

Increased demand putting stress on local food bank, donations needed

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Local food bank, Shepherd's Cupboard, is calling on the help of the community as they face decreasing donations, rising food costs, and facility maintenance on top of an increasing usage demand.

"We're low right now on donations. Starting from about March to about early September is our lower time for getting donations," said Ardith Dunlop, foodbank coordinator for Shepherd's Cupboard. "We really feel for the people who come in. We want to be able to have the stuff to serve them ? we don't want food to be on their minds."

The local food bank, which serves the Shelburne, Mono, Melancthon and Amaranth areas, has seen a substantial increase in the number of users.

In the last year, Dunlop said about 300 families in the community have utilized the foodbank and of those 61 per cent are from Shelburne, 25 per cent are from Melancthon, 11 per cent are from Amaranth and 3 per cent are from Mono.

The increase in user numbers has created a new obstacle for the foodbank, with their current location, the Mel Lloyd Centre, no longer giving them the sufficient space needed to operate.

"We've been lucky in this building, we really have been, but now it's become apparent we're just too big," said Dunlop.

While holding interviews with foodbank users outside the facility became the norm over the last two years due to COVID-19 restrictions, their growth and spacing difficulties have now led the outdoor interviews to be the standard.

It's a process that Dunlop said is not ideal.

"When you're face-to-face you can deal with a multi-layer of issues that arise and I think clients really miss having an opportunity to talk to the interviewer, who can point them in more directions than just food," she said.

Shepherd's Cupboard is scheduled to meet with Shelburne council in August to discuss the possibilities of a new location.

Alongside spacing, the other biggest difficulty the food bank is experiencing is the rising cost of food.

In the months when fewer physical donations are seen, much of what is given out is relied on by the food bank making their own purchases.

On average, the Shelburne Foodbank spends around \$10,000 a month on purchasing items, but as of last month the bill doubled.

"To hit \$20,000 was a shock," said Dunlop. "We just don't have that kind of funding to continue that."

Some of the most expensive items to purchase have included laundry detergent, deodorant, feminine hygiene products, and cooking oil.

The costs hit home even more as a malfunction with the freezers at the beginning of June caused Shepherd's Cupboard to lose close to \$1,500 worth of chicken.

?It's disheartening to see. It was a big loss to us that moth and on top of already putting out so much money.?

With surmounting difficulties as well as a rising usage demand, Dunlop added they're worried about Shepherd's Cupboard's future direction.

?It falls on the community and we're really lucky that we have a them, they've always seen us through, but how long can they do it in order to sustain this growth,? said Dunlop. ?People are really suffering.?