

## Salvation Army aims to help more tweens and teens this holiday season



The Aurora Lions Club has been hard at work this year, as they have for the past eight decades, collecting items to make the holidays that much brighter for residents in need ? and there's more need now than ever before.

On Thursday afternoon, the local Lions pulled into Newmarket Plaza on Davis Drive to deliver their latest round of donations to their community partner, the Salvation Army. More than 200 families each year are routinely served by the Lions and their partners, but their roar is only as loud as your donations.

?We are the largest program in the country, which is unusual considering how affluent York Region is, but we have developed the program,? says Raymond Varkki, Community Capacity Development Officer for the Salvation Army in Central York Region. ?There is poverty in this Region, just as much as anywhere else, but it is just not as visible.?

The local branch of the Salvation Army aims to provide Christmas hampers to more than 2,000 individuals and families this holiday season, catering to people of all ages.

Grandparent packs, for instance, are being prepared with a selection of the donated gifts so those who might be struggling living off their pension have the ability to give something to their grandchildren.

?It's about restoring the dignity of the grandparent,? says Varkki.

Depending on the age of the grandchildren in question, they might be in the most high-demand demographic of all. While Varkki says the donation drive is doing well with gifts for younger children, including toys, the same can't be said for teens, tweens and youth who still live at home.

?Our teen and tween area is very sparse,? says Varkki, gesturing towards shelves near the back of their cavernous sorting facility. ?Often we put applications off because we don't have the product. We rely on gift cards for teens, especially.?

Legos are another hot commodity for this demographic, along with family-oriented board games.

Older teens and young adults, including 19- or 20-year-olds might receive personal hygiene products, including shaving and makeup sets, pending donations.

?For infants and kids up to eight, we're pretty fine because, primarily, that's what comes in from the community,? says Varkki. ?Those of us who can afford to get new gifts for our kids, why shouldn't they have the same dignity? We need things for people 12 and up, especially 15 ? 17-year-olds because we don't get enough stuff for makeup kits. Stuff for boys is difficult, but men's shaving

kits, even battery-operated shavers, would be awesome and we would love to have loads of those.?

Gift cards to places like Indigo and Amazon, he added, would be very helpful in allowing young adults to purchase books for themselves, whether in hard-copy, or digital to read on their phones and devices.

?Our philosophy [with hamper recipients] is we're here for you today, but one day you will be in a position where you can give back and that's great ? that's what community is. We're supposed to be leaning on each other and helping one another.?

Donations will be accepted at Newmarket Plaza through December 22, and although there is no guarantee that donations in the latter part of this window will get to recipients this holiday season, Varkki says rest assured they will get to the people who need it next year.

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