

Food bank implements door-to-car-door service for community members

The Aurora Food Pantry has instituted door-to-car-door service in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The good news is, for the most part, the local food bank is doing well in responding to community needs in this time of crisis.

Since the outbreak began to transform our lives in March, the Aurora Food Pantry, which is based on Industrial Parkway South, has been looking at ways to meet community demand while, at the same time, maintaining the health and wellbeing of its volunteers, the lifeblood of the organization.

“We started with the premise that we want to be able to continue serving our community. Period,” says Allison Stuart, Board Chair of the Aurora Food Pantry. “Falling out of that was the need to protect our clients, our staff, and volunteers. Somehow we had to make those puzzle pieces come together while also recognizing the set-up that we had and the limitations that entailed.”

The biggest question, she says, was whether or not the Food Pantry would be able to provide personalized service for its many underprivileged clients.

Before COVID-19 and social distancing became our new normal for an indefinite period of time, clients would be able to go shopping in the food bank for what they needed, accompanied by a volunteer to help assist in this process. It soon became clear that that model would have to be suspended in the interests of everyone's safety.

Now, volunteers are the ones doing the shopping throughout their vast warehouse, guided by parameters such as family makeup and dietary restrictions supplied by clients.

“We started this process probably earlier than we needed to, but it was our best way of approaching it,” says Ms. Stuart. “The clients are appreciative that we're open and we probably get ten calls a day asking if we're still open. They are appreciative that we're looking out for their safety by letting them wait in their individual cars rather than coming in and snuggling together in a rather small waiting area. It is more difficult for those who come by either transit or walk to the Food Pantry and there is really nothing much we can do to accommodate that because if we let one client in, it is going to be too challenging to manage all the clients. Most of our clients have arranged rides and so on, so that works out quite well.”

Ms. Stuart admits that while the new protocols have made for a process that is slower than usual, there have been no complaints from clients.

Despite their new delivery model, it is full steam ahead at the Aurora Food Pantry.

While they are well stocked for today, tomorrow is always a question.

“We started off with our shelves full and able to pretty well give our clients what they needed,” says Ms. Stuart. “However, when we went to stock up on those things that we were running on, we couldn't get some of those replaced at the grocery store, the same as everyone else? standard stuff like toilet paper. Produce was very low, along with flour and those kinds of things, but we've got systems in place and we're doing quite well with meeting our commitments to our clients. That, in large part, is due to the incredible, over-the-top generosity of the community.

“We have had people phoning every day of the week asking where they could drop stuff off and we have been supported financially by the community with donations and this is really important now? and it is also really important for the future because what we anticipate over the next little while is, yes, we will be seeing our current clients more frequently than usual, but?that people's personal ability to manage with challenging circumstances, as they get more and more limited, we're anticipating there will be an increase in activity at the Food Pantry and even more new registrations. We're looking not only to today but also to make sure we're still able to serve them as this continues and the hardship for people increases.

“The community's generosity is fantastic and we can assure the community today and tomorrow that we can look after our clients. We appreciate their continued support so that into the future we can continue to say that because we're anticipating it is going to get worse before it gets better. People's initial energy will diminish. It is kind of a balancing act: we don't want to take more than our due in terms of people's generosity and yet we also want to make sure that we're not having to modify what we can do for our clients too much because their needs continue whether we modify what we can do in response or not.”

For more information on the Aurora Food Pantry, visit www.aurorafoodpantry.ca or call 905-841-1577. Services are currently offered at select times on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

By Brock Weir