



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

Liz Beattie (from left), Sue King, Anne Houle, Pat Duncan and Sally Karamath work on another Casting off the Cold blanket at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library.

Knitters give warmth to those in need

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There is nothing quite like the touch of a handmade knitted blanket to make you feel all warm and cozy.

For people who have to suddenly leave their home for a shelter or the hospital, items that feel like home get left behind.

But in 2006 Sally Karamath decided to change all that.

She started Casting off the Cold, a group of volunteers that knits blankets, mitts, scarves and tuques for babies, teens, men and women and then donates them to various not-for-profit organizations throughout York Region.

"It definitely makes a huge impact when you're talking about keeping moms and kids warm," said Melissa Robinson, development and volunteer co-ordinator for Newmarket's Rose of Sharon Services for Young Mothers.

Rose of Sharon is a not-for-profit charitable organization providing support and educational services to pregnant and parenting women under the age of 25 across York Region.

"(The women are) just always shocked by the amount of support the community gives them," Ms Robinson said.

Ms Karamath is also carrying on a tradition her mother started many years ago in their homeland of Trinidad.

Once a month, Ms Karamath's mother, who ran a take-out food business, invited local homeless people to their back yard for dinner.

"My mom wasn't a rich person. She was comfortable," Ms Karamath said.

Ms Karamath got her start knitting, like many others, by seeing other people doing it and thinking 'I can do that.'

When Ms Karamath started knitting about 20 years ago, her only goal was to make sweaters for her nieces and nephews.

"They didn't want to wear them," she laughed. "I did a good job, but some things were always wrong."

Ms Karamath eventually fixed the flaws and started selling her knitted items.

Work then got in the way of her knitting, so she stopped for a few years. But she picked it up again in 2006 and that is when she started

Casting off the Cold.

A hairdresser, Ms Karamath 'coaxed' a few of her clients to join in.

Five years later, the group has grown from five knitters to 40, with chapters in two towns - Markham and Stouffville.

'In many ways, it's like the smell of fresh made bread. It's a touch-point to humanity.'

The Stouffville chapter started last September and meets one Sunday a month at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library.

"I wanted to grow and the only way to do it is to do chapters in York Region," she said.

Last year, the group, which is comprised of knitters of all levels, made 1,500 scarves, pairs of mitts, blankets and hats and donated them to about 10 charities throughout the region.

All of the yarn is purchased by each group member, although some yarn does get donated to them every once in a while.

"Sometimes it costs us more to make it than go buy it (finished). But it's special," Ms Karamath said.

This year, Ms Karamath hopes they can make 2,000 pieces.

"In many ways, it's like the smell of fresh made bread. It's a touch-point to humanity," said Rev. Don Shields, chaplain and co-ordinator of spiritual and religious care at Markham Stouffville Hospital. "It's kind of like magic. They just appear."

Casting off the Cold provides the hospital with baby blankets and clothing to bereaved families for burial.

The bereavement program helps families who have lost a child under 20 weeks, or is stillborn. The hospital provides a memento box, which includes a knitted blanket, tuque and outfit for the child.

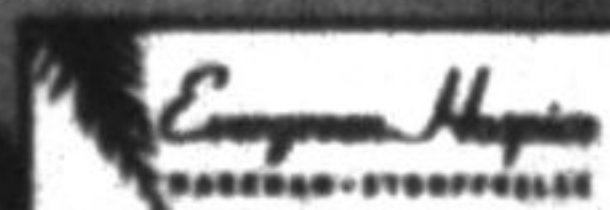
"Contrary to the way people understand it - it's not really a baby, they can have another one - it is a loss of a child. It's a loss of a dream," Rev. Shields said.

For more information on Casting off the Cold, go to www.webintensity.ca/share/knit/CastingOfftheCold.htm

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