

Markham, Stouffville mentors needed for program

Initiative matches York Region moms younger than 25 with older, more experienced women

BY ALYSSA JULIE
Special

A York Region social agency is hoping to make Connections with Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville residents who might want to become mentors for young mothers.

A trio of Markham moth-

ers, part of a Rose of Sharon program called Connections, have been waiting several months for matches.

"Most of our volunteers are 30 or older," manager Christine McGregor explained about the initiative, which pairs moms younger than 25 with mostly older, more experienced women.

"I find most women in their 20s don't volunteer because it's an extremely busy time in their life."

That said, the program tries to respect the needs of moms who may want a friend rather than a moth-

er-figure, or someone also parenting her first child, so their children can play together.

Mentors provide guidance and support to help the mothers make the right parental decisions.

"It is important to us that young women receive the informal support they can't get at Rose of Sharon or other programs available for mothers," Ms. McGregor said.

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"Our services are really only available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., but often the lonely hours are after 7, when their baby won't stop crying and all they want is a friend to talk to."

"We want to offer a constant in their life who can attend their child's birthday party or take them grocery shopping, so they don't have to take their child and the stroller on the bus."

"Friends will offer support when they first hear of the pregnancy, but they often dwindle off. A mentor can offer friendship and help them get out more so they don't feel so isolated."

Connections, a partnership between Rose of Sharon and Girls Inc., started as a pilot project in October, 2001.

In June 2002, it received a three-year grant of \$180,000 from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Because the program is relatively new, not enough potential volunteers know about it yet, which is why the Markham mothers are still waiting.

There are 10 more women in need of mentors throughout York Region.

"We're really trying to get the word out in the Markham area," said Ms. McGregor.

"Because we're so new, people don't know of us as much in Markham as in the north end of the region (Newmarket), where we're based."

Last month, Ms. McGregor set up a booth in Markville Shopping Centre to spread the word.

She has also registered the initiative with

Information Markham.

"It's frustrating to have to make the moms wait so long," she said.

Rose of Sharon offers other outreach services, such as ABC, a prenatal nutrition program.

However, it is primarily a school for young mothers struggling to attend school and care for their children.

"We offer a child development centre, where their children can learn and play

while they pursue their own studying," Ms. McGregor explained.

There are about 60 mothers in the school. Rose of Sharon for Young Mothers also offers individual and group counseling.

Girls Inc., Rose of Sharon's Connections partner, has services throughout York Region.

It is helping recruit volunteers for the program.

Teacher earns honour

Dorsey James has earned all kinds of awards for his teaching and sculpting abilities. Now the Markham District High School instructor has added one more.

Mr. James, who's set to retire at the end of this school year, is a recipient of the York Region District School Board's Outstanding Service Award for 2003.

Award recipients have initiated, modeled and put into practice the board's values of quality, service and teamwork.

According to a media release, Mr. James' contributions at MDHS resulted in positive change, greater success, strengthened communications and a good influence on others.

In a supporting letter, Mr. James was touted by Markham Mayor Don Cousens as a renowned artist and photographer.

He received the award at the annual awards evening April 28.

—Adam Malik

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