

Your support for our food bank makes a difference... on our shelves and in many hearts

Every day, dozens of people from our community turn to the Mission's food bank – many for the first time. At the same time, soaring food prices make it difficult to fill our shelves. Thanks to our donors, we're keeping up with the growing need.

Laurie Musson has seen a lot in her role as Director of Food Services at the Downtown Mission, but nothing quite like this.

"Over the past 12-18 months the need for our food bank has increased dramatically," she says. **"We used to see 75 to 80 people a day, now we see 100. More first-time users are coming through our doors too – an increase of 50%."**

Many first-time users are international university students. They can afford the cost of tuition



and rent, but don't have money left over for food. "Before they discovered our food bank, some students were living on ketchup soup," Laurie says. "How can you learn when you're hungry?"

Sadly, more seniors are also accessing our food bank along with other Mission services. Recently a couple in their 70s spent two weeks in our emergency shelter after they were forced to leave their apartment. "Two pensions weren't enough to cover the increase to their rent. They spent two months living on the street before they came to stay with us," says Laurie.

The couple now has a new home but they still visit our food bank regularly. "They're so excited to have cupboards for their food," says Laurie.

Walk into any grocery store or restaurant and it's evident why the Mission is so busy and so necessary. Many neighbours, who were barely getting by before inflation started to climb, simply can't afford the high cost of food. They come here hungry and in urgent need.



Hardworking volunteers and staff help run the Mission's food bank

We make it our mission to be there for them all.

Laurie spends a lot of time working with other agencies in the community. "We trade food so everyone's needs are met," she explains. "For example, last November, our shelves were almost empty of canned foods for two weeks. Donations are down with everybody feeling the pinch so we help each other."

Laurie and her team also go out



“Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not
quickly broken.”

— Ecclesiastes 4:12



Staff. Volunteers. Donors.

When we come together to serve our most vulnerable community members at the Downtown Mission, we weave a cord that is not quickly broken.

That’s important to remember as we look back at the challenging year that was. 2022 brought skyrocketing costs of just about everything. We saw an increased number of people accessing our services, especially our food bank. At the same time, donations were down as many of our supporters faced financial challenges of their own.

And yet, in the midst of a difficult year, I saw staff, volunteers and our amazing donors come together to help neighbours in need.

Together, we opened a

warming centre for the first time.

We moved our adult services into one building. We also celebrated a major achievement when the Mission was awarded Imagine Canada accreditation – only the second organization in Windsor-Essex to achieve this honour. This accreditation shows that we’re operating at levels of excellence set by Canadian standards for non-profit organizations.

I’m very proud of everything we accomplished in 2022 and I’m deeply grateful to supporters like you who made it possible. Giving when times are tough and supporting people in need of help shows God’s love. It lets our most vulnerable community members know they are not alone no matter how difficult things might be.

As we begin a new year, we’ll look at the next steps we need to take to move our organization ever forward. And, we’ll continue to do everything in our power to keep up with the needs of our community.

We’ll do it together. Staff, volunteers and compassionate donors like you forming a bond – a cord woven of three strands that remains forever unbroken.

Wishing you and your family a very happy New Year

Rukshini Ponniah-Goulin
Executive Director

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into the community, appealing for fresh food donations from businesses and restaurants. When times are tough, every effort is made to feed families, seniors, students, and every person who turns to us.

Caring supporters like you play

a crucial role too. With your food and financial donations you keep every part of our Mission up and running, including our food bank. “Thank you for helping us out,” says Laurie. **“Without your support, we couldn’t be here for those who need us most.”** ■

Helping our homeless neighbours come in from the cold

The Downtown Mission is committed to ensuring nobody sleeps outside on the coldest nights of the year. With your support, here's how we're caring for our homeless neighbours during the winter months.

It's 10 am on a frigid January morning. The dining hall at the Downtown Mission has been full for an hour after breakfast as those who just ate are afraid to leave the warmth. Other shelters around Windsor-Essex are full too. What does that mean for homeless men and women with nowhere to go? Thanks to a partnership with the City of Windsor and the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, along with the support of our donors, the Mission is here for them.

"Last winter we met with the City of Windsor to discuss strategies to deal with the winter," says Matt Johnson, Director of Programs and Services at the Mission. "Together, we created a warming centre for up to 10 people to come in, get warm, and sit for as long as they wanted."

This year, the Mission has once again opened a warming centre, expanding and changing it to accommodate up to 30 people during the day or night, as needed. Until the end of March, we will transform our dining hall and a shelter room at 875 Ouellette Ave. into a space where homeless neighbours can come in out of the cold during the day

or night and be reminded that people care about their well-being.

"Our goal is nobody sleeps outside on the coldest nights and nobody is left to wander the streets during the bitterly cold days of winter," says Matt. "The hardest part is convincing some people to come indoors to avoid exposure. Our staff works very hard to build relationships and rapport so our homeless population trusts us."

Our spaces will act as the warming centre downtown during the day and night as needed. Once shelter beds are full or no space is available during the day, homeless individuals will be sent to the Mission where they'll be treated with compassion and respect. The Mission has also expanded our emergency shelter from 84 to 96 beds to care for and protect our most vulnerable community members.

None of what we do here at the Mission would be possible without donor support. As Matt says, "We rely on our community to help out in any way you can – by volunteering your time, donating your hard-earned cash or giving us your gently-



Mission staff member, Morgan, prepares hot meals to serve our neighbours who have come in from the cold.

worn clothing. All of it is just as important as my team and I being on the frontlines to bandage someone's knee, give them a pep talk, offer them a snack, or give them a hug on the worst day of their life. We feel your support and I'm profoundly grateful."

If you're able to donate coffee, tea, hot chocolate, or light snacks for our warming centre this winter, please contact Laurie at 519-973-5573. ■

Buck for a Puck: How a young hockey player is scoring big for our homeless neighbours

Sammy Guenther was just nine-years-old when he decided he wanted to help the homeless. He and his mom, Susana, were in Toronto to see a hockey game when

they encountered a man sitting on the cold pavement, a coffee cup in his hand.

"Sammy started to walk in his direction and I grabbed his arm and pulled him back," Susana recalls. "For months, he'd ask, 'Mom, why didn't we help the homeless man?'"

Susana realized they had to do something to "right the wrong." She spoke with her son, a young hockey goalie, and he came up with a wonderful idea. "Why don't we ask people to sponsor me a dollar for every save I make and give it to the homeless?" Sammy suggested.

Buck for a Puck to Help the Homeless was born.

Since 2017, Sammy and the community have raised \$43,966 to help the homeless in Windsor-Essex. "Sammy has always been the type of child that feels so much," says Susana. "He is able to grasp the situations of the world around him and if there is someone in need,

"Everything you do for someone makes a difference in their lives, your own life, and the world as a whole. Not always does it have to be something huge in order to achieve something good."

— Susana & Sammy Guenther

Sammy wants to do all he can to help change the trajectory for that person."

All of us at the Mission are grateful to Sammy for his caring heart and to Susana and the community who support him in his efforts. **"The community has been generous to help us reach our goals,"** says Susana. **"The need is great, and it's because of them that Buck for a Puck has become something special."** ■



Sammy and his mother, Susana—we're grateful for your amazing support!

