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Big changes coming to the Shelburne Food Bank as it begins process of becoming registered charity

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Shelburne Food Bank is bringing forward big changes for the organization's future as it continues to make efforts to address food insecurity in the community.

The local food bank told the Free Press on Monday (Jan. 27) that they have begun the steps in becoming an officially licensed charity and are in the process of rebranding.

?I am very excited and re-energized to undergo the steps to become a licensed charity, not only as it will allow us access to grants and more assistance to meet the growing needs of this community, but will hopefully provide more assurance and stability as we take all the necessary steps to help guarantee our continued ability to do so,? said Ardith Dunlop, volunteer coordinator for the Shelburne Food Bank.

Originally known as the Shepherd's Cupboard, the local food bank was started in 1991 as a joint venture of the Shelburne Ministerial ? all of the local churches ? who recognized that there were residents struggling in the community from cuts to social programs and who needed help in getting enough food to eat.

?We're now ready to grow up from a small volunteer led-organization into a more mature charity that can continue to provide food for people in need in our community,? said Ami Alexander, a member of the food bank's advisory board.

The Shelburne Food Bank has been working towards making changes to the organization for nearly a year after working with Good Roots Consulting to develop a three to five-year strategic plan. In November, the organization officially became incorporated and began the process of registering as a charity.

Part of the future evolution of the food bank will include a rebranding of its name and logo, obtaining charity status, finding a new and larger location, hiring staff to operate the facility and creating a Board of Governance.

The local food bank has already started rebranding with the development of a new logo and officially incorporating under the name Shelburne Food Bank.

?We've been known as Shepherd's Cupboard Food Bank, we've also been known as the Shelburne Food Bank, so we decided to amalgamate it,? explained Alexander.

The Shelburne Food Bank will be looking to move from its location at the Mel Lloyd Centre to a bigger facility in the future in order to address the growing needs of the community.

?The space we have is really limited and our clients are outside,? said Alexander. ?Our goal is to eventually find a home, some space that would be large enough to access the needs of the growth we've experienced so we can not only store food in our space, but also have clients in the space.?

Another step would be to eventually hire staff members to operate the Shelburne Food Bank with the support of the volunteers.

?We've gone from a small volunteer organization and part of our next step of growing up will be looking at staffing,? said Alexander. ?I think it would be unusual for a food bank of our size to be running as fully volunteer at this point; it takes great

commitment. By hiring staff to coordinate, it doesn't mean we won't continue to need the volunteers, it just means they won't be over stretched and can enjoy their work.?

One of the most significant factors in the changes coming to the food bank is the demand in the community and the rise in the number of clients accessing their services.

Alexander noted that 10 years ago, the food bank saw approximately 40 families on average per month and has since grown to see about 280 to 325 families per month.

?Every month we've got several new families, and so we're just growing and growing,? she said.

Statistics from 2023 show the Shelburne Food Bank has around 400 files consisting of over 1,000 individuals from Shelburne, Melancthon, Mulmur and Amaranth. Of those clients, nearly 70 percent are from the Town of Shelburne.

?We've been forced to grow because people aren't going to stop coming. They're coming and we need to scale accordingly. We feel it's our responsibility to make sure that we are sustainable, so we can continue to meet the needs of the community.?

A timeline of when the Shelburne Food Bank will begin introducing some of the larger changes has not yet been determined.