

Hamper Program Backpack Project helping kids get ready for school

Written By **Brian Lockhart**

Getting kids ready for their back-to-school adventure can sometimes be a bit of a scramble in the weeks prior to the start of a new school year.

For some, it can be a struggle to make sure they have all the supplies they need to be successful in the classroom.

The Hamper Program Backpack Project helps provide supplies for students from junior kindergarten right up to grade 12.

With this year being a rather difficult one due to the pandemic, more families are struggling due to job losses or other unforeseen circumstances as a result.

Last year, the program provide 85 backpacks, water bottles, and school supplies to kids in Shelburne and the surrounding area.

“The Christmas Hamper program is run by local service clubs in Shelburne,” explained Rotary Club member and chair of the Backpack Project, Bobbi Ferguson. “This Backpack Project is an arm of that but primarily it is run by the Rotary Club. Over this past year, with all that was going on so it was difficult to get together with other groups. This is the second year we've done the Backpack Program. For this year campaign we've just started registering students. We started registration through the Food Bank at the beginning of July.”

So far this year they have registered around 40 students and they expect to reach the same number from last year which supplied 85 students.

“Because of COVID there are more families that are going to be needing the Food Bank,” Ms. Ferguson explained. “It's an easy way for people to register. They can tell us they need a backpack, and we ask what ages the children are. Right now our goal is to raise enough money to give each kid a backpack, a lunch kit, and a reusable water bottle. Last year we were able to supply age appropriate items like pencil crayons, a ruler, pens, pencils, some writing books, and things like a protractor for the kids in the older grades.”

The backpacks are filled to be age appropriate for whatever needs a child in a certain grade in school requires.

Several local businesses have stepped up to donate to the program as well as private individuals who donate funds to buy the supplies.

The Food Bank reported that quite a few people have registered or are showing interest in the project so they are extending registration into the middle of August.

“Around two weeks before ‘back-to-school,’ I'll deliver all the backpacks, and the kids will be able to pick out the one they want,” Ms. Ferguson explained.

Organizers have put a lot of thought into this program. The backpacks are nice and popular with the kids, and they do not have any type of logo or identifying mark that would indicate they came from a program like this.

“The backpacks look like they just picked it out at the store,” Ms. Ferguson said. “We don't want to put any logos on them. They're kids are just like anyone other kids, they're just maybe going through a tough time and need a little bit of help. It was wildly successful last year, and people contacted us to see how they could help.”

If you would like to help by making a donation, you can contact organizers via e-mail at: shelburnechristmashampers@gmail.com, or visit them on Facebook at Shelburne Christmas Hampers.

You can register a child for a backpack through the Shepherd's Cupboard Food Ban.