

AGM report, Centretown Emergency Food Centre, 2019

In 2019, the Centretown Emergency Food Centre's 41th year of service, clients remained our principal focus as we continued to provide our clients with the highest quality of service possible within our limited means. We did this despite several challenging situations. Among my goals for the year were to get more use out of the space we occupy, to look at additional programming for our client base, to enlarge our donor base and to strengthen our relationship with other resources in our catchment area.

Our Clients: In 2019 we served a total of 9,052, compared with 9,032 clients in 2018, with a per-person food cost of \$9.51, vs \$9.53 in 2018. While our client numbers are only slightly higher than last year, our clientele has shifted towards more families, new immigrant populations, including Mexicans. Clients come on average 6 times a year; only a small core of clients come monthly. And while the vast majority of our clients are courteous and grateful, I would like to note a higher incidence of disruptive clients due to mental illness and extreme need. These clients tend to be living in precarious housing, and have complex problems.

Our support: Much of our support comes through the 22 churches that form our parent organization, Centretown Churches Social Action Committee (CCSAC). Direct donations from our CCSAC churches and CCSAC's annual grant and proceeds from its annual Walkathon constitute the major portion of our funding. An annual grant from the City of Ottawa is another substantial part, while donations from my individual donors, organizations and foundations, local businesses and schools makes up the rest. Most of the money we receive is spent on food, with staffing our next biggest expense.

Staffing: When my assistant Aidan Grapes resigned in early 2019, I was able to hire Belel (Billy) El-Cheikh as his replacement. Billy came with previous experience in the grocery business and has been a great asset with administrative duties and serving clients. As well he has been attending all agency meetings with the OFB and advocated on our behalf, in particular, re their food purchases.

In April, our Carleton student, Heather Thiessen, completed her placement, and in June we hired another Carleton student, Erin James, for the summer with our HRDC grant. In early September, Carleton student Kevin Chatter started his 3rd year placement. It is my pleasure to mentor and supervise these young people, who bring a lot of energy to the Centre. While it is also a time-consuming responsibility, it is very rewarding to see them gain the professional skills and expertise that will be helpful in their future careers as social workers.

In June, we conducted our annual client survey to provide insights into our clients needs. Overall results of the survey were positive, with many commenting on how well they are treated and that they realize we are doing the best we can. In addition to food, the survey indicated housing and health as other major preoccupations, while others were concerned with their lack of funds.

An excellent measure of our work this past year is our food expenditure: we spent over \$87,000 (compared to \$88,000 in 2018) to purchase food to supplement donations from Ottawa Food Bank, our churches, local schools, food drives at Metro Glebe and Loblaws Isabella, community gardens and many other sources. Despite purchasing chicken legs in response to results of our 2018 client survey, we were able to serve more clients with less dollars because of strong negotiations with our food suppliers. In

total, we estimate that we distributed approximately \$500,000 (\$450,000 in 2018) worth of food and toiletries to our clients.

Volunteers: The Food Centre operates four days a week, thanks to morning and afternoon teams of dedicated volunteers. Other volunteers serve on the Management Committee, deliver their Church donations, organize Food Drives and special events such as CCSAC's Walkathon for the Food Centre. In total, we have over 80 regular volunteers, including 46 who do a weekly shift at the Food Centre, who this year contributed over 10,500 hours (11,000 in 2018). They are essential to our ability to respond effectively to our clients' needs.

Programs: Throughout the year, our major focus is providing enough food, whether from donations or purchase, to meet the needs of our clients for a nourishing well-balanced selection of food. Working with Huguette Samson-Bouchard, nutritionist from the Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC), we hold monthly cooking demonstration to encourage better cooking skills and nutrition. We promote literacy with a good supply of free reading material on hand, and we update our bulletin boards on a regular basis to enhance our referral program. In December fifty of our families receive a Christmas Hamper from the Centretown United Church's hamper project, while other clients are offered a choice of ham, turkey or gift certificates supplied by the Food Bank. It is a rare Christmas when we do not also respond to several emergency requests for gifts and extra food. During the winter, we always have warm hats and mitts for our clients.

