

HatsOnDufferin and the joy of knitting to help others



By Constance Scrafield

It began like this, 'Back in December, I was on the parent council at my children's school. The school informed us that while they had a budget to pay for kids to go on field trips when their parents couldn't afford it, there were so many kids that didn't have warm clothes, they had to re-allocate that money for buying winter clothes,' Stephany St. Louis related.

'They couldn't ask parents to donate? I had lots of snowsuits and things in my basement I could have given? but the kid becomes identified as 'in need.'

Until that moment, Ms. St Louis had no idea there was such a problem of poverty in Dufferin.

'I thought? there has to be something I can do.' Then it dawned on her: 'Let's make hats for children in Dufferin with no set pattern, colour? just the kind of hats your mom would crochet for you? all mixed up.'

With everything donated, they come in all kinds of cosy materials, 'Wool, basically whatever gets donated. We put out a call for donations. A lot of people doing the work had their own stock. The hats are literally coming in from all over Dufferin County. We approached the library, community centres, seniors, parents councils. People drop off hats that they've made to the 10 drop-off centres.'

Naturally, Ms. St. Louis' approach to the campaign was through social media, specifically, Facebook and Instagram. She works for Headwaters Tourism and Dufferin Board of Trade, as well as her own company working to 'help manage other businesses with their finances.'

This considerably successful campaign, with 1,700 hats having come in at last count, has been waged by Ms. St. Louis 'all on my own. I formed two social groups? crochet and knit club Dufferin which meets monthly and HatsOnDufferin.'

The group meets at Lavender Blue, the caterers and now restaurant owners, next to the TSC Store on Highway 9.

'They show up with hats they've made during the month. Our goal is to make 150 hats for every school in Dufferin? there are 29 Dufferin Country schools. That's 4,350 hats.'

The school count includes the high schools. She is working with the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) about distribution.

'No hat is out,' she commented. 'The hats coming in are all sizes? everything is covered. The campaign only started in February. We still have a way to go to reach our goal. It is really picking steam, with the UGDSB And DC MOVES, ... now we're getting a lot of people talking? they're starting to realize it's a hidden issue.'

With the weight of success on her shoulders, Ms. St. Louis noted that 'it is only me doing the administration for this. When we deliver all the hats, to move forward, it needs to be run by a committee.'

The distribution of the 4,350 hats is another job for volunteers, as she reminded us. 'We are always on the hunt for volunteers. With some of the schools being located close to each other, one person could do more than one school.'

A call-to-action meeting is planned for later this month. People will be coming together to talk about how the distribution will work.

Ms. St. Louis herself has damaged her arm, which is in a sling.

?I won't be able to lift the boxes,? she admitted.

For your information: the 10 dropoff stations are: in Orangeville: Healing Moon, the Library on Mill St., Lord Dufferin Centre residence, Montgomery Village Residence; in Hillsburgh, The Friendly Chef Adventures; in Guelph, the Upper Grand District School Board; in Shelburne, The Wool and Silk Company, Shelburne Public Library, Country 101.5; and the Grand Valley Public Library in Grand Valley.

?The next time the social club meets is November 1, 7:00 p.m., at Lavender Blue. The deadline for the hats is November 4. Lots of sizes, no specifics. Just nice warm hats,? said Stephany St. Louis.

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