

**WOLSELEY**

# Support network helps disabled

## *Tomato plants raise money*

WHEN it comes to providing for her daughter Karen, Laura Schnellert says all the money in the world could never buy friendship.

"The best gift I could leave Karen would be family and friends who care for her," she says. "Staff come and go and there isn't that consistency."

Schnellert says Karen, 28, suffers from an intellectual disability. Ten years ago, Schnellert jumped at the chance to be a part of Continuity Care — a non-profit organization run by families that was established to help families with a child that suffers from an intellectual disability get support from the community. Since then, the organization estimates it has had 450 members, including parents, siblings and citizens, get involved to help with the program.

For the second year in a row, the organization is selling tomato plants to raise money for its Help us Grow campaign, to help people with intellectual disabilities build support networks in the community and live independent lives.

"We want people suffering from intellectual disabilities to be



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## Help Us Grow organizer Leigh Cunningham (from left) with Laura Schnellert and her daughter Karen.

part of the mainstream (community)," says Leigh Cunningham, instigator for the Help us Grow campaign. "The impacts are phenomenal."

Last year, Cunningham says they sold a total of 400 plants and raised more than \$1,500 for the organization. This year, Cunningham says the tomato project is in memory of the late Bob Manwaring, the founder of the organization who passed away from cancer last month. She says they are hoping to double their efforts and sell more than 800 plants.

According to Karen Leggat, executive director of Continuity Care, parents are usually the primary caregiver when a child has an intellectual disability, and Continuity Care helps them establish friendships with people in the community who can help take care of their child. She says as parents age, they worry about who will be able to look after their child once they are no longer able to or when they pass away.

"It's so important because people with disabilities are vulnerable," she says. "They need friendships and people who are not paid around them so they can continue with their quality of

life."

Leggat says the organization offers workshops for families to share their stories and learn from one another. She says making friendships and ensuring that people with disabilities are secure in the future can help integrate them into the community.

Schnellert says Karen's support circle of about 12 people meets as a group a few times a year. She says her daughter is surrounded by people from all walks of life who love and support her and socialize with her on a regular basis, like taking her out for coffee or dinner. Schnellert says she feels confident that the committed group will remain in touch with Karen as she gets older, and will make sure that she always receives the kind of support that she needs.

"If I was in a car accident tomorrow, I feel these people will come together," she says. "They would be there for her."

Help us Grow continues until the end of the month. Tomato plants are \$5 and are available by calling Continuity Care at 779-1679 or by picking them up at the Continuity Care office at 120 Maryland Street.