

Stouffville Families Offer Warm Response to Frozen Queen's Charity Drive

'Queen Elsa' collects 85 backpacks filled with school supplies

By Kinjal Dagli Shah

Rachel Stewart, also known as Queen Elsa of York Region, remembers a time in her childhood when her mom, a single mother of four, struggled to get her children new backpacks every year. "While growing up, I remember feeling so happy with a new backpack and lunch box. But there were times when I didn't have those things. My mom tried her best but often felt lucky if she could even get one of us a new bag. Often, my lunches were placed in yellow No Frills bags. Even my pencil case was a ziploc bag," recalls Rachel.

Despite the struggle, or perhaps because of it, Rachel stepped into the world of fantasy. Her work as an entertainer — dressed as Elsa from the movie Frozen — takes her to many children and charities. She decided to start one of her own drives this summer, called *Back To School With Confidence*. "During the second week of August, I visited homes dressed as Elsa. We talked about charity, and how we can make a difference in

our communities by giving back. All I requested for the visit was for families to donate a backpack and a few supplies."

Families, including many from Stouffville, were very receptive. "Stouffville and Markham were where I did my first day of pickups. It was one of the busiest, with 18 enthusiastic homes to travel to. The residents of this town showed an immense amount of support and excitement for this initiative. It brought me to tears when I unloaded my car, which was overflowing with bags. I am so grateful."

Over five days, Rachel collected 85 backpacks full of school supplies. "There were pencils, markers, rulers, lunch bags with snack boxes inside, hair bows, labels for clothing, Tupperware for lunches as well as other items like calculators, math sets, paper, binders and more. No age group was left out. Many families offered a brand new outfit or two. How kind of the residents of Stouffville to think about all these little details. They really thought of everything," said Rachel,

herself a single mother of a nine year old boy.

The backpacks will be divided between York Region Children's Aid, The Yellow Brick House for Abused Women and Children, The Rose of Sharon for Young Mothers, as well as local food pantries.

Allison Barker, a Stouffville resident, was among those who donated a backpack and supplies. "My daughter

Ainsley was so excited. We talked all week about why it was important to give back in the community. 'Queen Elsa' gave a wonderful (five year old appropriate) explanation that added to mine. She will remember it for years to come and is already asking about kids who need toys for Christmas."

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Rachel Stewart (Queen Elsa) enjoys a moment with her son Owen and Ayaana Shah while picking up donated backpacks full of school supplies.



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