

Parents urge people be aware after bag stolen from man with Down Syndrome



By Brock Weir

Ryan Grant had just finished a day's work when he stopped by Aurora Town Hall late last month to buy his April York Region Transit pass.

For Ryan, the monthly pass is not just a nice-to-have, it is an everyday necessity in getting to and from home, his jobs, and his volunteer opportunities.

Ryan has Down Syndrome and is an active member of the Able Network, the Aurora-based organization assisting individuals with learning disabilities achieve independence in life, work, and play.

With the guidance of Able Network, Ryan is able to get around Aurora, where he works at Club Aurora and Sunrise Senior Living and travels between Able Network and his Newmarket home.

He temporarily lost that independence, however, as he made his way home from picking up that bus pass.

Heading home from Town Hall, he stopped to catch the northbound bus on the northwest corner of Yonge and Wellington where his parents say his bag ? containing his bus pass, cell phone and wallet ? was stolen.

?He put his bag down on the ground and when the bus came, he went to grab it and it was gone,? says his mom, Debby. ?There was another friend of his that goes to his program that Ryan was speaking with and from what we can tell, he saw someone grab the bag. He also has Down Syndrome, so it is hard to get a description, which direction, and anything like that in terms of what actually happened.

?When we quiz them, I think they are scared they will get in trouble for something, we don't get a lot of answers, and they are used to getting accused of things.?

Listing off the items stolen along with the bag, Ryan places emphasis on the stolen wallet, but at the end of the day it contained little more than his bank card and a few gift cards. Police, say Debby and father Greg, however, have been most concerned about the wallet and, for them, that misses the point.

?We felt horrible, not just the fact that somebody had perhaps stolen from someone who has Down Syndrome, but you also feel a little bit violated all the same if someone takes your stuff that you need day to day,? says Greg.

Adds Debby: ?As parents, we have to feel that he is safe out there. The cell phone thing is safety for him. Everywhere he goes he has to text [the Able program] to say he is at the bus, he has finished work and those types of things. We have to feel he is safe in the community. When something like this happens, you feel that safety is gone and you start to worry every day whether he is safe at the bus stop.?

His parents say they are lucky he got home. The bus driver in question let him on the bus to get him home because Ryan couldn't call to say he was stranded.

Following the incident, Debby says she contacted the police and have been left with little to no response. Particularly frustrating, she says, is the fact this particular bus stop is equipped with security cameras and when they asked if those had been looked at, ?it was like I had requested something crazy.?

The Grants say they have gone public so they can raise awareness. Members of the Able Network are familiar to Aurora commuters in the Yonge and Wellington area as they set out each morning from the Rectory at Trinity Anglican Church for their jobs, volunteer opportunities, and to work out at Club Aurora.

?If you travel in Aurora at any point in the day on weekdays you will see these guys out and about,? says Debby. ?They are going to their jobs, they are going to their volunteer work, going to the gym, and it puts a smile on my face seeing them out and about, independent and safe. Maybe if everyone is aware we can keep that safety up.?