

Second-annual Mental Health gala raised tens of thousands for local care



The Salvation Army's Northridge Community Church was a sea of joy last month as they hosted their second-annual Gala in support of their mental health programs.

This year's event, which was held at Northridge's campus on Leslie Street, just north of Wellington Street East, raised an estimated \$25,000 for their well-used programs, allowing them in turn significantly increase their capacity.

?Have you ever felt like you were part of something really bigger than you are? If you're wondering what that is like, just look around the room,? said Vicki Nishihama, a Registered Psychotherapist at Northridge, addressing an auditorium full of dignitaries, church leaders and members, and residents at large. ?Tonight, you are part of something that is way bigger than any of us singularly.?

Last month marked Nishihama's fourth anniversary working with Northridge and this one, she said, was an anniversary she was particularly looking forward to as it is a season of growth and change.

?I am happy to announce we have gone from one therapist to two therapists, to this year we're on-boarding three interns,? she said. ?These women are awesome and they have been chosen to work with us here, committing to mental health services in the area.?

One of the services and programs offered at Northridge uses the S.T.A.I.R. model developed by CAMH, based on "Screening, Triage, Assessment, Intervention, and Reintegration.? Northridge has offered this service twice in 2024 and the psychotherapist said participants process trauma symptoms together, learn practical skills to increase emotional regulation, and how to develop healthier relationships together.

?Over the years, I have noticed the S.T.A.I.R. program for trauma has created a bridge between the services offered here at this church and other community mental health providers,? she concluded. ?We get referrals all the time [from] social workers, case workers, Southlake hospital, psychiatrists ? it's wonderful to all work together to be part of something that is bigger than you are and all of this helps to provide and instills optimism and hope in our community. That is why you're here tonight ? to celebrate the past in the present and to help us with our view to the future.?

Supporting this vision was Captain Fred Reid, Pastor at Northridge, who said their tagline is ?Giving Hope Today.?

??Hope' is an interesting word because, for so many people, hope can look so different and we are very blessed and privileged to be able to provide hope in so many ways, whether it is a box of food for people who come for our supplementary food bank, and hope is fully covered; whether it is providing camping experience for kids who couldn't afford to go, hope maybe looks like a summer

camp. For others, hope can look like finding a sense of community and a sense of home?particularly tonight [as] we celebrate that hope looks like the opportunity to speak to someone who cares and who can help,? he said.

?This evening, I want to thank you for your partnership in equipping us to give hope ? part of our commitment to you who support us and our community is we will help and we will give hope. Thank you so much for your partnership, for your kindness in coming and supporting.?

Amongst those lending their support to the gala in-person were Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, and Mayor Tom Mrakas.

?The Salvation Army Central York Region is doing amazing work supporting dozens of people in our community through both individual and family group therapy. We know that it is getting harder and harder to keep up with growing demand for mental health support, especially as our collective understanding of the importance of mental health keeps evolving,? said Mayor Mrakas.

?Mental health is health and anyone in our community who needs professional support should be able to access it and that's really what tonight's gala is all about: all of us coming together so that the Salvation Army can expand their services, reach more community members, and change lives. I am so thankful for everyone's support tonight and it is reflective of the caring and compassionate nature of our community. I want to once again thank the Salvation Army of Central York Region for the work they are doing in our community and I thank all of you for coming out tonight.?

By Brock Weir