

Shelburne Backpack Project in need of donations to support students at local schools

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The end of summer holidays is rapidly approaching, which means it's time for families to start getting ready for another school year with back-to-school shopping.

But for some students, the preparation for another school year can be a struggle to ensure they have the basic supplies needed to succeed in the classroom.

To help with this, the Shelburne Backpack Project is asking for the community's help raising funds to provide students from junior kindergarten to Grade 12 with back-to-school supplies.

"We have a couple weeks to go because the students need stuff before the first day of school, and we are about half way to our goal in getting what we need for the backpack project," said Bobbi Ferguson, chair of the local backpack program.

The Backpack Project is an annual initiative run by the service clubs of Shelburne, which looks to provide school supplies such as backpacks, lunch bags, and water bottles to families in need. The program was launched in 2020, and in its first year, it provided 85 kids in Shelburne and the surrounding areas with essential back-to-school supplies.

Over the last three years, the Backpack Project has seen a steady increase in the number of students reaching out for their services.

So far, the program has registered 83 students for backpacks for the upcoming school year, but Ferguson said she expects the final numbers to be between 120 and 130 students.

"Last year, we had 105 students and we had to cut it off because we ran out of funds. We're preparing for the same this year," said Ferguson.

Ferguson believed that one of the reasons the program has seen an increase in the number of students accessing the service year-over-year is, in part, due to awareness of the program.

"It's the knowledge that this program is available. Obviously, things are tight right now, and what the [Backpack Project] does is free up some cash so families can get food or put gas in their car instead of thinking what aren't we going to get this week because we need school supplies," said Ferguson. "We do feel very fortunate that our community allows us to do this for people that need it, and I'm hoping it means a reliable, good quality source of help when they need it."

The organizers spend a significant amount of time putting together the backpacks to ensure that each one is tailored to be age appropriate for specific students. The demographic need for supplies is determined based on the registration through the Shelburne Food Bank.

After the backpacks are packed, they are handed out to the families when they make their regular visits to Shepherd's Cupboard.

"It's all very discreet because we want to make it as private as possible. Students deserve to have nice things no matter what kind of trials they're going through," said Ferguson.

Ferguson noted that this year, the most common age group they're collecting school supplies for are students between the ages of 9

and 12.

The cost of putting together the backpacks for the local students is not a cheap endeavour and varies for each age group. To put together a backpack, a water bottle, and a lunch bag for one student costs the program around \$75.

According to Ferguson, the Backpack Project spent over \$6,000 in 2022 to provide the back-to-school kits and also received 20 backpacks through donations.

Anyone who is interested in making a donation to the Backpack Project can contact organizers via email at ShelburneChristmasHampers@gmail.com or by calling 519-278-4578.