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NEWCOMERS CARRY ON CANADIAN TRADITION



Teacher Helen Panakos carries buckets of sap to the boiler to the delight of her language instruction for newcomers class as they visit the maple syrup festival at Bruce's

Mill Conservation Area Friday. The festival, which continues until April 17, features children's entertainment during March break. For more, go to www.trca.on.ca

STAFF PHOTOS/JOERD WITTEVEEN

Out of region's cold, into warmth of volunteers

BY SERENA WILLOUGHBY
Staff Writer

Everybody has a story. Spend an evening with the homeless guests at the Out of the Cold Program in Richmond Hill and you learn to listen.

Last week, volunteers spent an evening helping at Ja'fari Islamic Community

Centre on Bathurst Street to serve dinner to the homeless.

The program is a network of churches and community centres in the region that provide dinner, accommodation for the evening, breakfast, a bagged lunch and a TTC token the next day, to the homeless.

Initially, Toronto helped finance the eight York Region churches that joined that

city's program in 1997.

In 2001, Toronto stopped funding the program, putting it in jeopardy, however, four facilities decided to carry on with the program by finding their own funding.

The initiative is now funded by York Region and the federal government.

Temple Har Zion, St. Luke's Catholic Church and Thornhill United Church all

participate in the program with Ja'fari Islamic Centre.

The program co-ordinator Rehana Sumar organizes all four programs with the help of an army of volunteers.

"We like to think of the (homeless) people as our guests," she said.

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