

Local United Way chapter grants \$120,000 to community groups

Written By MIKE BAKER

United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin is providing \$120,000 in grants to help support four vital community services and programs during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Announced on Tuesday, the money will provide some much-needed assistance to the Orangeville Food Bank, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dufferin, Shelburne's Shepherd's Cupboard Foodbank and Canadian Mental Health Association Peel Dufferin.

"We are extremely pleased to be able to support the Dufferin community in this way," said Rick McCombie, interim executive director at the local United Way. "These funds have allowed our community partners to think of new ways to support those who need our help right now and address new and emerging issues head-on over the coming months, and that is a wonderful thing for our community."

United Way GWD announced it would be granting money to vulnerable members of our community through its Emergency Community Support Fund back on May 19. Over the past six weeks, a volunteer-led grants committee reviewed applications and make recommendations regarding where, and to whom, the emergency funds should be distributed.

"The team worked closely with the Dufferin Community Foundation to ensure a coordinated approach was taken to distribute funds fairly, and ensure maximum impact," a press release distributed by United Way states.

Top of the list donation-wise was the Orangeville Food Bank, who received \$75,000 to help with its emergency food and perishable food program. Operating in Orangeville and Grand Valley, the Dufferin Food Share provides non-perishable and perishable foods twice a month, through either a drive-thru or walk-thru model, to those in need in the local community.

The Orangeville Food Bank recently moved to a new home on Centennial Road in Orangeville. Since the COVID-19 pandemic started back in March, more people than ever are relying on the local food bank to ensure they can feed themselves and their families. Back in May, Orangeville Food Bank Executive Director Heather Hayes told media there had been a 70 percent increase in the amount of new individuals accessing food bank services in April 2020 when compared to April 2019.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dufferin will be using the \$15,000 they received to fund a virtual mentoring program. The organization has long offered one-to-one mentoring to local youth, which pairs boys and girls under the age of 18 with an older role model that they can talk to and socialize with.

"Through regular outings, a relationship is developed between the mentor and the mentee, which is built on trust and common interests, and is supported by our experienced case-workers," a passage on the organization's website, explaining the program, reads. "The result is a life-changing experience for both the mentor and the mentee."

Unfortunately, one-to-one mentoring program participants have not been able to meet up since March. While restrictions enacted by the provincial government have been loosened in recent weeks, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Dufferin is taking a careful approach when it comes to relaunching its in-person programs. As such, the development of the virtual mentoring program is pivotal to ensure local youth can continue to connect with their mentors.

Elsewhere, the Shepherd's Cupboard Food Bank in Shelburne will receive \$10,000 to bolster its food stock, and help ensure it can continue to meet the needs of the local community, while Canadian Mental Health Association Peel Dufferin will receive \$20,000 to improve infection prevention and control measures across its facilities.

Mr. McCombie said he was pleased to see the successful applications will address a number of issues across our community,

including food insecurity, mental health and addictions, housing, domestic violence, and isolation.

“These are issues that our community faced before, and COVID-19 has only exacerbated,” Mr. McCombie said. “We know many are struggling right now, and even as we move into more things reopening, we know vulnerable populations in our community will continue to need support moving forward.”

He added, “We are pleased to have been able to award some of this funding to projects that will not only assist in the short-term, but set up services for the long-term.”