

Neighbourhood Network revives, expands Food Drive challenge amid rising needs

The affordability crisis has made local food banks busier now than ever before.

As a response, ahead of Thanksgiving, Neighbourhood Network is re-launching its Food Drive Community Challenge and expanding it through to the holiday season.

The Neighbourhood Network Food Drive each year supports local food banks serving the communities in which Neighbourhood Network operates.

The Challenge is an opportunity for high school students to give back to their communities while collecting Community Service Hours.

To take part, all you need to do is go to neighbourhoodnetwork.org and look at the most urgent needs of the food banks and pantries closest to you, purchase some of the items on the list, keep your receipt and, upon donation, send your receipt to Neighbourhood Network towards your community involvement and challenge friends to do the same.

The challenge is not limited to students, either. If you're not looking for Community Service Hours, businesses and teams are more than welcome to join the cause and make a positive difference for food insecure individuals and families in their communities.

‘Our goal is to support our food banks and food pantries in our partner municipalities and we're encouraging this through the holidays and between the holidays,’ says Neighbourhood Network's Tanya Dennis. ‘Right now, our focus is from Thanksgiving until Christmas and all of our food banks' urgently-needed items are on our websites.

‘Now schools are back and in person, they're all looking for peanut-free kids' snacks like fruit cups, granola bars and things like that. We're encouraging this food drive until the end of the holidays. Because we're calling it a Challenge and because our high school students are still in need of volunteer hours and opportunities, we're offering this to them through the entire year.’

Numbers at the local food banks, she says, continue to climb and the Aurora Food Pantry alone is presently serving 250 families per month, which averages out to 650-700 individuals during the same time period.

‘They're continually increasing,’ she says, ‘and the prediction is it is going to continue with the increased costs of everything. Those numbers are climbing and those numbers are scary. I don't think people realize that so many people are using food banks. Food insecurity [is defined as] when an individual or household does not have enough money to purchase adequate food to meet their dietary needs. I think adults are missing meals to feed their children and some people aren't even eating in a full day and definitely not meeting those dietary needs.

‘I am in shocked to sit where I sit as a program coordinator. It's becoming tricky to see how the needs are growing so much. If anyone is looking to do anything between now and also through Christmas, hosting a food drive within a company or business is highly encouraged, to take a look at our website, look at those urgently needed items. Gift cards are a huge thing for people. Food pantries would like monetary donations. I think a lot of people forget that food banks and food pantries will also accept fresh produce. It's sad to think, but people are really eating unhealthily. The cost of groceries are going up, so people are sacrificing nutrition, adults are sacrificing meals to feed kids, and it is hard to eat healthily.’

For more information, visit neighbourhoodnetwork.org/program/fall-food-drive.

By Brock Weir
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