

Many give because they have known hard times



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What a community.

We've heard it before and some charities and food banks are singing the refrain again.

Hamiltonians are a generous bunch who answer the cry of those who serve its neediest, they say.

"Our community is unbelievable," said Joanne Santucci, executive director of Hamilton Food Share, which raises food donations for nine food banks across the city. "They answer the call and then some ... Everybody is getting very close to their projected target."

Still, others are struggling and need every last donation that may come through their doors today before closing for the holidays.

St. Matthew's House is still in need of turkeys and other nutritious food donations.

Financial donations are especially helpful to allow it to buy food in bulk, says Canon Wendy Roy.

Demand at its three food banks was up nearly 20 per cent in early December from the same time last year, she said.

"People's food dollars are not going as far at all and that's been a trend that's been going on throughout the year," said Roy. "This year we have the added dimension of people who have

been employed but who have been laid off temporarily ... and that has contributed a lot to those increases."

Salvation Army raised \$503,591 through its kettles as of Tuesday, but is still shy of its \$550,000 Christmas goal, said Jennifer Kellner, major gifts officer.

She says they've seen an increase in the number of first-timers coming to them for help.

Across the city, the need was definitely greater in this tough economic year, said Rachel O'Reilly, resource development director at Food Share. She said last year, 15,511 people relied on food banks each month. That grew 26 per cent to more than 19,600 this year.

But Hamiltonians responded.

Santucci said some agencies surpassed their goals after the urgent need was publicized and food is still coming in.

Food Share will release final tallies for food bank results today.

"We have been very blessed," said Cathy Wellwood, chief development officer with Good Shepherd.

Its fundraising goal for Christmas was \$350,000 and Good Shepherd is around \$25,000 short. Wellwood is confident they will meet that goal shortly. It saw its sponsor-a-family program grow from 130 families registered last Christmas to 200 this season.

Asked why people stepped up to help in the face of increased need, she said: "I think because more people are feeling the hurt so they understand it more."

Barely a week ago, Tamara Coleman-Lawrie of Wesley Urban Ministries was worried they were headed into debt to meet demand.

She said a story highlighting their need in The Spectator got the word out.

"A huge thank-you goes out to everyone," she said. "The community really supported us when we needed it the most and we were able to make sure that all the families that needed support from us did in fact get it."

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