

## **AGM report, Centretown Emergency Food Centre, 2020**

The year 2020, the Centretown Emergency Food Centre's 42<sup>nd</sup> year of service, began like so many others. The Food Centre had well-established procedures, a small and dependable staff, a large team of dedicated volunteers and ample financial resources to serve our large roster of neighbours in need. The number of clients served in 2019 and the cost per person were virtually identical to results from 2018. We never suspected how soon this would all change.

**Two unforeseen challenges:** The first challenge was the loss of Kerry Kaiser, our dedicated Coordinator for the past 26 years. I believe everyone reading this report knows that Kerry became ill in March, was on sick leave from April and succumbed to cancer in late November. It was Kerry who alerted us to the second challenge: COVID -19.

**Changes to our client service:** Early in March, Kerry reorganized our service to pre-packaged food and established new protocols for social distancing, enhanced cleaning and hygiene. Next, with permission from Centretown United Church and the cooperation of Centre 507, Kerry moved our service upstairs to the Inner Room (the former chapel) so clients could be served more efficiently and not kept waiting in a crowded stairwell. In late March she spent her last days at the Centre greeting clients from behind Plexiglas. She then worked from home as much as she could until her final month.

The above changes meant we could no longer interview and serve clients on an individual basis, nor offer referrals and options for various food preferences. As an extra precaution, we restricted client service to staff, reduced days to two from four, and shortened hours to 12 to 1 (later expanded to three days and 12 to 1:30 as the demand increased). At the same time, many volunteers withdrew because of health concerns, and older volunteers were urged to stay home. Instead, we established smaller teams of 2 or 3 volunteers working shorter shifts to prepare food packages, and expanded our food preparation space into the former client room to allow for greater social distancing while packing food.

**Our Clients:** In April, as a result of the threat of COVID, the number of our neighbours seeking food support dropped rapidly, as was the general case in other food banks across the City. Many people were apprehensive about leaving their home; federal grants for COVID relief also reduced the numbers; and the Ottawa Food Bank made direct deliveries to our elderly, ill and quarantined clients who were unable to come in person. As a result, we served a total of 6,105 people in 2020, compared with 9,052 clients in 2019, with a per-person food cost of \$9.40, vs \$9.51 in 2019.

**Our support:** In 2020, much of our financial support continued to come from the churches of our parent organization, Centretown Churches Social Action Committee (CCSAC), and we are especially grateful to CCSAC Chair Kristine Burr who provided steady leadership and encouragement under challenging circumstances. Direct donations from CCSAC churches, plus proceeds from its annual Walkathon constituted a major portion of our funding. An annual grant from the City of Ottawa was another substantial part. As well, we were blessed this year with a great upsurge of donations from local businesses, individual donors, organizations and foundations, including two large grants from the Ottawa Food Bank, to help us meet the challenges of providing for clients safely during the COVID-19 crisis. We also received an outpouring of PPE, extra food from the Ottawa Food Bank, and help in many other forms,

including temporary staff lent by Somerset West Community Health Centre. As a result, we finished the year with an ample surplus, and in a good position for any future crisis. We are very grateful!

**Staffing:** When Kerry was no longer well enough to work in person, I helped in the office, ably supported by Billy (Belal) El-Cheikh, whom Kerry had hired as her assistant in early 2019. From the earliest days of the pandemic crisis, Billy provided incredible stability for the Centre, despite his concern for his family, and he never missed a day of work. That meant our food orders, truck deliveries, and most important of all, client service, were never interrupted.

Our Carleton student, Kevin Chatter, continued his 3<sup>rd</sup> year social work placement at the Food Centre that had started in fall 2019. When that was completed, Kevin accepted our summer student position, funded with a Canada Summer Jobs grant, and at summer's end, he accepted part-time work at the Food Centre, teaming up with Billy for client service, daily stats and Link2Feed input. Kevin administered our satisfaction client survey in the summer, and has now been accepted as a 4<sup>th</sup> year placement at the Food Centre, under the supervision of our new Manager, Diana Mahaffy.

Other additions to our part-time staff were Doug who was hired in August as our Monday delivery helper, and Edward Fites, a student in Algonquin's police studies program, who was hired in late October as our Client Service Assistant, work that had been done in the summer by a volunteer. The Food Centre also benefited from the services of Todd, a long-serving honorarium, who willingly took on extra duties from the start of our COVID protocols.

**Volunteers:** As the year began, we had a full roster of dedicated volunteers – 15 in mornings, and 30 on afternoon shifts - to cover the operations four days a week, plus many others delivering food from the churches, and serving on committees. Since COVID, we have been operating instead with a team of 9 -10 regular volunteers, two shifts for each day, with some volunteers working twice a week. Other volunteers serve on the Management Committee while volunteers from CCSAC ran a highly successful virtual Walkathon for the Food Centre, which resulted in record returns of \$34,000 in net proceeds.

