

Ryan "pays it forward" for Able Network



By Brock Weir

“We Ryan Grants have to stick together.”

That is just one example of the community outpouring received by Ryan Grant, along with his parents Debby and Greg, after they went public with their story.

Ryan, who lives with Down Syndrome, had his bag stolen this past March while waiting at the York Region Transit stop on the northeast corner of Yonge and Wellington. This was no ordinary bag. It not only contained a change of clothes, but also his cell phone and newly-bought bus pass, both necessary items to maintain his independence as he goes about his day working at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex and Sunrise Senior Living, as well as working out at Club Aurora.

A client of the Aurora-based Able Network, which helps those living with intellectual challenges live, work and give back independently to the community in which they live, Able and The Grant family reached out to The Auroran to raise awareness of the work these men and women are doing in the community and urge the public to keep an eye out for them.

Since The Auroran and, subsequently, CTV Toronto told Ryan's story late last month, the Grants say they have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support they have received from the community – so much so that Ryan has decided to pay it forward to the organization that has helped him become so independent.

“As soon as the article came out and then CTV put it on, the community was just outraged that this happened,” says Debby. “People started asking what they could do to help and a whole group started up on Facebook I knew nothing about. People started sending me messages on Facebook asking if I knew anything about this group and it was just a lot of people asking what they could do to help, and if they could start something to show their support.

“What came about was the area manager of Cobs Bread, whose name also happens to be Ryan Grant, said, “Ryan Grants stick together.”

The bakery donated a number of gift cards, followed by a similar contribution from Boston Pizza, sold through Newmarket's Roadhouse and Rose and business-owner Jackie Playter, with the intention of raising money to replace Ryan's bus pass, cell phone, and other stolen items.

“When we found out about this, we were thrilled with all the support, but we had already replaced everything of Ryan's,” says Debby. “His brother bought him a phone and we went out and replaced everything else he needed. We didn't feel there was anything

Ryan needed the donations for, so we asked if everyone would be okay with us just paying it forward.

?What we would like to do is donate what comes to Ryan to the Able Network. They have been a huge deal in Ryan's life and it has really made him into the independent, happy guy he is. He has learned so much since he has been there and has become so independent. His independence, confidence and love of life is all because of the Able Network and we are very happy to be able to pay this forward and put this donation to Able.?

Adds Greg: ?For us, as Ryan's family, it is just bringing a lot of awareness to Able and all the participants at Able, and it makes you feel good the community supports it in many different ways. We really appreciate the community jumping on board and saying, ?How can we help?'

When the Grants first shared their story, they expressed some frustration at a seeming lack of police response to the incident. By early last week, there was movement on the file. As Ryan got the full star treatment on a tour of the police station, Debby says she is heartened that police are now aware not only of what happened to Ryan, but that Able Network is here, what they do and that their clients are busy members of the community in Aurora and Newmarket.

?Hopefully that will get them keeping an extra eye open,? says Debby.

?I am just amazed at the support,? she continues. ?It has been unbelievable. When you first have a child with Down Syndrome you always worry about what their life is going to be like and how other people are going to treat them or perceive them out there. We have never run into any adversity at all and it has been great. This isn't a huge deal someone stealing his stuff, but it was a kick in the teeth.

?You think, ?How could someone do that to him if he has worked so hard to become so independent and then this happens.' To see everyone rallying around us like this is just amazing.? You learn so much about how a small gesture from one person can snowball into something big like this and make you feel really included, and make our family proud to live in this community.?