

Students' idea blooms for Autism Awareness Day



By Brock Weir

Spring is here, the mercury is finally starting to climb, and soon the little sprouts popping up in local gardens will be in full flower. But, if you're looking to get a head start on bringing some spring blooms into your house ? while contributing to a good cause at the same time ? look no further than Tulips for Autism.

Tulips for Autism, which was launched to coincide with World Autism Awareness Day next Monday, April 2, is the brainchild of Aurora High School's Empowering Students Partnership (ESP) and student Amanda Bishop.

Through Tulips for Autism, members of the Aurora High School (AHS) community and members of the community at large can order five tulips sourced by Aurora Greenhouse at a cost of \$10 a bunch through April 10 and proceeds from each purchase will directly benefit the programs and services provided by the Aurora-based Kerry's Place Autism Services.

?Our group was coming up with ideas on what we wanted to do for our ESP club, which is throughout schools in York Region, and we really liked Kerry's Place because they work a lot with students who are on the autism spectrum,? explains Amanda, who was recently recognized by MPP Chris Ballard with the Leading Women/Leading Girls Award for her leadership within the community. ?They provide lots of different initiatives to help like summer camps, and we really liked that because our club is all about empowering students. We figured that we should do something for Autism Awareness Month in April ? and why not sell tulips? They are a nice spring flower.?

The first step, once they landed on tulips, was to contact Aurora Greenhouse which, she said ?gave us a pretty good deal.?
Then, it was a matter of logistics.

Using the website School Cash Online, the club developed a point of purchase for all students and parents to be able to buy. For community members outside of Aurora High School, Kerry's Place provides an online portal for the purchases.

?I think it is really incredible to see we have students in our community who are interested in autism awareness and want to raise funds to support programs and services that are offered to those with autism in their community,? says Kate Tansley, Fundraising Manager for Kerry's Place Autism Services.

During this month, Ms. Tansley says Kerry's Place hopes to highlight the principle, particularly among students, that ?just because you're different doesn't mean you're any worse or any better than someone else.?

?Individuals with autism can do the same things as you and I, or anyone else, but they might have a different way of going about it,? she says. ?I think [it is] that acceptance piece of knowing that it is okay to be different and knowing that it is okay that you might have a classmate who is a little bit different from you and being accepting of how they may approach a certain task or a certain problem. While it may be different from how you would approach it, it doesn't mean that it is wrong.?

In addition to Tulips for Autism, Kerry's Place is carrying out a number of initiatives to mark World Autism Day on April 2 and World Autism Month to raise awareness. T-shirts are being sold online to build awareness and there is something for sports-minded supporters too.

On April 14, Kerry's Place is teaming up with the Toronto Marlies for an Autism Awareness Night where \$10 of every ticket sold will go to Kerry's Place ? and the arena will also provide a forum for Kerry's Place to get the word out about their organization and the services they provide.

?Lots of times our schools have paired up with us and done things like Change through Change where they actually give their change to make a change,? says Ms. Tansley. ?Other schools are undertaking different fundraising initiatives during the month of April to support Kerry's place. Tulips are really cool because we're thinking about the weather turning warmer, springing forth, and I think when we thinka bout spring we think about change and that's refreshing. I think this is really neat in how it pairs up because while we're thinking about autism awareness and the growth of these flowers, we will be able to see our community grow in terms of awareness of what autism is.?

For more about Tulips for Autism and how you can order yourself a bunch, visit www.kerrysplace.org/tulipsforautism.