

Halton Learning Foundation impact on community visceral: director

By Julie Slack
Metroland Media Group

They say little things can make a big difference. From its bare-bones, three-person staff, working out of a tiny portable building to its many small gifts, the impacts of the Halton Learning Foundation (HLF) are felt far and wide.

HLF executive director Lesley Mansfield puts it quite succinctly: The impact can be quite visceral.

HLF partners with businesses and organizations to eliminate financial barriers to education for all public school students in the Region. It has its own board of directors, which includes representatives from Halton's municipalities, school board trustees and even students.

The non-profit organization does all its own fundraising as well. One of their biggest fundraisers takes place on Nov. 10, at the Burlington Convention Centre.

The 2016 Benefit Bash, dubbed Imagine the Possibilities, is HLF's premier event, raising much-needed funds to help ensure no Halton District School Board student gets left behind.

According to Mansfield, there are students in our Region who go to school with no winter coats let alone money for a field trip and pizza days.

With 10 per cent of Halton residents living in poverty, families are unable to bare the costs of added school-related expenses.

With 62,000 kids in 105 schools, there's always a need.

Schools make requests to HLF since it's the teachers and principals who see exactly what's happening in their classrooms, explained Mansfield.

In one case, she recalled the principal had visited a child's home and discovered there was no bed.

So HLF paid for a bed, she said.

According to Mansfield, the HLF allocates \$250 per student per year. So, if there's a need,

we will help.

We've never said no to any student, she stressed.

Following last year's benefit bash, Mansfield was approached by Mountain Warehouse, which offered the non-profit organization with skids of coats at no charge.

She immediately said yes, without thinking about HLF's lack of space to store them; she knew they'd find a way and of course, they did.

The joy we felt when the principals said there were little Grade 2 girls enjoying a brand new pink coat, she said, dubbing HLF role as that of a custodian of kind gifts from community businesses and individuals.

In turn and to thank them for their gifts, Mansfield ensures donors receive reports on where their funds helped.

She shares stories like these at presentations she gives to various supporters, such as the Oakville Rotary Club.

Mansfield herself was shopping at Staples in Milton this past August. The clerk asked her if she'd like to make a donation to a children's charity and she asked which one. Turns out it was HLF and Staples raised \$4,000 during their back-to-school fundraising drive.

Gordon Food Service and Maple Lodge Farms have also come on board to help HLF, along with countless other businesses and groups in all the communities that HLF serves.

The impact of HLF is very real, said Mansfield. It's making a difference today, right now. Virtually all schools have been helped, regardless of what people may think they see. There's at least one child in every school who has financial difficulties.

She said the gifts HLF receives are changing children's lives every day.

I go home at night and think, Cool, we helped someone today and it's because of those people out there in our community and we are stewards of their gift, she said.

Go to www.haltonlearningfoundation.ca to learn more.

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