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Costly Living

'Buy Nothing' movement grows in Surrey

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As Surrey residents struggle with the rising cost of living, some are buying nothing, where possible.

Several "Buy Nothing" and "Everything Free" groups have sprung up on social media in recent months and years, as part of a global movement to save money and also reduce waste.

These "gift economy" networks also help foster greater community connections as people "give and receive, share, lend and express gratitude," as explained on the website buynothingproject.org.

Launched in 2013 by two friends on Bainbridge Island, WA,

the network is said to now involve close to 7,000 Buy Nothing groups, including several in Surrey and surrounding cities, and more than 5.3 million members in countries around the world.

On Facebook, the Buy Nothing Whalley group includes more than 600 members who share the philosophy of "Buy Nothing. Give Freely. Share creatively."

"If you live here," a group post says, "we'd love to have you join us! You can join one group only, the group where you live so you can literally 'give where you live.' This is what builds community."

Mostly household items are gifted and received, including books, plants, hair dryers, cat brushes, shoes, puzzles, even restaurant food deemed too spicy – you name it, people have posted it, either looking to give it away or wanting the item.

Mya Davidson is an administrator of the private Facebook group, and joined not long after it was launched in the fall of 2020.

"Our group has grown fairly quickly but not with the explosion

that I think even the Newton group has experienced, and some of the other groups in the Lower Mainland," Davidson said.

A government employee, Davidson said she appreciates the spirit of community in the Buy Nothing movement, whether it's a gift of a tangible item or service of some kind.

"Sometimes it's about people needing help to fix something, maybe IT help, or they need the gift of knowledge or support," Davidson explained. "It's not always items that are given and received."

Davidson said she's been shopping at thrift stores for many years.

"I'm a cheapskate," she admitted with a laugh. "I don't like paying full price for things. I'm the sort of person who likes walking down alleyways because you never know what you'll find in them – I love the idea of a great find."

"I've never been big on brands or buying new if it's something that's available otherwise, or having the newest and shiniest," Davidson added. "That's not important to me. New to me makes me just as happy."

One time, she needed some wooden skewers to test the moisture of her plants.

"Those are, like, \$2 at the dollar store, but literally 15 minutes after I asked for them, someone said, 'Oh yeah, I have a pack of those I never use, have them.' She didn't need them and I could use them," Davidson recalled.

"It could be easy to go to a store and purchase that thing, but it's about rejecting the idea that I have to spend money, and maybe someone already has that thing and they don't need it, and that I could use it."

Andrea Painter, another Buy



Mya Davidson with some items she's been gifted through connections made on the Buy Nothing Whalley group on Facebook. "I don't like paying full price for things," she said. "I love the idea of a great find." (Photo: Tom Zillich)

Nothing Whalley group member, said she was involved in online "freecycle" groups close to a decade ago, but they weren't as geographically specific as the Buy Nothing platform.

"I've always liked going to thrift stores and all that, but for some people, even the prices at thrift stores are too much," Painter noted. "So this is the alternative, and if I have stuff I'm not using anymore, I like being able to share it with people who will put it to good use."

Painter said she feels lucky to have been employed throughout the pandemic.

"But some people aren't as lucky, and some of the people in the group don't have all the necessities all the time," she said.

She's given away a humidifier and also a set of dishes, among other items.

Another time, she was in need of a very specific thing, and posted in the group.

"My boyfriend broke the lid to my shampoo bottle after dropping it in the shower," Painter recalled.

"So I asked if anyone had a bottle of Dr. Bronner's that was almost empty and if they had a lid, and sure enough, someone did. My bottle was almost full and theirs was almost empty, so they gave me their lid. It's ridiculous things like that that feel kind of silly, but it helps a person out. It'd just go in the recycling bin otherwise."

Another day, Painter needed some rooting compound for plants.

"I could buy some, but it's 10 bucks and I will use it once this year and then it'd go to waste, so reducing waste is also a big part of this group," Painter explained. "I also needed some drywall mud powder and didn't need a whole container of it, for four little holes in the wall I wanted to patch. So it's about sharing what you don't need."

Painter said she's sometimes reluctant to give stuff to local thrift stores, because she wonders if that stuff will be used by someone who truly needs it.

"But giving it to an actual person who's excited to get that particular

thing, like beads or crafting supplies, or lantern lights, stuff like that, it feels good to give that to someone who's excited about having it," Painter added. "This cuts out the middle man, almost, of the thrift store or second-hand store."

The Buy Nothing Project now includes an app, in addition to Facebook groups.

In the Whalley network, Davidson recently posted about a "traveling suitcase" of clothes that made its way around the community. People could take what they wanted or needed from the suitcase, then give it to someone else, until all items were gone.

"I went through and got rid of easily half a closet of dresses," Davidson recalled. "I'm really hoping that they'll get spread around the community."

"It fills me with joy to see a post about someone going through a change in life, having a child, or about to have a child, for example, and they might need new clothes and post about it, or that they've changed size and need or are giving away those clothes," she added.

On the group page, Davidson said she's noticed an uptick in the number of food-related posts, from people either giving away food or asking for it.

"I haven't noticed any posts specifically mentioning the rising cost of living, but we have had a few posts from people who've gone through their pantry and it's getting thin," Davidson said. "And other people have posted that they have two extra grocery bags of food to give away."

"I even notice that with the cost of living right now, sometimes I can't afford to buy fresh fruit and vegetables," she added, "and I was really quite affected by that and became quite scared in some respect, and so I really appreciate people offering food when they know they might not need all of it."

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