With a growing number of new Canadians among our clientele, we are proud that we can serve clients in both official languages but also Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese, and we offer our information and food selection sheets in Mandarin and Farsi, an important aspect of serving clients well. And for the first time, we secured bus vouchers for emergency purposes for our clients with funding from the City.

Challenges: A variety of issues kept me as Coordinator busy this year. One was an ongoing problem with Ottawa Food Bank deliveries, something that both the OFB and I worked hard to resolve. From time to time our other suppliers provided challenges. Pest-control and lack of storage space are on-going problems. Perhaps the greatest concern has been over changes in the OFB's food selection, as in spring they stopped purchasing margarine, kraft dinner and canned pasta, three items that are particularly sought after by our clients, and have always been part of our food selection sheet. This means that we only receive these items from the OFB if they have been donated. We have focussed our discussion with the OFB on margarine, asking them to purchase it for those centres that want it, and meanwhile, we have been absorbing the cost of purchasing whatever supplies we needed.

Management Committee: During the year, our Management Committee meet monthly to review the quality and effectiveness of our service, and to provide guidance and stewardship. Recognising that our program delivery and ability to offer addition programs is constrained by our lack of space in our current location, a major project this past year was an accommodation review to explore the requirements for an ideal facility. Unfortunately, we concluded that we do not have the funds to move to a larger, more accessible facility what would allow us to grow our programs. The study also looked at what could be done to improve our situation in our current location. Fortunately, our member churches already deliver many of the programs (drop-ins, out of the cold meals, educational programs) that some centres offer on

site, and the study concluded that there is no need for us at the moment to duplicate existing local services while we can achieve so much through effective partnerships.

In the fall we welcomed Martha Musgrove as new liaison with CCSAC and in March, Catherine Fortin as Treasurer, to replace Susan Johnson who stepped down after 18 years of dedicated service.

Events: Together with CCSAC, we held our Annual General Meeting on April 3. The Food Centre volunteers were honoured at the annual Volunteer Dinner hosted by CCSAC on May 29, and we worked with CCSAC on this year’s successful Walkathon on October 6. On October 3, my assistant and our Treasurer attended the OFB’s Food Security Conference. On November 27 we held our joint Advent Service and Potluck lunch on at Centretown United Church, with Rev. David Illman-White as Minister. Other events included a Meet and Greet with federal candidates in Ottawa Centre on October 9 organized with the CCHC, Dalhousie and Parkdale food centres, aimed our clients, and focused on poverty issues and information on how to vote, and local food drives.

As Coordinator,

During the year I had the pleasure of speaking at two of our churches and attending 11 events. These opportunities to meet our support base are meaningful and encouraging.

In closing, I would like to express our great thanks to Centretown Churches Social Action Committee, its chair, Kris Burr, and its representative and church congregations; to all our volunteers and funders, including the City of Ottawa, local schools and the Bytown Rotary Club for holding food drives for us on a regular basis; to our Management Committee for their ongoing support and guidance; to our partners at Centretown United Church, Centre 507 and the Centretown Community Health Centre; and to my assistant, Billy El-Cheikh, with a final shout out to all the Food Centre’s wonderful volunteers!

ANNUAL CLIENT STATISTICS

	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Children	1980	1835	1956	2159	1885	1611	1686	1091	803	658	664	650
Adults	7070	7198	7453	7969	7875	7626	9233	8638	8057	8112	7973	7132
Total	9050	9033	9409	10126	9,760	9331	10919	9729	8860	8770	8637	7782

PER-CLIENT FOOD COSTS

2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
\$9.51	9.53	8.51	\$9.63	\$10.32	\$9.99	\$10.10	\$9.97	\$10.11	\$8.02	\$9.58	\$8.65	\$7.10	\$7.70

Kerry Kaiser, Coordinator, January 31, 2020