Petawawa Pantry Food Bank and Mental Health Services Of Renfrew County Partner To Provide Food And Personal Care Products To Those In Need

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 14, 2022

Over the course of the pandemic, The Petawawa Pantry Food Bank and Mental Health Services of Renfrew County have teamed up to ensure that clients in crisis throughout the region have basic necessities such as food and personal care products.

Launched initially as part of a pilot project in January, 2021, "crisis boxes" containing approximately 30 non-perishable items including easy-to-prepare foods, and necessary personal care items like: toothpaste, tooth brush, soap, shampoo, and deodorant were prepared and delivered to those in need. A $10 grocery gift card was also included enabling clients to purchase their own perishable items.

The project was made permanent last June based on its success and in 2021 alone, a total of 695 boxes were prepared and distributed, including nearly $7,000 worth of grocery gift cards, made possible through grant funding received on behalf of the program.

"Throughout 2020 and 2021, the foodbank mobilized its community outreach program which offers a delivery service for individuals who are ill, disabled, or struggling with mental health issues, and as part of this we reached out to 25 social service agencies and organizations which serve Petawawa," said Laurie Alton, President and Co-Founder of The Petawawa Pantry Food Bank who also works for Mental Health Services of Renfrew County, a program operated by the Pembroke Regional Hospital.

Through this collaboration, a connection was made with the region's Mental Health Services Mobile Crisis Team which works with residents who find themselves unhoused or insecurely housed. Further discussions led to creation of a list of items that clients would need and from there, the pilot project began to take shape, Ms. Alton said, acknowledging her role as program lead with assistance from volunteers Mohammad Elfitori, Goldie Tunney, and Kelsey Michaud.

"This initiative has been pivotal for our clients in the community and has brought an ease of access for food to our most vulnerable clients," said MHSRC Crisis Worker Miranda Giroux. "This partnership has allowed the Crisis Team to better support clients who are in need of basic necessities such as food, and hygiene items. The clients we serve have truly benefitted from the wonderful generosity of The Petawawa Pantry Food Bank."

Mireille Delorme, Director for Mental Health Services Renfrew County added that, "Food security is essential for mental health and we are most thankful for the opportunity to collaborate with the Petawawa Pantry Food Bank on this important initiative."

The Petawawa Pantry Food Bank opened its storefront location in December 2016.

During the pandemic, they were challenged to not only adapt their process to align with COVID-19 safety measures but also to find ways to work with and assist other community partners – the "crisis box" project was one of the outcomes.

"A food bank must continually monitor how it best serves the community," said Linda Paterson, secretary for The Petawawa Pantry. "It is necessary for a Board and operations staff to seek new and innovative ways to access people who are food insecure, and to improve aspects of the service. It has become apparent that a storefront model, for a food bank is not always the most efficient, effective or cost effective method of providing service."

Volunteer Manager Wayne O'Regan agreed and noted that there are many reasons local residents may need to turn to a food bank for assistance. "By supplying these boxes to local crisis workers, we have discovered new ways to support those in our community and that's a win for us all," Mr. O'Regan said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Laurie Alton, President and Co-Founder
The Petawawa Pantry Food Bank
(613) 633-0745 / mslauriealton@gmail.com

Carolyn Levesque, Public Affairs and Communications Coordinator
Pembroke Regional Hospital
(613) 732-3675, extension 6165 / carolyn.levesque@prh.email.