

Food bank over halfway to raising funds needed for dedicated van



Written By PAULA BROWN

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Shelburne Food Bank, Shepherd's Cupboard, is getting closer to its fundraising goal of \$100,000 with the hopes of using the money to purchase a vehicle to help expand its efforts in tackling food insecurity in the community.

Ardith Dunlop, volunteer co-ordinator with the Shelburne Food Bank, told the Free Press on Tuesday (Oct. 22) that they have raised \$63,000 of their \$100,000 goal through their sponsorship campaign.

'We're so appreciative of those who have stepped up and pledged their support because it's recognition of the fact that food insecurity is happening and is increasing in our very own neighbourhood,' said Dunlop. 'A lot of small businesses and charities in town have stepped up to support us and we're just amazed. We're still looking for a few more business to consider pledging their support to reach our goal.'

Shepherd's Cupboard Food Bank and the Rotary Club of Shelburne celebrated the official launch of their sponsorship campaign in July at Trillium Ford in Shelburne. The goal of the campaign is to help raise the funds to purchase a 2023 Ford E-Transit Cargo Van T-350 for the food bank.

The campaign sees local businesses choose from a selection of sponsorship tiers, each of which comes with different perks. The five tiers that businesses can pick from to sponsor the van include Community Partner (\$20,000), Team Partner (\$10,000), Friend (\$5,000), Fan (\$2,500), and Pal (\$1,000).

The idea of purchasing a vehicle to help with pickups and deliveries has been an idea the local food bank had floated around for nearly five years. Two of the biggest catalysts for the purchase are the rise of food insecurity in the community and the stress the demand has put on volunteers using their personal vehicles.

According to Dunlop, the demand for the food bank has increased by 800 per cent since 2017 with more than 400 active files constituting over 1,000 people from Shelburne, Melancthon, Mulmur and Amaranth. Of the individuals accessing the food bank, 73 per cent are Shelburne residents.

The Food Bank also noted in 2023 they served between 225 to 250 families each month of which, 41 per cent were adults, 37 per

cent were children and 17 per cent were seniors.

?The Shelburne Food Bank has only continued to grow and we're looking at the van as the main tool of helping us in addressing some of that growth,? explained Dunlop.

In order to meet the demand, The Shelburne Food Bank uses a team of 10 volunteer drivers, who use their personal vehicles to pick up and transport purchased and donated food items.

According to the Shelburne Food Bank, in 2023 there were 936 trips taken by using vehicles owned by volunteers.

?Right now, we're sending a lot of cars out to do the food rescue and this will consolidate that by bringing 10 to 12 individual cars off the road. It will also allow us to do more deliveries and increase those deliveries to reach a wider population in the rural areas we service,? said Dunlop.

Not only will the van help tangibly with donations and distribution, but the hope is that it'll allow the local food bank to build visibility within the community.

?It will show people in town that we are in operation because I'm sure there are still people in town who do not know that there is a Shelburne Food Bank,? said Dunlop. ?It should increase our donations because we can be at many of the functions around town with the van to collect items. It's going to have a great impact overall on us being able to address food insecurity.?

The local food bank hopes to have the \$100,000 raised by the end of the year to have the van up and running for early 2025.

?The only way we're going to be able to address [food insecurity] is if we all work together. This is one way the community can come together and give us the tools to continue on? concluded Dunlop.

Local businesses interested in helping raise donations by becoming sponsors of the Shepherd Cupboard Food Bank's Food Rescue Van can contact the food bank by email at shelburnefoodbank@gmail.com or by phone at 519-925-2600 ext. 350.