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Monthly message: Shelburne Food Bank struggling to keep up with demand

It has been a very long winter for Shelburne, and at this point, it is safe to say we are all ready for spring to be sprung.

This is no different for the Shelburne Food Bank as it has been a very long winter that has seen a continual increase in demand for the service it provides.

The board for the Shelburne Food Bank keeps a running total, month by month, on the number of families and individuals we serve. We have seen a year-over-year increase in demand for the last five years running, each year higher than the preceding.

Before we headed into the winter season and the turn of the New Year, the board of the food bank had to make a very tough decision to reduce what was given to our clients on a monthly basis. We looked to reduce non-essential items and non-food items, in an attempt to continue to provide help to our community without turning anyone away.

After a financial analysis from the previous year, 2024, it was determined that the food bank could not continue on the path it was on.

With the summer approaching, school coming to an end for another year, and the need continuing to grow, we are concerned about the leaner summer months when it comes to donations. We are hoping to raise awareness of the need over these months. When kids are home from school, the breakfast and lunch programs end for the summer as well.

As of last year, the food bank was spending more (on average) than we were receiving; and this has proven to be unsustainable. The Shelburne Food Bank is hoping for in-kind as well as monetary donations, and now that we officially have our non-profit designation, we are working towards getting our charitable status so we can offer tax receipts.

The food bank is run on a 100 per cent volunteer basis, and every penny donated goes right back into helping our community. We are hoping that we will be able to request more funds from the many grant providers available to help fight food insecurity.

This should help offset the increased spending, but it will not be enough. According to Feed Ontario, over 1 million Ontarians visited a Food Bank from April of 2023 to April of 2024, representing a 25 per cent increase, and the Shelburne Food Bank is certainly seeing these same trends.

With us just entering into April, we are expecting to see similar types of increases for the same 2024-2025 period. The spirit of giving and community shines bright in our small town and surrounding areas. It is demonstrated year after year by the volunteers, corporate and municipal partners and the generosity of our residents. We know that if we are able to get the awareness out there, that we will all pitch in to help our neighbours who may be going through a rough patch.

I believe it was the great Mahatma Gandhi who stated, ?The true measure of a society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.?

Please consider how you can help.