

Region endorses campaign to get more organ, tissue donors

By Bill Rea

Caledon's numbers are pretty good when it comes to people registering to be organ and tissue donors, but they could be better.

Ronnie Gavsie, president and CEO of the Trillium Gift of Life Network (TGLN) was at a recent meeting of Peel Regional council, offering congratulations for the progress that's been made so far and pressing the need to do more.

She also handed out pins of appreciation to several officials, and Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson was one of them.

Council ended up unanimously endorsing a request from TGLN to champion organ donor registration across the Region, and to encourage others, including municipal employees, community partners and residents to register. By registering, people give their consent to having their organs or tissues donated to others after they have died.

Throughout Ontario, the percentage of people who have registered to be donors is 29 per cent, and Gavsie said Peel lags behind that average at 21 per cent. Brampton's figures are 16 per cent, and they are 18 per cent for Mississauga. But Caledon is doing better, at close to the provincial average of almost 30 per cent.

"I'm one of the 30 per cent in Caledon," Thompson told Gavsie as he accepted his pin.

In her presentation to council, Gavsie said TGLN is a government agency, responsible for organ and tissue donation and transplants. She added the agency has partnered with hospitals and first responders in Peel to increase awareness, as well as raise the numbers of people who are registered.

"Simply the right thing to do," she remarked.

Gavsie said there are currently 1,620 people in Ontario on the waiting list for "medically urgent" transplants, as well as hundreds of others whose situations aren't quite as urgent. She added that every three days, one of the people on the list of 1,620 dies.

She also said that one organ donor can save up to eight lives, and enhance the lives of 75 other people through tissue donation.

Registration to be a donor takes only a couple of minutes, at beadonor.ca

Gavsie pointed to the importance of people registering to be a donor making sure that their families are aware of their wishes.

Bringing the figures closer to home, Gavsie said there are 206 Peel resident waiting for a "medically urgent" transplant, and 10 of those live in Caledon.

She also pointed out that while the numbers in Peel are lower than the provincial average, they are better than Toronto, which is at 19 per cent. York Region is at 24 per cent, and she said Sudbury is at 49 per cent.

Gavsie set out a challenge by calling on council to work with first responders and TGLN to create a culture of donation. She called on the Region to host a three-day registration drive, using various communication tools to highlight the challenge. Gavsie said such challenges can be successful, motivating and fun.

She added council's endorsement would be an important part of such a challenge.

"We don't just want you to walk with us," she said. "We want you to talk ahead of us. When you talk, people listen."

The report to council from Commissioner of Health Services Janette Smith stated that a barrier to registration is this issue is simply not top of mind with most people in Ontario.

Thompson agreed the numbers in Peel are too low. He added he and his family have registered as donors.

He also recalled the funeral a couple of years ago of the wife of one of his council colleagues (he did not mention any names), but in his eulogy to his wife, the councillor made the point that "she's gone on to help 25 others."

"It was the most powerful moment you could even imagine," Thompson said.

Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie agreed the numbers are too low in her city, pointing out it's less than one in five. She also said she has friends who have made donations and benefitted from them.

Crombie asked about cultural barriers. Gavsie told her there are generally lower registration rates in more diverse communities. She added TGLN tries to reach out to these communities, and would appreciate any help available.

Mississauga Councillor Karen Ras said she has a friend who received a double-lung transplant. "He is doing amazing today," she declared, adding she's planning a community event in April and is hoping to sign up more people then.

Thompson added about 8,000 people are expected out at Caledon Day in June He suggested TGLN set up a booth there.

"I am registered," Mississauga Councillor Chris Fonseca said, commenting her father died unexpectedly in 2013, and he had always pushed her and her siblings to get registered. Fonseca said she could understand how some family members might hesitate, having a lot to deal with at a time like that. But she added it's also possible to see how lives can be changed.



Mayor Allan Thompson accepted his pin of appreciation from Ronnie Gavsie, president and CEO of the Trillium Gift of Life Network.