The Pas Friendship Center - Food Bank

Food insecurity is on the rise in our community. When I walked into The Pas Friendship Center this became clear. The Pas Friendship Center is addressing the issue of hunger and providing a service for the working poor, low income families and those on disability incomes and supports. I was greeted by the friendly staff of The Pas Friendship Center, plus boxes of food and shelving that support the Community Food Bank. It really is all hands-on deck to make sure that people in this community have the most basic need for life available… this being food.

Just over a year ago, Doug Bartlett of The Pas Friendship Center started researching the process of opening a community food bank. He recognized that food security is an issue for many living amongst us. The idea of a food bank started when Doug noticed that some people where short on food and needed to ask others for help. An elderly neighbor came to his door and asked him if he could spare a box of kraft dinner. He found this very unsettling, but it was out of these types of personal experiences The Pas Friendship Center Food Bank was given breath. The pandemic further brought food security to the forefront. In March 2020, The Pas Friendship Center opened the Food Bank to help those who are struggling to provide food for themselves and their families. Food security is an issue for many living in our community and it may get worse as the pandemic hits its second wave.

The gap in the social safety net has become much wider. There are increasing numbers of people who are relying on food banks early in the month for a variety of reasons. For some the social assistance benefits are too low or wages are delayed. Currently it is from lost jobs, unemployment, seasonal employment, and lay-offs. Others that are using the food bank are homeless, relocated, those experiencing family breakups, people suffering from an illness or medical expense and those who experience a natural disaster.

The Pas Friendship Center prepare and deliver 110 hampers each month within our community. In a short time, the demand has grown three-fold. There are many others struggling with food shortages. An additional 55 requests for food support are on a waiting list. Doug fears that this number will grow as the federal government change the way that families can apply for income assistance during the pandemic crisis. He predicts that the community will be dealing with a huge demand for food bank services.

There are several partners that support the Community Food Bank. Funding partners include Manitoba Harvest, Manitoba Metis Federation, and the National Association of Friendship Centers. Monthly, Manitoba Harvest arrange for 110 hampers to be delivered to The Pas Friendship Center. The staff enhance each hamper with extras such as fresh vegetables, bread, and vouchers for meat that can be purchased at the Grub Box. One goal of the Community food bank is to give recipients greater access to fresh vegetables and nutritious foods and distribute them to those in need.

The Pas Friendship Center used to be the hub for those who needed a cup of coffee. Since March, these services have been suspended but the good that has come from this is that the space is now being utilized for the Community Food Bank. Looking to the future, Doug’s hope is that the Community Food Bank will be taken over by a community entity. In the meantime, the service will continue to operate. The Pas Friendship Center staff have taken on the workload of the food bank. Many food bank volunteers are seniors, so to minimize the risks of Covid-19, the doors are currently closed except for staff. Hunger and food shortages is a reality in our community. To find out more about how you can help with a corporate or private donation please contact Doug Bartlett, Executive Director of The Pas Friendship Center at 204 627-7503 or email [tpfc.executive.director@gmail.com](mailto:tpfc.executive.director@gmail.com).