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Small gifts can make a big impact over the holiday season: Neighbourhood Network

Socks might not be at the top of everyone's Christmas list, but for local families in need it can make a world of difference.

As Christmas approaches, Neighbourhood Network is looking at the little things that can make a big impact as they make a final push on their holiday gift drive.

Each year, the Aurora-based organization that connects local volunteers in northern York Region with non-profits and charities that need extra hands, partners with these organizations to make the holidays just a little warmer for lower-income and in-need clients.

Needs are always there, and Neighbourhood Network always strives to fill them, but these needs are always changing.

?For one family, the need seems to be for the necessities with moms always putting down socks, coats and boots for their kids, along with toiletries, toilet paper, and laundry detergent, but this year one of the moms got a sewing machine that one person bought for her,? says Tanya Dennis of Neighbourhood Network. ?The shopper said, ?I didn't want to not buy it because what if this is a way for her to make money?'

?A lot of the kids are asking for things that people might think are really big asks, such as a tablet, but the thing people are realizing is some of these kids don't have access to a computer, so someone went out and bought that child a tablet. It's not a big ask nowadays. If we go into another lockdown, this child will have a way to learn easier. It's a learning tool, it's not just for fun and games, and that was really nice to see.

?We have single mothers with three children, families who have kind of fallen through the cracks. COVID has also had a huge impact on people. For one woman and her child, she lost her job and she was in with her mother, but the mother has also lost her job all because of COVID. There is a woman in need of a mattress, so we're facilitating the picking up of a mattress ? all she wanted was a mattress and a teapot. We're just doing our best to make these things happen. Whether they want to give something like a mattress or just a million rolls of toilet paper, it feels like as a request comes in they are taken on and it is such a neat thing to see. It's a true Neighbourhood Network spirit this year.?

But it can't be done without help from members of the public.

While our definition of big-ticket items, particularly in light of the global pandemic, is shifting, the basics are always in demand.

Toiletries ? including feminine hygiene products and diapers ? and gift cards are ?huge? this year, says Ms. Dennis, particularly for partner organizations that don't have detailed wish lists for their families.

?Their hope is that if they do receive gift cards or monetary donations that parents and guardians can do their shopping,? says Ms. Dennis. ?It is a really uplifting experience for someone to be able to shop for their family, to be in control of what they are purchasing.?

Even a gift card to places like Tim Hortons or McDonalds can do a world of difference in raising families' spirits.

In addition to individuals being able to go over to Neighbourhood Network's website at nnetwork.org for an up-to-date list of needs, groups are also taking on the task, with a group of teachers from the York Region District School Board organizing toy drives, companies that have taken on adopting families, and much more.

The holidays are a time when the spirit of giving is at its highest, but people are sometimes unsure how to channel that giving.

?We appreciate families who come through organizations because we know they need to be taken care of, but we have had some people when people search [for help] our website comes up right away so someone actually reached out from Alberta looking for help. He's a newly-sober man who had lost his children but because of his sobriety he now has his kids for Christmas.

?We're doing our best to make these things happen. It has been super great to see neighbours helping neighbours. Our community continues to come together, even during difficult times.?

By Brock Weir EditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter