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Shelburne Christmas Hampers brings essential goods to families in need

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Times can get tough during the holidays, but a local initiative in Shelburne is stepping up to support families in need.

The Shelburne Hamper Assistance Program is a locally sourced and run initiative that provides food and other essential supplies to families during the holiday season. They are veterans of the community, having been in operation for over 50 years.

Bobbi Ferguson, chair of the program, said the initiative has taken many forms and operated in many ways, but the core mission has always been the same ? helping those who need it.

?Well, we got started before my time, maybe 65 to 70 years ago,? she said. ?It was started by the Lions Club, and they would basically collect a basket and drop it off at people's houses that (they) felt needed the extra help. It's changed a lot over the years, but people come to us through the food bank now, we don't decide who needs help.?

Ferguson continued by saying that since she took over the initiative, the demand has exploded. More families than ever before are asking for help.

?When I took over about 10 years ago, we were getting between 50 to 60 families a year,? she said. ?And now, as of this year, we're anticipating about 300. It's obviously been ramping up year over year. Part of it is, of course, getting the word out so more people now know about us. But then COVID happened. This program has become well-utilized in the community.?

Despite the high demand in such a small town, Ferguson has been able to keep the initiative organized, in part through a more recent plan to coordinate the collection of items across town, from food to toiletries.

Now, individual locations will focus on one specific item to add to care packages.

?During COVID, at one point, it was basically everybody was working on their own, doing their own thing,? Ferguson said. ?I thought, why are we all trying to do the same thing? Why aren't we working together??

?We approached the churches and said, instead of just choosing items randomly, throwing them into a box, and then sorting, what if we all picked one item and focused on collecting that item?? she added.

?That could be bodywash, toothpaste, toilet paper. It was a very helpful change.?

The approach is working. The initiative is well appreciated by locals, and some individuals who once depended on its generosity are turning their success stories into return investments.

?I've started to run across it a few times already, that people who had used the hampers in the past are now coming back to help us help others now,? Ferguson said. ?They said, ?You made a huge difference in my childhood, and now we're helping.' They're huge advocates now, and they've even gotten their companies involved.?

?It's just so gratifying to hear that these people, whose lives were impacted by the hampers, are back now to help others,? she added.

Currently, the Hamper Assistance Program is actively accepting donations of both physical items and monetary support. There are several locations around town to drop off items.

?There are giving trees set up at Enchanting Esthetics & More, RISE Physio and Wellness, and RLB,? Ferguson said. ?Then we also have two reindeers collecting toys and canned goods at Town Hall and the Royal Bank.?

As the holiday season approaches and the cold weather sets in, the Shelburne Hamper Assistance Program is doing its part to make sure no one is left out in the cold.

To learn more, head to their Facebook page titled ?Shelburne Christmas Hampers.?