

Salvation Army tackles unseen problem through Kettle Campaign



By Brock Weir

As you do your Christmas shopping and hear the gentle jingle of the Salvation Army's bells reminding you to drop some money into their kettles, chances are you envision your money going to help underprivileged families celebrate the season with a nice turkey and a few gifts to open.

And that is certainly the case, as the Salvation Army has now taken over the former Canadian Tire location at Yonge and Murray Drive as their toy distribution centre, but your money is also going towards addressing some issues that sometimes go unnoticed. "A portion of the proceeds go towards the actual Christmas Toy Distribution Program but need is not restricted to any particular season of the year," says Major Brian Bishop of the Salvation Army. "Certainly after Christmas, we are going to have people in need in our communities, people that are going to be coming to us that are going to require food, some clothing, some vouchers and other forms of assistance, whether it is emotional care, grief support, and there are a variety of programs we offer that are funded by the proceeds that people generously give to us during the holiday season."

Last year, the Salvation Army of Central York Region served 1,100 applications representing approximately 3,000 people. Of those 3,000, 37 per cent were found to be single parent families, a stat which Major Bishop says is "fairly significant."

"It reflects the struggles within marriages today," he says. "It reflects the ramifications as well of broken marriages and the implications that is going to have on their children. I think there is a rippling effect as a result of the broken family."

"One of the things we are looking at, and I think there is an indirect link, is we're going to look at establishing support services for teenagers that are battling some mental health issues. We currently offer an emotional rescue program for people who are adults every single Monday night with appropriate facilitation and a chaplain, and even a clinical counsellor on site that provides support for people who are struggling with their emotional stability."

"Certainly we're seeing evidence of that among some of our teenage community and even younger than that. You sort of see how these unfortunate situations within families are creating levels of anxiety and stress amongst some of the young people in our community."

But Christmas is supposed to be a time of peace and joy, and the Christmas Toy Program is at the forefront of their focus right now. When the Salvation Army is asked what is needed around this time of year from a material rather than financial perspective, they often answer the question with another question: "what kind of toys would your children like?"

The kids in need are no different from the kids who want for nothing and their likes and dislikes are similar, more often than not. From a food perspective, non-perishable items are always top of mind for the Salvation Army as they do not have the storage and freezer space to accommodate fresh produce, for instance.

The Salvation Army also zeroes in on gift cards when it comes to turkey.

"We understand we live in a cultural diversity today and not everybody likes turkey, so this gives people the opportunity pick up the perishable item of their choice," says Major Bishop.

"We are very, very blessed in that we work in partnership for the Christmas Assistance program with Holiday Heroes with the York Regional Police, along with the Lions Club. These partners certainly walk alongside us and help us to have the kind of product that is required for toys, not that we would ever turn any toys away whatsoever. Certain financial donations give us the flexibility then to assess what our needs are to then go and buy what is required."

Considering standing on a kettle for a two hour shift, whether or not a business wants to adopt a kettle or whether or not a business wants to stand on a kettle for a two hour shift, that would be one of the greatest forms of contributing to our Christmas initiative and that goes directly towards supporting our Christmas programs and the programs in the coming year. Volunteers are always welcome and we can certainly value from more and more people stepping up.

One of the things I have come to appreciate is the feedback we receive from people who that have had the opportunity to stand on the kettle. In fact, there are many people who because it is their first time experiencing, they want to be able to do it again and again. It not only feels good to give back in that way, but you know very well those dollars that have been collected are going towards those who are genuinely in need. There is a genuine sense of fulfilment, I believe, and a sense of satisfaction knowing that you are giving your time, which raises money that goes towards a good cause.

To sign for a shift on a kettle at locations across Central York Region, contact Nancy Harrison at nancy.harrison@horthridgesa.com or call 905-895-6276.

Every dollar that people give are so appreciated and we're so grateful to that kind of support, says Major Bishop. It enables us every year to help others that are in need. As our community grows the needs continue to grow and if it wasn't for the generosity of people, there would be a lot of people I know who would be finding the Christmas season a difficulty.