

Charities feel holiday pinch



Ron Albertson, The Hamilton Spectator Social service agencies are feeling the pinch as demand reaches record levels.
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Many groups are short of their fundraising goals this season

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THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR
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It's been a tough year indeed.

Many charities in Hamilton and Burlington are struggling this Christmas season to meet increased needs as the after-effects of thousands of job cuts continue to ripple through the community.

This weekend, the last one before Christmas, they expect to see a big surge in donations. Here's a snapshot of where some of the agencies are in reaching their goals.

Hamilton Food Share

Goal: 300,000 pounds of food to contribute to the 12,000 hampers put together by the nine agencies Food Share helps and supports. The hampers cost an estimated \$1 million.

So far: Collected 200,000 pounds and spent \$100,000 on specific foods for the hampers. Also collected 3,000 pounds worth of donations during the visit of CP Rail's Holiday Train.

Hamilton Food Share executive director Joanne Santucci says the need is great this Christmas season.

With the economy still emerging from the recession, she said Food Share estimates a 26 per cent increase in the use of food banks across the city and a 20 per cent increase in requests for food hampers.

She said Food Share's role is "to stock those shelves" and keep awareness on the issue. She doesn't doubt donors will make it a happy Christmas for needy Hamilton families.

"This community is a very generous one," she added.

To donate: Non-perishable items can be dropped off at police stations, fire halls, CARSTAR Collision outlets, Royal Bank locations and other businesses such as The Hamilton Spectator, CHCH and Upper James Toyota. For more information, call 905-664-9065 or go to hamiltonfoodshare.org

SALVATION ARMY

Goal: \$550,000 (for kettles in Hamilton, Burlington and Dundas)

So far: \$292,000

Salvation Army has applications for 3,500 hampers -- a number that spokesperson Major Ken Percy calls staggering when you recognize the average one goes to a family of four.

He says hamper applications are up as much as 35 per cent compared with last year.

"It's the collateral damage of a hurting economy," he said.

"The outlook is good for the economy recovering but the collateral damage that is caused by a downturn takes a lot longer to heal, and as a result of that, people losing their jobs, many of the Salvation Army supporters in the past are coming to us for help."

To donate: 1-800-SAL-ARMY or salvationarmy.ca

WESLEY URBAN CENTRES

Goal: \$25,000 for Christmas program

So far: \$20,000

The Christmas program at Wesley Urban Ministries allows families to register to shop at its Christmas store for gifts, clothing and food. Around 4,500 people will benefit from it.

Tamara Coleman-Lawrie, director of resource development, says it is anticipating "definitely going over budget," likely by \$5,000, to supplement food and gift donations.

"Food and gift items are severely down," she said. She says people in the community have tried to rally with financial donations and get businesses and others on board with food drives, "but it's still not enough."

"We're very scared at the store (that we'll have to go into debt) or that we'll have to cap the number of people we can help."

To donate: 905-528-5629,

wesleyurbanministries.ca, or visit the Christmas store at 210 Napier St.

NEIGHBOUR TO NEIGHBOUR

Goal: 700,000 pounds of food

So far: 92,000 pounds of food as of the end of November

Goal: \$250,000

So far: \$60,000

"We've got a long way to go," said Denise Arkell, executive director.

"We're just getting calls now. People are just starting to get to a point where they're thinking of Christmas.

"We're having a very slow start," Arkell added.

To donate: 905-574-1334, or visit 28 Athens St.

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