special, so there are things like pyjamas, slippers, nail polish, some makeup products. Every year we have been able to find some additions to add, but the staples and underlying value of what the Pampered Pillowcase hasn't changed. Something we have been doing for the past couple of years during the holiday season is we have not only been filling it with products, but we have each girl putting together pillowcases make a card, which is really nice as well. They have put in a card just saying, ?Happy Holidays. Remember someone is there for you. You're being thought of,' and they make their own personal message which, even though it is not this big tangible item, it really makes a difference in people's holiday season.

?Giving a product is one thing; really putting emotion and thought into it and including this message just saying, ?You're being thought of during the holiday season, we hope you're doing well,' I think gives it so much more value as well.?

November's in-house event was their second annual ?Pampered Pillowcase Stuffing Party.? Ahead of the event, the Benlolos contacted their partner organizations to get the needs of their clients, including slipper and pyjama sizes. Looking at the number of people they could invite to the party, they set a target of stuffing 50 unique cases.

Each invited ?packer? is asked to bring 25 of a common item on the respective wish lists, such as bottles of nail polish, nail kits, and individual makeup bags.

Once the team was assembled they put together nothing short of an assembly line to get the job done.

?It is really nice because you're not only donating the items, we're actually seeing exactly where they are going and what is being done with them,? explains Avery. ?When you're putting together the donations yourself, you give it a little more thought and consideration. One of the most important things to emphasize about our initiative is women, especially during the holiday season, who are going to these shelters and centres for support, they often are facing extreme difficulty and hardship. Some people are coming from poverty, abuse and they don't have any sort of time or money to spend on themselves. I think an organization like Pampered Pillowcase really makes them feel special and thought of ? especially during the holiday season.?

As they prepare to welcome another chapter to their growing group, Avery stresses that the more chapters out there making a positive difference in their community the better.

?I think this is such an amazing opportunity and such an amazing cause. We have already expanded across North America, which is so amazing, and there is always room for more. We're all very supportive with anyone expanding and my sisters and I are able to really help people out. It is really what it's all about.?

Adds Lexi: ?When we started it, we didn't think it would get as big as it is. We're so lucky this is continuing to different universities such as Western and Queens and throughout North America.?

For more information visit pamperedpillowcase.com

By Brock Weir