

Respite fund started for parents with disabled kids

By Brock Weir

Caregivers often go about the community unsung for their work, with few supports out there to help them along the way ? but the Rotary Club of Aurora is looking to change that.

Beginning this February, the local service club will establish the Rotary Club of Aurora Children's Emergency Respite Fund, a fund with an initial infusion of \$5,000 to benefit caregivers ? parental or otherwise ? of children with severe disabilities within Aurora.

Slated to get off the ground in the early part of the month ahead, administrative support ? and review of applications ? will be undertaken by York Support Services Network.

For Aurora Rotarian Katie Ablett, Director of Community Service for the Club, the fund is a natural extension of Rotary's motto of Service Above Self.

?For about a year now, I have been contemplating how there are wonderful caregivers who work very hard to provide unpaid care and support to children who have severe disabilities, and a variety of other types of caregivers,? says Ms. Ablett. ?There are lots of families that have a child with a severe disability, there are informal caregivers, typically a parent or somebody else, who is a dedicated support provider for them. Through this fund, when the families find themselves in a time of crisis, or an emergency, either because the child's needs have increased dramatically or suddenly, or because the caregivers themselves have experienced a crisis, they will be able to apply for funding through this fund so that a respite worker would be able to come in and give some relief.

?The intention would be an immediate source of direct support to families who experience a crisis and have a child with severe disabilities.?

Working with the York Support Services Network, a registered charity, to take in donations and administer the program, will ?streamline the process? so families and clients in most immediate need can apply for and receive some of the funding.

The \$5,000 infusion from Rotary funds is hoped to be just the beginning, says Ms. Ablett, as they hope others service clubs, individuals and groups come on board and support this community endeavour ? and perhaps spread the wealth beyond Aurora in the near future.

?The Rotary Club of Aurora is focusing on Aurora, but it is actually our hope to raise funds and awareness across other groups, including other Rotary clubs and try to help build the fund and other funds like it because there is a growing need,? she says. ?We're hoping the community will be able to make donations to the fund. We're planning to host a golf tournament in May and those funds will be dedicated to this fund. We're thinking of it as a permanent fund we hope to continue contributing to and we hope that funding will continue to grow for this initiative.

?We understand that this is the first fund of its kind in York Region and the Rotary Club of Aurora is excited to help fill this critical gap."

For more information about how to access the fund, families are asked to contact Maria Guevara, Respite Access Facilitator for York Support Services at 905-898-6455 x2385. For more on Rotary, visit www.rotaryaurora.com.