

Second year for United Way HPE Hygiene Product Drive



By Michael Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

United Way Hastings Prince Edward is launching a targeted Hygiene Product Drive for its second year, according to a May 20 media release sent out by Tracey Reid, marketing and communications manager for United Way HPE. The drive runs from May 20 to June 6 and will help restock urgently needed items for nine local food banks and service organizations, including North Hastings Community Cupboard. Kaitlyn Lalonde, director of community impact at United Way HPE and Monica Piercey with NHCC

comment on this drive.

Responding to a shared concern from frontline organizations about a lack of high demand basic hygiene products that are rarely donated, the Hygiene Product Drive is now in its second year, and sought after items include toothpaste, tampons, men's deodorant, and body wash. Essentials like these are expensive and many individuals and families struggling economically turn to community agencies like United Way HPE for assistance. According to Feed Ontario's 2024 Hunger Report, between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024, over 1 million people accessed food banks in Ontario, a 25 per cent increase from the previous year and an 86 per cent increase from 2019/2020.

Lalonde says that when multiple organizations highlight the same pressing issue, they know it's time to act.

?With the rising cost of living, more people are being forced to make impossible choices - between buying groceries, paying rent, or purchasing basic hygiene products. We've identified four top-priority items for this campaign. Of course, all hygiene-related donations are welcome, but these four make the biggest difference right now,? she says.

United Way HPE invites local residents, businesses, and community groups to donate products or organize collection efforts in their workplace or networks. This year's drive supports the following organizations; Gleaner's Food Bank, Care & Share Food Bank, Helping Hands Food Bank, Salvation Army, John Howard Society, Storehouse Food Bank, Central Hastings Support Network, North Hastings Community Cupboard and Ontario Addictions Treatment Centre. Items can be dropped off at United Way HPE at 55 Harriett Street in Belleville, Monday to Friday from 8: 30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Piercey told Bancroft This Week that their agency distributes a large quantity of hygiene products, along with food bank services and meals.

?So many simply cannot afford the basics of life anymore, and simple hygiene products are often considered a luxury item as we are seeing growing numbers of our population facing poverty and food insecurity. This hygiene product drive has a significant impact for our region. United Way Hastings Prince Edward is not only our major funding source for operations, but has historically been supportive in accessing food supplies too. We will sometimes get a call out from United Way that they have received a large quantity of a food supply and we arrange pickup. Rural eastern Ontario faces challenges due to the remoteness from larger centers, so we have to work harder to reach a large geographical area. United Way's support is important in helping us to do that,? she says.

Funding 40 agencies and 48 programs and collaborating with local organizations, businesses, the health sector and individuals, United Way HPE increases the capacity of our community to respond to human service needs. They support one in three people in our local community. For more information, go to www.unitedwayhpe.ca.

Lalonde tells Bancroft This Week that last year, the campaign was a huge success.

?The community responded with incredible generosity and enthusiasm, allowing us to collect more than enough hygiene and menstrual products to support local food banks and service organizations. Several workplaces, including P&G, Amazon, and Kennametal ran internal product drives, which also made a big impact. What was especially exciting was how the campaign spread organically, even local sports teams got involved and ran their own drives. It was amazing to see the community step up to support this work,? she says. ?It's still early in the campaign but we've already had some lovely community members come into our office to donate products so we're feeling very optimistic about how the rest of the Hygiene Product Drive will go.?