



'In that split second, I went from a very physically active, independent guy, to someone who has become very dependent ... in a world that is not well suited to wheelchairs.'

Luke Anderson, Stouffville native

Luke Anderson (left) and friend Steven Gray with ramps being offered through the StopGap program. Some of the ramps are in use in downtown Stouffville.

Making the world better, one ramp at a time

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entrances have gone from inaccessible to wheelchair and walker users, parents pushing baby strollers and even couriers, to inviting places for patrons.

"(That's) a fairly big customer base," Mr. Anderson said.

The ramps first appeared in front of downtown shops such as 2-4-1 Pizza and Moonflower's Magical Touch in February 2012.

There are now 16 of them throughout the town.

Sam Tela, a partner in Main Street's new Smitten shop, has one of the ramps and has noticed he gets more customers because of it.

The ramps were donated to the businesses via the Community Ramp Project, created by Mr. Anderson and Mr. Hopkins. Hardware stores donated the materials and volunteers constructed the custom ramps.

"Dignity. Respect towards customers. They come in when they want to. We all want to be self-sufficient. It gives them that opportunity," said Anna Rose, the municipal-

ity's downtown co-ordinator.

Ms Rose did not initially jump on board the StopGap wagon when Mr. Anderson first approached her with the concept.

She wanted him to go through the "proper channels" of obtaining the Downtown Stouffville Working Group's approval and then that of council's because the ramps are located on town property.

Mr. Anderson didn't. He went straight to the business owners.

"The pros outweigh the cons," Ms Rose said, noting she is on board with the project.

MORE NEEDED

"Why haven't we got them stretching the length of Main Street?" said Heather Andrews, a member of the town's Accessibility Advisory Committee.

There are now more than 100 ramps outside businesses in Orillia, Cranbrook, B.C. and pockets of Toronto. Mr. Anderson is working with business owners in Mississauga, Hamilton and Aurora.

"This ramp is so simple. It makes life so easy for so many people," he said.

"It would be amazing to give a

free ramp to every business with a single step," Mr. Anderson said.

But without donations from building supply companies, it's tough. However, the ramps are still being made available, but for a fee of between \$150 and \$250.

Ms Andrews said not only do businesses need to take the initiative to make their spaces accessible, but customers need to be asking that they do so.

In Ontario, one in seven people have a disability and over the next 20 years, that number is expected to increase, according to the Ministry of Community and Social Services' website.

By the end of last year, businesses with 20 or more employees were to be providing accessible customer service. In 2025, the entire province is to be accessible.

"Twenty twenty-five is a long time to wait. Good solutions only come during an irritable design," according to Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Anderson is hoping, this time, to work with Whitchurch-Stouffville council and staff to create a permanent solution currently being filled by StopGap.

"Be leaders in Ontario or Canada,

for that matter, in being in the forefront of inclusive design," he said.

For the first 24 years of Mr. Anderson's life, accessibility was not something he thought about. The Stouffville District Secondary School grad and former Sun-Tribune carrier was an avid mountain biker and even competed in the sport.

That love of riding drew him to the interior of British Columbia after he graduated from the University of Waterloo so he could be in the "mecca" of mountain biking.

RIDING INJURY

In 2002, while out on a ride, he came upon a "really technical trail" that was 25 feet wide with a 20-foot drop.

"I came up short," he said matter-of-factly.

Mr. Anderson lost the ability to walk, along with most of his hand control.

"In that split second, I went from a very physically active, independent guy, to someone who has become very dependent ... in a world that is not well suited to wheelchairs," he said.

For more information, go to stopgap.ca

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