Great idea leads to charitable Ideal-way

‘Heart work’ gave $40G in donated goods to clients last weekend

TEAM WORK: Robert Pio Hajjar, founding director of Ideal-way.ca, a new charity for intellectually disabled persons, sits on boxes full of donated wares as Donald Yeo, CEO, and Addie Daabous, executive director, look on with goods stacked in their storage space.

Rob Pio Hajjar asked one question a year ago, and a charity for the intellectually disabled was born. “How’s business?” Hajjar asked his aunt, Adeline (Addie) Daabous, who runs an international marketing firm. That particular day, Daabous felt frustrated. Three containers of mahogany shipped from the Congo destined for Baltimore had landed instead in Turkey. “With a look I’ll never forget, Rob said to me: “I know what you should be doing. You should be working with people like me. Your life will never be better, and God will be happy with you,”” Daabous recalled.

Daabous was in tears. So was Hajjar, who has Down's syndrome. The die was cast. Ideal-way.ca was launched, with Hajjar its founding director, Daabous its executive director. “God told me about it,” Hajjar explained. “God said my aunt is so special and I want her to do this.”

A devout Hajjar, 30, communes with God for an hour each day. He listens to the Lebanon church on the radio, and prays — for IDEAL: “God make (Ideal) a miracle.”

IDEAL is an acronym for making people with intellectual disabilities feel included, deserving, equal, appreciated and loved. IDEA also reflects the central Etobicoke family’s belief that the intellectually disabled enriched lives.

“People always say, ‘Take time to smell the roses.’ Well, they smell you down in a good way,” Daabous said of intellectually disabled people. “You focus on the things that really matter, rather than deadlines. Let’s just enjoy things, enjoy people, enjoy the moment.”

Ideal-way.ca’s mission is three-fold: to connect intellectually disabled persons and others, to improve their lives by creating and enhancing opportunities for mainstream community interaction, and to educate mainstream social attitudes about people with intellectual disabilities.

“I feel great, happy. Having Down’s syndrome doesn’t bother me,” Hajjar said. “It hasn’t stopped me from doing things.”

In fact, Hajjar will soon take Horizons to lunch and to “shop for free” from $40,000 worth of donated items at the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 210 on Jutland Road. “The light we saw that day; the gratitude was very uplifting,” said volunteer Jack Dunne, a Re/Max real estate agent whose colleagues donated goods from estate sales.

“One place was full of love. It was a tremendous success. Everybody left very, very happy.”

Last Christmas, Daabous and Yeo witnessed the same light in 40-year-old Gracie: “Santa, you finally came,” she said, when Yeo, dressed as Santa Claus, handed out gifts at her group home.

Much of the charity’s work involves the collection by volunteers of donated new and gently used clothing, household items, computer and electronic equipment. This year, Ideal-way.ca has donated $57,000 worth of goods to intellectually disabled people living in group homes, independent living- and co-op apartments.

Currently, it is Ideal-way.ca that is in need — of warehouse space. Daabous said Yeo’s 400-square-foot garage is full of boxes of donations, so full Daabous said she has had to put up furniture donations because they don’t have a truck to pick it up, or a place to store it.

Anyone with leads on a large vehicle or warehouse space can contact Daabous at info@ideal-way.ca, or visit the website www.ideal-way.ca, or visit the website www.ideal-way.ca.

Overcoming obstacles in business is nothing new to the entrepreneurial couple, who have 50 years experience with their businesses. “But this is different. Even if there are obstacles between them, Yeo is the inventor of, among other things, the now-ubiquitous Blue Box,”

If families like Ideal-way.ca, obstacles fall away, Daabous said. She calls the calling “heart work.”

“Never in the past have the paths been opened like this,” Daabous said of the couple’s experience with their businesses. “But this is different. Even if there is a roadblock, immediately as we approach it, the roadblock is removed.”

On Video...

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• Win a pair of tickets to The Shop on Main Street (www.te-anim.com, $40), deadline Nov. 11.
• Win a copy of Dana’s Top 10 Table cookbook and a whisk (www.top-tentable.com, $38), Nov. 11.