**Programs:** Throughout the year, our major focus is providing enough food, whether from donations or purchases, to meet the needs of our clients for a nourishing well-balanced selection. In February we held our last monthly cooking demonstration with the nutritionist from the Centretown Community Health Centre, as these events were no longer feasible with COVID-19 restrictions. Without bulletin boards to share information, we produced and updated regularly a handout listing free meal programs in Centretown, and offered as much as we could in the way of additional items. In December fifty of our families received a Christmas Hamper from the Centretown United Church's hamper project, while all other clients were given gift cards for Loblaws.

**Other changes:** We purchased a new air conditioner and air filter for the pantry, installed a plexiglass screen for the greeter's desk, and with a grant from the OFB/Taggart Family Foundation, acquired a new commercial refrigerator, which helps us provide high-quality produce and dairy to our clients.

**Partnerships:** During the year, the Food Centre benefited from the close cooperation and generosity of many agencies and groups, in particular, Centretown United Church, Centre 507, Ottawa Food Bank, Somerset Community Health Centre, our local Community Gardens, Second Avenue Bakery, Flora Hall

Brewery, Ottawa Community Foundation and Escape. We are particularly grateful to Centretown United Church for arranging to stay open during COVID, so that our clients have not had to be served outdoors.

**Help from the Ottawa Food Bank:** I want to highlight the incredible leadership and extra support that the Ottawa Food Bank provided right from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. They organized a number of helpful virtual meetings and consultations to guide us; in April, recognizing the stress on their agency food banks, they provided cash cards to our neighbours to give respite to the food service (something that was very popular with clients); they accommodated our request to maintain regular delivery service rather than switch to Feed Ontario pre-packed hamper boxes for our clients; they increased the quality and amount of food they delivered to us, especially fresh milk and produce; they provided two grants of \$25,000 to member agencies for their discretionary use; and in December they provided our agency with \$4,000 to purchase holiday extras for our clients.

At the same time, the Ottawa Food Bank, in concert with Feed Ontario, moved its Link2Feed data program to an interactive platform. We had some initial concerns about privacy for our clients, but we were reassured that their personal information was not at risk. Our staff members Billy and Kevin attended several training sessions during the rather bumpy start to this new system.

**Management Committee:** With the increased concern during COVID, the Management Committee met twice a month from April to July. Led by Martha Musgrove, a small group prepared a Contingency Plan to help us be ready for new developments in COVID. Following the formal resignation of our Coordinator in September, Martha headed a Hiring Committee to search for her replacement. This resulted in the appointment of Diana Mahaffy as Manager, effective October 26, who quickly proved to be a fine administrator and wonderful colleague.

In April we welcomed Brian Davidson, who had been volunteering two mornings a week for many years, to the Committee, and in the fall we accepted the resignation of Mary Lou Bienefeld, Tuesday team leader. To prepare Diana to take over her duties, the Management Committee prepared a Briefing Book, with particular input from Brian. During COVID, our Treasurer Cathy Fortin has taken on extra duties, and our extra meetings doubled the work of our Secretary, Nancy Jonah. I would like to express my appreciation to everyone on the Committee for their important contribution and support this year.

**From our Manager, Diana Mahaffy:**

2020 was a strange year in which to start a new job. While I am very happy to assume the role of Food Centre Manager in late October, I am saddened by the fact that the position was only available because of Kerry Kaiser's illness and passing. Hers are big shoes to fill. I am grateful to the CEFC Management Committee and CCSAC for the trust they have placed in me, for all the work they have done to keep the Food Centre operations running smoothly throughout 2020, and for the assistance they have provided to me as a new manager.

COVID has also presented many challenges. Volunteers are the foundation on which this organization relies. Unfortunately, I have only been able to meet a fraction of the CEFC volunteer team and can only engage in brief conversations (while masked and standing 2m apart) with those volunteers who are able

to come in. Similarly, there is no opportunity to engage with the people who come in to get food, as we are so cognizant of the necessity of minimizing contact.

Although I wish things were different with respect to COVID, I am overwhelmed by the community of support that surrounds the Centretown Emergency Food Centre: volunteers, staff, churches, local businesses, schools and service organizations, and individuals in the community who contribute in so many ways. I am especially grateful to Billy El-Cheikh who very ably carried on the day-to-day operations of the Food Centre in Kerry's absence and who has been such a wonderful support to me as I transition into this new role.

My hope for 2021 is that, by the end of the year, we will be able to put COVID restrictions behind us and return to engaging fully in the work we all know is so important.

#### **ANNUAL CLIENT STATISTICS**

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Children</b>	1210	1980	1835	1956	2159	1885	1611	1686	1091	803	658	664
<b>Adults</b>	4895	7070	7198	7453	7969	7875	7626	9233	8638	8057	8112	7973
<b>Total</b>	<b>6105</b>	<b>9050</b>	<b>9033</b>	<b>9409</b>	<b>10126</b>	<b>9,760</b>	<b>9331</b>	<b>10919</b>	<b>9729</b>	<b>8860</b>	<b>8770</b>	<b>8637</b>

#### **PER CLIENT FOOD COSTS**

<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2007</b>
\$9.40	\$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

**Respectfully submitted,  
Allison Dingle, Chair, January 22, 2021**