

Community comes together to help Food Bank



By Nate Smelle

All of the volunteers scheduled to work at the North Hastings Community Cupboard (NHCC) in Bancroft during the week of Dec. 15 knew it was going to be insanely busy trying to meet the demand for the food bank's Christmas Hamper program. None of them however expected that a large quantity of the food they had been packing up for its patrons would be stolen before the end of the week.

Executive director of the NHCC, Dianne Lang and her team of volunteers started pre-packing the family boxes early Monday morning. Although the food bank was not scheduled to open until noon on Tuesday morning, community members started lining up by 10:30 a.m. Not wanting the hungry crowd to get cold while waiting, the team of seven volunteers hustled to finish their final preparations, and managed to open the doors by 11:30 a.m.

?With seven volunteers we were able to serve over 171 people, feeding approximately 300 men, women and children,? said Lang.

Lori the office manager went to Kawartha Food share, our hub in Peterborough, the week before and as a result we were able to give all the families, diapers if needed, potatoes, carrots, cranberry sauce, gravy, stuffing, pancake mix, syrup, bread, plus a week's worth of food and a gift card. In addition we bought 90 turkeys for the families. This is more food than we have ever been able to provide.

The NHCC was not open to the public again until Thursday, Dec. 18 at 4 p.m. When Lang and the five volunteers she was scheduled to work with arrived at 11 a.m. to pack the family boxes with vegetables and children's candy bags they soon discovered that the storage shed had been forced open. Knowing the food they had in storage Lang and the others could see that many boxes of food, and 10 turkeys had been stolen.

?I immediately went and purchased \$800 of food to replace what was stolen and we scrambled to feed the 200 people who came to our door at 4:30 p.m. that day,? Lang said.

Lang said she is often asked why so many people in this community are in need, and whether their need is genuine. To answer such complex questions Lang points one finger towards the most recent Canadian census. This report shows that Hastings County has the lowest average wage in Canada. She points another finger towards the 2014 Hunger Count by Food Banks Canada. This study shows that one in every three families using a food bank in Canada are the working poor.

The board of directors at the NHCC are extremely grateful for the community's ongoing support and generosity this past holiday season. Lang said she is astounded by how quickly the support started to roll in from the community after the word spread that the food bank had been robbed.

?Thankfully the Pearson family and the North Hastings Family Health team donated \$1,000, and Denis Campeau from Youth Services went and bought us an additional \$837 in food,? she said. ?The line-up started early again on Friday and we opened at 11:30 a.m. Thanks to the donated food all the people requesting assistance were able to be accommodated. When all was done over 700 men, women and children received food for Christmas day.?

When the doors closed on Friday the exhausted crew of volunteers who mad this generous gift to the community a possibility were elated at the incredible work they had been a part of. In the end the break-in may have added an element of confusion to the usual hectic Christmas routine at the food bank but it did not over shadow the positive things the team at the NHCC had achieved. Overcome with pride and emotion when the last patron had been served the volunteers shared a few tears and hugs ensued.

The food Bank is located at 2 Madawaska Street in Bancroft. For more information regarding the NHCC visit www.northhastingscc.com, or contact nhcc1@sympatico.ca, 613-334-6981.