

## Salvation Army helps community make merry this Holiday Season ? with your support



The Salvation Army is set to help nearly 300 area families ? and counting ? make the Christmas and Holiday season bright, and are looking for the community's support in helping make dreams come true.

Salvation Army volunteers are hard at work transforming the former LCBO building on the southwest corner of Yonge Street and Brookland Avenue into a yuletide shopping experience for families in need.

Those who are looking for a hand this holiday season need to register by this Friday, December 5, with distribution set to begin on Monday.

?When we start our distribution, which goes until December 20, it's going to include the two Saturdays on December 13 and 20 for those who are working and our volunteers will escort parents around our space so they know where everything is and they'll help them in choosing the toys for their children,? says Angela Covert of the Salvation Army's Northridge Community Church.

But it's not just toys ? games, books, and much more are also available.

As are other supports to help families make ends meet in ways many people might take for granted.

The Salvation Army volunteers are actively encouraging the community to donate gift cards, or even funds to aid the Salvation Army secure gift cards, to help address food security.

?People still want to give toys, which is very fair, but where I struggle is I'm getting people walking in the door who come in and say they need winter gear or a voucher for the thrift store, or grocery cards,? says Covert of the needs they are seeing at Northridge. ?I have a lot of people coming in now even for Esso gift cards because they're living in their car. December is a wonderful month and people are very generous, but I love it when people can see past December, so gift cards help with that.

?I still have families who are coming in excited about toys, but I'm starting to hear their stories of other struggles, of gaps in services that they're experiencing; if their children have autism, for example, they tell me these stories of real gaps they're seeing for themselves in how to properly support their children. Regardless of Christmastime being all joy and fun, it's not for everyone. If we can just relieve that stress right now with the toy piece, the food card piece, and encouraging them??

Salvation Army Northridge provides a wide array of community programs, including food bank services and mental health

programs. While those seeking out these services often express their concerns about being able to put food on their table and pay their rent, Covert says the gift program unfolding at Yonge and Brookland "at least provides some relief from the concern of what they're going to do for their children's Christmas gifts."

"We already have existing clients who are using our services throughout the year" that would be our food bank, our Affordable Fresh Food Market, which is a partnership with York Region Food Network, our mental health services, children's programs like day camps, overnight camps, the Single Moms programs that we're running, those who come in for clothing throughout the year," she says. "Because we're serving them throughout the year, we're able to connect with them specifically at Christmastime for things like our toy program."

Supporting the Toy Program this year is the York Regional Police through their Holiday Heroes campaign and the Town of Aurora's Toys for Tickets program, which allows those who received parking infractions in November to pay off their tickets through toy donations. Reflective of current needs, the Toys for Tickets program is also accepting gift cards in lieu of the regular payment.

These gift cards not only help families put appropriate food on the table, but are also an opportunity to provide for teens who are often overlooked at this time of year as donations are frequently honed in on toys for younger ones.

In addition to their own efforts, Covert notes they are also supporting gift programs for more than 20 other community organizations.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter