

The Hard Knock Life benefits local eating disorders support group



By Brock Weir

The sun coming up tomorrow is a dream not shared alone by a plucky, curly-haired redhead growing up in a New York orphanage. But, the well-known songs of 'Annie' will come to life in Richmond Hill to spread a little sunshine on Aurora as well.

Tickets are now on sale at Eating Disorders of York Region's Riverwalk Wellness Centre (EDOYR) for the iconic musical 'Annie', which opens Friday, November 21 at 8 p.m. at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts.

Steppin' Out Theatrical Productions has given 200 tickets to Riverwalk to sell for the Friday night performance, with 100 per cent of all ticket sales going directly to local programs to support those living with disordered eating. There is a collaboration which has continued for nearly a decade, melding their love of the arts and giving back to the community.

'The initiative comes from them, their generosity, and how they support the community,' says Janice Morgante, Executive Director of Eating Disorders of York Region. 'We are really grateful for people who buy tickets directly from us. They are getting the value of this wonderful entertainment and Stepping Out, in its creative, genius way, is supporting our work.'

This support is needed now more than ever, says Ms. Morgante, as although eating disorders continue to be a problem for all ages, being battled not only by those living with disordered eating, but also their families, government support for treatment and counselling programs remains minimal.

'These funds'are absolutely essential to enable us to keep our doors open,' she says. 'We are not a government-funded agency, although disordered eating has the highest mortality rate of any mental health issue. It never fails to surprise doctors, frontline workers, teachers, guidance counsellors and families that we have no funding, with the exception of the Ontario Trillium Foundation for community development grants. Everyone is blown out of the water by that fact because disordered eating is so serious and so prevalent.'

Eating Disorders of York Region was founded out of a memorial fund established in the memory of a young woman who did not survive her eating disorder. Her family, and those of others who subsequently lost their daughters to eating disorders, ultimately decided to spearhead the change they wanted to see in the community 10 years ago, and EDOYR was born.

'I think it is astounding that individuals in the community met, had this impulse of generosity and worked hard to at least keep our doors open,' says Ms. Morgante. 'In fact, through really good strategic thinking and the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation and some sponsors we have been able to expand and create the early intervention centre and the expressive and therapeutic art programs and gallery. All this is to provide support for all ages for disordered eating, addictions, substance abuse, and some mental health concerns because anxiety and depression were very often part of the person's struggle.'

'Next Friday we are able to enjoy one another's companionship and company. It is for all ages, so maybe grab family and friends

that you have been waiting to see and have been too busy to spend time with and you don't even have to spend the time cleaning up your living room? We will just all meet at the Performing Arts Centre and enjoy a heartwarming evening.?

Tickets for Steppin' Out's production of Annie are available now through Eating Disorders of York Region at \$32 for adults and \$27 for seniors and students. To purchase, visit www.edoyr.com or call 905-886-6632. Curtain rises at 8 p.m., Friday, November 21, at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts.