

Do what you can (because if we all give a little, together we could do a lot).

Written by SHERALYN ROMAN

It's that time of year and while I was tempted to add my two cents worth to the "Baby it's Cold Outside" fracas, I'm not sure yet another voice chiming in is truly necessary at this point. There are, as the saying goes, bigger fish to fry than whether or not you have your nose out of joint over a song that's better than 50 years old. Specifically, there's a greater need in our community, both close to home and in the broader sense, the need to worry about something a whole lot more important than a song. We need to address need.

The dictionary defines need as something required, essential or very important and where some course of action is necessary. For our community, need is really that simple - something is required and a course of action is necessary. There is need and we can do something about it. This time of year changes the definition of need for many. Where poverty is an issue, heat becomes a need, sometimes taking priority over food. But is food a want? Of course not - it too is a need. Parents are forced to make difficult, heart wrenching decisions around prioritizing budget. Food (a need) takes precedence over presents (a want). For others, there might be a little bit extra but certainly not enough to make life comfortable. In either example, the possibility of having to rely on the generosity of strangers hits close to home during the holiday season.

On the other side, the obligation to help can be burdensome for those families who have enough but not extra. They aren't rich but neither are they poor. They want to help, but how? With so many social service agencies, church groups and non-profits looking for support this time of year, how do you determine the best place for your donation to go? Even if you don't have much, ensuring a donation works to maximum benefit is what we all want to achieve, donors and recipients alike. That's where the mantra, do what you can comes in.

Do what you can is about awareness, making whatever size donation you can comfortably afford and being content that what you have donated might not help many but it will certainly help some. Here's a couple of ways you can give:

- Food banks often fall short over the holidays and in response grocery stores help make donating easy. All you have to do at the cash register is buy a bag of food the grocery store has already packaged. If you can afford this option it ensures you are donating items that have been designated by organizations like The Exchange to be of most benefit to families in our community.

- If buying a whole bag of groceries is outside of your budget, or you want to personalize your donation, throw an extra bag or two of pasta, some cereal and canned goods into your cart. If you choose this option, may I respectfully suggest you buy what you would buy for your own family, treating others as you yourself would like to be treated. In other words, if you buy brand named for yourself, do likewise when you donate.

- Perhaps your faith participates in giving. In the past, our family has participated in packing food hampers through our local church. People donate expired food. Yup - happens every year and sometimes the pile of expired food far outweighs the pile of requested baby supplies or personal hygiene items. Would you feed your own family expired food? I think not. So do what you can, even one bag of pasta is better than no bag of pasta, but only if you're donating from the heart, not the back of your pantry.

As for giving monetarily - where you give or how much you give - is a lot more personal. It can be embarrassing standing at the cash register at the LCBO (an obvious non-necessity) and saying no to supporting Sick Kids but the reality is I support Sick Kids in a different way because that's a charity that hits close to home for me. Many of us have faced this same cash register conundrum. Do we throw a buck or two into the till to assuage our immediate guilt or make a more meaningful contribution of a larger dollar amount to one charity that is important to us on a personal level? At this point, the conversation starts to get a lot more philosophical about how and where you spend your donation dollars if you are lucky enough to have some to donate.