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ENTERPRISING TEENS HOPE TO EXPAND PROGRAM ACROSS CANADA

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to be exposed to the virus," Mastromarini said.

Since late April, the teens have delivered 600 baskets containing a fabric mask, gloves, sanitary wipes, soap, deodorant, toothbrush and toothpaste to Toronto agencies serving homeless people, including Covenant House Toronto and Street Health.

Tomé lives in Etobicoke, while Mastromarini, Lee, Mancuso and Neal all live in North York.

Their Homeless Protection Baskets (COVID-19) GoFundMe page has raised more than \$6,000 of its \$10,000 goal.

Donations may also be made with PayPal or a card directly on the website at bit.ly/2YIroqv.

Recently, the friends delivered 300 baskets to Cove-

nant House Toronto.

It is Canada's largest agency serving about 300 youth a day who are homeless, sex trafficked or at-risk with the widest range of 24-7 services to reach their potential, reclaim their lives and transition to independence.

Tracie LeBlanc, associate director of communications with Covenant House Toronto, said the baskets are greatly needed among their approximately 100 drop-in clients a day, who are vulnerable to contracting COVID-19.

"We rely very heavily on these hygiene kits for our young people; it plays an important role (in keeping them safe)," LeBlanc said. "It has been such a hard time during COVID knowing how much our young people need us. There is no staying home and staying safe for them."



Nathan Lee and Jack Tomé unload their baskets, which include washable fabric masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, socks, toothpaste and toothbrushes, for Street Health clients.

LeBlanc lauded the teens' initiative.

"I was so impressed by these young men and their level of dedication and commitment," LeBlanc

said. "They arrived with their own delivery van with their logo on it, wearing T-shirts with their logo. It's a well-oiled machine."

While making basket

deliveries, they carry 10 to 15 baskets to hand out to people in need.

"People are very, very thankful and very surprised we're out there at a dangerous time during the pandemic," Mastromarini said.

The young men have also delivered baskets to Light Patrol, a Youth Unlimited outreach program working with homeless youth, and Given Values Toronto, who build supportive relationships with homeless people and at-risk youth to help them access services and support.

Currently, the teens are focused on spreading the word on The Basket Project.

"What we need is straight up awareness," Mastromarini said. "We really appreciate when people like and share our posts. It's really, really

hard to get yourself out there. We want to educate people."

Already, The Basket Project has a Hamilton division, co-founded by April Evans and Daniel Braccio. It has nearly reached its \$5,000 goal through its Homeless Protection Baskets Hamilton (COVID-19) GoFundMe campaign.

"Our end goal is to expand nationally," Tomé said. "We're a few university students raising money and making baskets. It's not hard to replicate it in other cities."

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: When reporter Tamara Shephard heard five university students were providing COVID-19 care baskets for homeless people in Toronto, she wanted to learn what motivated them and how they were impacting the community.

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