

Usage up at local food bank

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The Shelburne Food Bank, Shepherd's Cupboard, is in the full swing of their holiday demand and staff are reporting a 35 per cent increase in usage in the last three months.

Ardith Dunlop, coordinator at the local food bank, in an email to the Free Press said Shepherd's Cupboard is seeing well over 100 families' access their services each month, continuing to be up from their average 70 to 80 families pre-COVID-19. Currently, Shepherd's Cupboard has over 200 families listed as using the food bank in the Shelburne, Mono, Melancthon and Amaranth area.

'It's just so many people on every single shift,' said Dunlop. 'It's concerning because we're clearly not addressing the problem. There's clearly some underlying issues there that need better addressing than what we provide.'

Dunlop noted that in terms of demographics, the food bank is seeing more seniors and single person families in the communities access the program.

The increase in demand the local food bank is seeing isn't dissimilar to the demand being seen at food banks across the board.

Feed Ontario released a new report on Monday (Nov. 29), which found that a record number of 592,308 people have accessed food bank services between April 2020 and March 2021. According to the report there's been a 36 per cent increase in the proportion of senior citizens using food bank services.

While food insecurity is one of the main focuses of the food bank, Dunlop said residents have many reasons for utilizing the food bank including housing, financial, and job insecurities.

'All are experiencing food insecurities and that's where we can help,' said Dunlop.

Another concern has been the rising prices for food at grocery stores. Stats Canada reported in October 2021 that inflation hit an 18-year high with the consumer index price (CPI) rising 4.7 per cent. Food prices from October 2020 compared to October 2021 rose 3.6 per cent, with meat rising 10 per cent.

'We're nobody's total source of food so the clients all mention it because they go to the grocery stores and they see it,' said Dunlop. 'They're getting less for the limited money that they have, which leads them to the food bank. They're also not getting as much for the coupon that we give them as they used to, and that's concerning because it's nutritious produce and fresh food.'

At the time of print, Shepherd's Cupboard says they have adequate supply to deal with the demand with the numerous food drives and fundraisers held throughout the community. Dunlop notes though that concerns lie with the New Year, as donations sharply decrease in the winter and spring.

As a way to collect specifically needed items for the food bank, Shepherd's Cupboard has launched a 12 Days of Christmas Giving initiative, which sees a different item donated each day for 12 days.

'We get repeatedly asked 'what are your most needed items' because people want to know what we really need. We thought it was a great way for individuals and families to see what our most needed items are and to consider helping us out in a clear and simple way.'

From day 1 to day 12 the needed items are as follows: box of cereal, peanut butter, canned fruit, pasta sauce, personal care item, canned pasta, canned vegetables, coffee, kids snacks, cookies, laundry or dish detergent, and pancake mix/syrup.

Donations for can be made to Shepherd's Cupboard up until Dec. 22; their last day of operation for 2021.