

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: New Church, Daycare Funding and more?.

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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For more than 130 years the Salvation Army has played an important role helping vulnerable people in communities across our country.

On Saturday, I was honoured to speak at the dedication of the church's newly-built Northridge Community Church in Aurora. The Salvation Army is the largest non-governmental social service provider in Canada, with an exemplary legacy of service to humanity. Church leadership says the new location will enable it to better serve the residents of central York Region, including Aurora. The Salvation Army has a knack for being where it is most needed, and offers a host of services locally. In my role as Minister responsible for the province's Poverty Reduction Strategy, I am well aware of the Salvation Army's presence across the province. Many of the organizations and facilities dedicated to helping Ontario's most vulnerable people exist because of the church. Clearly, this is a group that walks the talk. Congratulations to Major Brian & Glenda Bishop, Pastors of the new facility, the congregation and everyone involved in making the new church a reality.

New Daycare Spaces

It's well documented that the first five years of a child's life are critical. To ensure future success as adults, we must ensure Ontario's children get the good start they need. That's why our government puts an emphasis on early education, reducing childhood poverty and early years' health care.

During last week's Speech from the Throne, the government announced it will create 100,000 new, licensed daycare spaces across Ontario. These spaces will help families across the province find quality and affordable care for their children. Currently only about 20 per cent of children, from newborn to age 4, are in licensed care. When this new funding is rolled out, that number will double to 40 per cent of children, will be in licensed care.

Activate Aurora

Last week, the Town of Aurora launched the 'Fittest Community in Canada Challenge' to become the most active community by 2020. It's calling on communities all over Canada to get up, get out and get physically active. The initiative is being aided by an Ontario Trillium Foundation's grant of \$749,500.

The OTF supports community-based initiatives that help build healthy and vibrant communities across the province. This is a great time for sport and recreation in Ontario. Just last summer there was the amazing success of the 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games. I want to congratulate and thank all the great achievements of our Canadian athletes and para-athletes in Toronto last summer, and at the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio.

Golden girls like Aurelie Rivard, Rosie McLennan and Penny Oleksiak give Ontarians a real boost of pride and enthusiasm for sport - especially for our young people. Our government is committed to building on that enthusiasm for sport and physical well-being. Last year, the Ontario government launched our action plan for amateur sport in Ontario - called GameON. Along with supporting our amateur athletes, we want to increase opportunities in sport and recreation for Ontario's girls and women, and for Ontario's Indigenous peoples. I encourage everyone to get out and help Aurora reach its goal of being Canada's most-fittest town.

Aurora Food Pantry

I was honoured to take part in the food sort at the Aurora Food Pantry recently to raise awareness that September is hunger action month. Here in Aurora, more than 1,400 residents rely on emergency food support each and every month. Food banks are an important resource for many residents across the province. The Aurora Food Pantry has been helping the residents of Aurora and area since 1990, and it is a laudable resource. If you can, drop off a few bags of food. Better yet, drop off a cheque. The Food Pantry can buy food cheaper than you or I, so they get more when we give cash.

Candlelight and Drumhead Service

I was deeply honoured to attend and participate in the Candlelight and Drumhead Service at the Aurora Cemetery. The service remembers those who fought for Canada and made it home but have since died. The service, organized by the Aurora Legion, started with the lighting of 420 candles that are placed on the gravesite of veterans. If you have not had the opportunity to attend this moving service, please consider doing so next year. The service is an annual event.

STEPS To Recovery

Although it's not located within Aurora, its reach is felt throughout our area. I'm talking about STEPS To Recovery, the group providing addiction recovery support. I attended the opening of the group's new facility in Newmarket and saw firsthand, how much this organization is doing for those dealing with alcohol and drug addiction. STEPS' mission is to create a safe community environment that facilitates successful long-term recovery for those addicted to alcohol and drugs. You can find out more about the group on their website: www.stepsrecovery.com.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.