

Local Food Bank in dire need ahead of busy Christmas period



By Jasen Obermeyer

With the Christmas feeling in the air, houses will be decorated, trees put up, and presents wrapped, as for many, Christmas is a time for celebration, giving and receiving. But for the Orangeville Food Bank, while it's a time when they receive some of their largest donations, they have recently seen some of their highest numbers of users.

For them, Christmas is a difficult time, with many being unable to provide presents and enjoy a family feast.

Heather Hayes, the food bank's executive director, says that for the first time in the two years she's been here, the food bank has topped 500 people visiting them, as last month 510 users came by.

Last year, the food bank raised 39,000 pounds of food for Christmas donation, and Ms. Hayes says they would love to hit 45,000 pounds this year.

In a report from the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB), it found that in 2016-17, nearly 500,000 individuals visited food banks, with 33 per cent of them being children. The report also found that nearly 30 per cent accessed food banks only once, with 50 per cent using it three times or less.

Ms. Hayes says they see an increase in donations around this time because "the nature of the holiday season is one of giving, and caring for neighbors, and supporting each other, and knowing sometimes that you may have more than other people do."

She explained that although they see an increase in donations, they see an increase of users.

"Christmas isn't always the best time of year for everybody, and that's what we find here. There's lots of pressure on people this time of year to not only manage the day-to-day things that are keeping their head above water, but then to throw in the extra bits of Christmas."

Discussing donations, she said the food bank has received some turkeys and ham, while financial donations help provide milk, eggs, fresh fruits and vegetables, along with their operating costs.

Donations, both large and small, come from individuals, local churches, organizations, and Orangeville Police Service's annual toy and food drive.

Ms. Hayes disclosed some monthly costs of certain products purchased by the food bank: milk and eggs \$270, kids zone \$440, fruits/vegetables \$500, and hygiene products \$200. "You can see those are costs we incur every month."

She says if they're lucky, the donations can take them to Easter, the next big holiday. "In the big scheme of things, it's impressive, but the need is ever growing."

Ms. Hayes added that they are always "fortunate to have lots of community support."

Some of those pressures she says include gifts and turkey dinners with "all the trimmings."

Despite this, Ms. Hayes says, "I meet the best people everyday, the best people who come in and use our services, but I also meet the best people who support us? It does bring the community together."