

Caledon residents gather in support of inclusion]

Bolton event marks relaunch of Caledon Area Families for Inclusion

By Zachary Roman

A local group has taken the first step towards building a strong network of support for families with loved ones with differing abilities.

On November 13, Caledon Area Families for Inclusion (CAFFI) hosted their relaunch event at Christ Church in Bolton. The casual, drop-in event was attended by many families and served as a chance for them to both meet each other and CAFFI's leadership team. There was free coffee and treats, and the sound of chatting and music filled the room.

One of the reasons CAFFI held the event was to learn what families in the community are seeking in terms of support for themselves and their loved ones.

Around the room, there were important topics posted on the wall, and sticky notes where people could submit their ideas on the topics. Some of the topics were: Circles of support; support workers; finance; active living; workshops and speakers; visibility and inclusion; and the community. Families left suggestions for things like: mom and dad support groups; youth working for special needs; needs-based funding; after-school programs; integrated social events; employment; and day programs in Caledon.

CAFFI coordinator Patricia Franks said it was lovely to see many younger families out at the event.

Since the agencies that support children are different from the ones that support adults, she explained it can be hard for families with loved ones of different ages to connect. Being able to speak with a family with an older loved one is especially important, as they can share valuable advice to those with a younger loved one.

"We are a network, we're not a top-down organization," said Franks. "We want to help facilitate, we want to help you get started."

Michael Brunetto, another of CAFFI's coordinators, said when groups come together it's a key step in influencing policy change. By learning what the community is looking for at the relaunch event, Brunetto said CAFFI can then present those ideas to Caledon's Town Council moving forward.

"It's beneficial for the Town to understand exactly what we're dealing with, and how they can better budget and better plan for these types of activities to become more sustainable," said Brunetto. "Less one-off situations, because there's so much commonality that we're trying to identify."

December 3 is the International Day of Persons with disabilities, as declared by the United Nations. As this day approaches, CAFFI's coordinators stressed the importance of striving for inclusion within Caledon and beyond.

Brunetto said while December 3 is just one day, recognition of people with differing abilities should happen year-round.