

Food insecurity doesn't take a summer vacation: Food Pantry in need of seasonal staples, toiletries



By Brock Weir

Over the past year, members of the Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill Constituency Youth Council have been hard at work keeping their fingers on the pulse of the community and getting a handle on issues just below the surface.

Last week, they put these lessons into action, delivering bumper crops of toiletries to the Aurora Food Pantry.

The Constituency Youth Council of MP Leona Alleslev dropped off two tubs of toiletries to the Pantry's Industrial Parkway South facility. It might have looked like a lot, but the Pantry's Sandra Seepaul says these addressed acute concerns and were quickly allocated to local families in need.

"We try to offer a little bit of everything that people generally spend money on regularly in their lives," says Ms. Seepaul. "While food is one of those things that we're trying to supplement, things like toilet paper, and things like toothbrushes, toothpaste and shampoo are things we use in our lives daily. We let people know that these are the types of things we're asking for because everyone is aware we use them, but I don't think people necessarily think about it.

"These [two tubs] go very quickly and they aren't really a whole lot when you consider how many clients we have; we serve over 200 families and each family only gets one item, pretty much, when they come in."

People generally think food banks such as the Aurora Food Pantry are busiest during the holiday seasons. While that's certainly not untrue, summer brings its own unique needs and challenges to the Pantry.

"We're running low on things like juice boxes and those are important because now kids are at home and they will generally eat more food," she says. "If they were accessing any kind of school program, they are no longer [using] a lunch or breakfast program and we're trying to supplement those families and children. Things like juice boxes are great, along with snack foods without peanuts, because if they are going to day camps, they're going to need snacks without peanuts."

In addition to this, the Aurora Food Pantry is also in need of canned meats — salmon, for example — along with canned soups and "sturdy" vegetables and fruit like carrots, potatoes, apples and oranges.

"People's needs don't go away," says Ms. Seepaul. "Just because other people have the ability to go away on vacations and go to cottages, people who are living with food insecurity don't have those options a lot of the time and that need never really goes away." In addition to the Aurora Food Pantry, the local Constituency Youth Council also made donations to Aurora's Welcoming Arms and Richmond Hill's Light on the Hill Church.

For more on the Aurora Food Pantry, including how to become involved or donate, visit www.aurorafoodpantry.ca, email info@aurorafoodpantry.ca, or call 905-841-1577.