

Birthday Angels make sure children in shelters not forgotten

Simon Martin

East Gwillimbury Express | Sep 30, 2015

Sometimes, we take for granted the simple things in life, such as a birthday party.

Debora Taylor read a magazine article about a girl in the United States who had her first birthday party ever at a shelter, where an organization provided children forced to flee violent homes for safety with a birthday party.

“I told myself I would love to get involved in something like that but I couldn’t find any similar organization in Canada.”

That didn’t stop Taylor. She founded Birthday Angels in 2014.

Originally from Bradford, Taylor started the organization in Toronto throwing parties at the North York Women’s Shelter.

That’s when Taylor’s childhood friend, Debbie Panza, noticed the charity on her friend’s Facebook page. Debbie told Debora she would like start a York Region branch of the charity and Birthday Angels partnered with the Leeder Place Family Shelter in East Gwillimbury.

The group throws one birthday party each month at their shelters, inviting all shelter residents. Each month, there is a themed birthday party with decorations, crafts and activities, cupcakes, snacks, party favours and a birthday cake. A special birthday gift is also given to each child celebrating a birthday that month.

“Children and families staying in homeless shelters face a sad reality,” Taylor said. “Celebrating a birthday is such a simple childhood joy.”

Getting involved with Birthday Angels was Panza’s way of giving back to the community.

“I have two kids of my own and they have too much stuff. To actually give things to these kids who have nothing feels good,” she said.

The party themes vary throughout the year. The charity has done everything from a beach party theme to a Frozen theme. It’s the thought that counts. “It doesn’t cost a lot of money to throw a birthday party,” Taylor said.

The party also has a way of bringing people together at the shelter in a celebration. There’s a lot of joy and love in the room, Taylor said.

Birthday Angels runs entirely on donations from the community. You can donate money through its website.

Birthday Angels is always in need of party supplies, new toys, new clothing and gift cards.

Every month, Birthday Angels needs volunteers to shop for gifts and supplies, bake cupcakes and wrap gifts.

They even recommend people donate their birthday gifts to the cause.

Simon Martin is a Reporter with the East Gwillimbury Express. He can be reached at smartin@yrmg.com . Follow him on [twitter](#) and the East Gwillimbury Express on [Facebook](#)



Ingrid Teunissen, manager of Leeder Place, part of Blue Door Shelters, gathers gifts with Debbie Panza, who runs the York Region chapter of Birthday Angels, a charity her childhood friend started to throw birthday parties for children forced into shelters.

.....