

# Local residents send aid to our neighbours in the north

By Melanie Hennessey

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Imagine living in a place where there sometimes isn't enough milk to nourish hungry babies, or proper clothing to keep them warm. A place where one can of food or one piece of meat costs at least \$10 each, making it unaffordable for many. A place where necessities like ample water and health care are scarce commodities.

While one may assume these are the plights facing those on the other side of the world, they're actually happening closer to home in northern Inuit communities. And Connie Karlsson wants to do something about it.

The Norval resident first spearheaded a corporate clothing drive for the Inuits in 2009— an initiative that has now grown into the Inuit Outreach Project through the Halton Hills Anglican Church Cluster. For the past four years, she and a group of dedicated volunteers have collected thousands of pounds of non-perishable food and warm clothing for Inuit babies and children, spent countless hours sorting

and packing these items, and even had them shipped by land and then air to those in need in four Arctic communities. Since 2010, these shipments have added up to eight tons in almost 1,000 boxes.

"Our mission really is not just about charity. It's about creating relationships with people who are isolated," Karlsson said. "These people are struggling to care for babies and children in the new world. Their hunting grounds are disappearing because of global warming. This mission is accepting that some people are living in circumstances that are not their fault."

The mission group just saw off its latest shipment, which delivered over 4,000 pounds of much-needed clothing and food to the communities of Sanikiluaq, Umiujaq, Inukjuak and Tasiujaq.

Among those who always help prepare the donations is Dagny Langer, an 81-year-old Acton resident with a remarkable connection to the Inuit community. In fact, Karlsson has deemed her the "catalyst" for the Inuit Outreach Project.



**Acton resident Dagny Langer (left) is reunited with several of her foster children on a recent trip to the northern Quebec village of Inukjuak with the Inuit Outreach Project.**

**Langer is joined by project head Connie Karlsson (right).**

Over the course of 25 years when she and her husband Ken lived in Montreal, she served as a foster parent for literally hundreds of Inuit children. What makes Langer's story even more remarkable is that all of these children were sick due to a lack of health care available in the Inuit communities.

"It's a different world up there. In my day, all they had was a little nursing station. It was just a room, with no doctors," she said. "It felt good that we could take these kids and get them

ready, make them healthy to go back home to their families."

As most babies arrived with only the clothing on their backs, Langer said she began collecting clothes from neighbours and friends to ship home with the children when they were ultimately reunited with their families.

The impact the former foster mother had on these children is one that will last for a lifetime, as Karlsson recently witnessed first hand. She and Langer ventured to the northern Quebec vil-

lage of Inukjuak for a week in September after receiving a grant through the Anglican Diocese of Niagara.

During their visit, Langer— who hadn't been to the community in 25 years— was reunited with some of her former foster children. Even though they're adults now, they still fondly called her "Mommy" during the emotional reunion.

"It was so lovely to see them again," said Langer with a smile.

The Langers ultimately adopted three Inuit children, who grew up alongside their three biological children. Today, they continue to give by raising their adopted daughter's son, nine-year-old Dylan, who has Down syndrome.

Langer and Karlsson's trip up north also proved to be an interesting experience in cuisine. With no restaurants around, Karlsson said she and Langer would walk into town to buy their food, and then cook it in the hotel's community kitchen. They went on to host dinner parties for local dignitaries, with things like caribou stew on the menu.

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