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Charitable campaigns hoping for late Christmas rush



DONATIONS Salvation Army Volunteer Len Ferguson collecting donations.

Gary Yokoyama/The Hamilton Spectator

Donations are down among several of the city's charitable organizations, but there's still hope the Christmas season will remind people to give during this crucial time of need.

"Right now, I would say we are down, but that doesn't mean we aren't going to make it up in the month of December. We have to rally the community out there to make it happen," said Denise Arkell, executive director of the Neighbour to Neighbour Centre.

The Christmas hamper program started on Dec. 12 at the centre, where in addition to its regular food bank, Neighbour to Neighbour provides toys to children 12 and under, along with family gifts and stocking stuffers. The number of participants is up this year, as 1,600 to 1,700 families are already registered or on the waiting list. Last year, the event saw 1,300 families.

October through December is the most critical time for many charitable organizations; donations are supposed to hold them through to September.

The Salvation Army is asking for help after a slow start to its Christmas Kettle Campaign. The charity had raised just \$365,000 of its \$650,000 target as of last Thursday.

At this point, St. Matthew's House doesn't have enough to keep up with the demand, says board member Susan Pratt. Last year, the organization helped 5,183 people through its Christmas programs — 53 per cent were children. This year, St. Matthew's

House has already served 700 families but won't have final individual numbers until after the holidays. The charity always needs food.

Hamilton Food Share is on par with last year in terms of donations, but Rachel O'Reilly, director of resource development, says the fight is by no means over. She says Hamilton is a very generous community but they are still working around the clock to meet the targets. Between now and the end of December, Hamilton Food Share needs everything it can get.

The Good Shepherd Centre is also on track with last year, but now the demand is significantly higher. Last year, 125 tonnes of food were donated along with 5,000 toys, but this year they need 10 to 15 per cent more.

Wesley Urban Ministries opened its No Charge Christmas Store on Dec. 8 and so far has been a success. But they will need more toys and there is always an issue with food as they are constantly replenishing.

How to help — drop off donations

Neighbour to Neighbour Centre:

28 Athens St. or donations boxes are at various locations throughout the mountain or www.n2ncentre.com

Salvation Army:

Any Salvation Army Branch or call 905-521-1660 or FilltheKettle.com

St. Matthew's House:

Christmas program (toys) — 883 Barton St. E

Food donations — 414 Barton St. E

Cash donations are also accepted

Hamilton Food Share:

Financial donations — call 905-664-9065, www.hamiltonfoodshare.org

Drop off food donations at boxes across the city, check website for locations

Wesley Urban Ministries

Food and toys — 210 Napier St.

Good Shepherd Centres

Food and toys — 120 Cannon St. E, financial donations 135 Mary St. or 905-572-6435 or www.goodshepherdcentres.ca

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