

Annual Backpack Project raising donations to help kids

Written By PAULA BROWN

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

While the summer is yet to be over the start of a new school year is not far away, and along with it comes the customary back-to-school shopping.

For some, the preparation for another school year is a last-minute shopping trip, but for others it can be a struggle to even make sure they have the basic supplies needed to be successful in the classroom.

The Hamper Backpack Project is raising funds to help combat that struggle and provide students in the community with back-to-school supplies.

"We're about halfway to the money that we need to help the students signed up," said Bobbi Ferguson, chair of the Backpack Project. "We have a month to go before school starts and we are still in need of money."

The Backpack Project is an annual initiative run by the service clubs of Shelburne, which looks to provide school supplies for students from junior kindergarten up to grade 12. When it was launched in 2020, the program provided 85 backpacks, water bottle, lunch bags, and various school supplies to kids in Shelburne and the surrounding area.

Last year, the program aided 97 students with their return to school.

"It was great last year, the kids were excited when they went to get their backpacks," said Ferguson. "You can probably remember what it's like to get back to school supplies and how exciting it is. It means everything for a kid to have bright shiny new items to go back to school with."

So far this year they've registered 98 students, but Ferguson said she expects at least 20 more by the end of the month. It's a number they're unsure they'll be able to support.

"This is something that we can help families with to get through a difficult time and we'll certainly do what we can to help all that we can. I always hate to say no, but we might have to cut it off this year and that's something I never want to have to do," said Ferguson.

In just two short years, the Backpack Project has seen a steady increase in the number of students reaching out for their services.

Fergusons said there are a number of factors that have resulted in the programs rising demand.

"The price of fuel to drive to work, the price of food and the price of everything; some things have to give," said Ferguson. "You pay your mortgage or rent, put food on the table and sometimes there just isn't enough money for a backpack or school supplies for a child to go back to school."

The organizers put a lot of thought into the program and how they put together the backpacks each year, including which items are most needed for the new school year. The backpacks and supplies are targeted to be age appropriate for specific students, which is determined based on the registration through the Shelburne Food Bank.

The backpacks are then handed out to the individual students when they visit Shepherd's Cupboard.

The cost of putting together the backpacks for the local students is no cheap feat. To have a backpack, a water bottle, and a lunch bag put together for one student costs between \$50 to \$75.

Ferguson noted that in 2021, they spent over \$6,000 putting together the backpacks for the 97 students.

Some businesses as well as private individuals have stepped up to help support the Backpack Project with donations including a combined \$1,000 from both local Tim Horton's and a collection campaign at RISE Physio and Wellness.

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