

Give Where You Live campaign brings in more than 26,000 pounds of donations as food banks look to maintain momentum



A campaign by York Region food banks urging residents to 'Give Where You Live' brought in 26,750 pounds of non-perishable food donations and more than \$3,000 in cash to support the community and participating organizations are looking to keep the momentum going.

Between June 15 and June 18, food banks serving Aurora, Georgina, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill and Vaughan came together for the springtime food drive.

The aim of the inaugural Give Where You Live campaign was to underscore to people in the community that their donations are distributed within their own communities to help fight food insecurity.

As residents more than answered the call, participating food banks would like to keep the issue of food insecurity top of mind as the summer days eventually turn to back-to-school season.

'Give Where You Live was an idea late in the making by the various food banks, so we weren't able to give it as much publicity as we might have under different circumstances, but as usual Aurora stepped up and did a great job of making donations and we were well-served,' says Allison Stuart, Chair of the Aurora Food Pantry.

'It will be very helpful because, as we go into the summer, we have fewer donations, fewer food drives, fewer team events and that sort of thing [to hold food drives] and it is always great to have unexpected contributions of food. In addition, over the summer, we prepare snack bags for kids that are going to be going to school, so it is still useful to help fill those bags as well.'

Some of the donations received during the first phase of Give Where You Live which will be especially useful for these kits were juice boxes, which Ms. Stuart stresses are much different than 'drink' boxes because not only do kids love them, they also provide some nutritional value.

'We're really proud here in Aurora of just how generous Aurora residents are,' she continues, adding that this generosity also extends to north Oak Ridges. 'People keep us in their minds and that is always fabulous.'

Representatives of the area food banks will be meeting this week to discuss strategies and events going forward. Ms. Stuart says everyone is 'enthusiastic about continuing to demonstrate our collective commitment' and reiterate their emphasis 'of supporting

people in your neighbourhood, where you live, and knowing if you're a donor you're supporting people locally who are struggling.?

As the affordability crisis continues, food banks like the Aurora Food Pantry have seen significant shifts in demand, including people who have never before experienced food insecurity, as well as newcomers to the community, including refugees from Ukraine, who are trying to get back on their feet while navigating an often-complex system.

?Most times if people haven't come to us on their own, meaning they took the initiative, it is because they're working either through government agencies and that sort of thing and they will suggest they get in touch with the Food Pantry,? says Ms. Stuart. ?If they need some additional help and we can't provide it because we like to stay in our lane and try and be the best we can be in our lane, the first thing we do ? and we do this for every new client ? is give them the ?York Region on a Limited Budget' booklet. It's an amazing booklet that covers all the various kinds of services ? everything from people in vulnerable situations, who to contact, shelters, food outreach, where you can get free meals like the Tuesday breakfast at the York Region Food Network, dinner at [Welcoming Arms] and the booklet is done through York Support Services Network. We're getting a fair number of people who are in the relative peace of Canada from Ukraine and they have a significant amount of general support but sometimes they need a reference.

?We're able to certainly meet the needs of all our clients, which is great ? not so great that folks need our services, but, if they do, we're here for them and we're here for them because the people in the community choose to support us. We get no ongoing funding or anything from a government agency, so every time someone donates something they're having an impact in their community.?

For more on the Aurora Food Pantry, including a list of current needs, visit aurorafoodpantry.ca.

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