

Men who care donate to help kids in need

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William Wallace is founder of 100 Men Who Give A Damn, an organization that listens to three funding pitches by local organizations. One is chosen and they are handed all the money collected that day.

KITCHENER — With a name like 100 Men Who Give a Damn Waterloo Region, it's not hard to figure out these guys are aiming to support their community.

"My sister is in 100 Women Who Care in Calgary and she was telling me about it, I thought it sounded cool," said founding member William Wallace, an entrepreneur who believes in giving back.

The idea behind these organizations is to bring large groups of donors together every three months for a short meeting. Everyone in the group writes a cheque for \$100, leaving the "pay to the order of" space blank.

Three registered charitable organizations are chosen based on members' suggestions and each has five minutes to stand in front of the group and present a funding pitch. At the end of the meeting, there is a secret ballot and one organization is chosen as the recipient of the money collected.

The funds can be substantial, up to \$10,000 or more depending on the membership totals. The winner's name is written into the payee's space on all the cheques and everything is handed over, no waiting.

"When you sign up, you check a box and agree to give \$400 over the course of the year," said Wallace who founded the organization with businessperson Marcus Drasdo. "We had 15 guys who couldn't make it to our first meeting and they still gave us cheques."

The Smile Maker Fund was the lucky recipient of \$6,100 in cheques at the group's inaugural meeting in June at the Huether Hotel. The fund, a charitable project run by Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region,

supports small wishes from children living in low income households supported by Family & Children Services. The fund is totally reliant on donors and often it is staff that put in their own money.

"This gives them little extras," said Liz Hedley, a supervisor at Family & Children Services. The money will be used to cover individual requests, everything from supplying a night light for a young child who has trouble settling down at night to a boy who wants to sign up for swimming lessons.

When Hedley pitched the idea at the 100 Men meeting, rather than feeling nervous she felt warmly welcomed.

"It was a very relaxed atmosphere," said Hedley. "They're very conscientious, very interested."

The 100 Men group wanted to know exactly where the money was going and how it would be dispersed and that all funds would be used to improve the lives of people in Waterloo Region. It also requires that the recipients report back to the group with the outcome of the donation.

The two organizations that did their pitch, but didn't receive funding were able to raise awareness and make new connections which are also valuable, said Wallace.

The first 100 Men chapters in Canada formed in London, St. John's, Fredericton and Halifax. Now there are more than 20 across Canada and nearly as many in the U.S. There are an equal number of women's organizations, 100 Women Who Care, across the country including the Waterloo Region chapter founded in 2013. That group now exceeds 150 members and has collectively donated more than \$78,800 to Lutherwood, KidsAbility and YWCA Cambridge.

Wallace said he became more motivated to form a 100 Men chapter after he attended an event hosted by Kitchener-Waterloo MP Peter Braid where charitable organizations were invited to do some networking.

"I saw what charities are out there, what needs are out there," he said. The event also introduced him to organizations he didn't know existed.

One of the first members of the chapter was an honorary male, former Waterloo Mayor Brenda Halloran, who is also a member of 100 Women Who Care. He said Halloran helped with recruiting the membership which now stands at 85.

"She really gave it a good boost," he said.

For more information about the local 100 Men Who Give a Damn chapter, go to www.100menwhogiveadamn.org.

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