

Impact Report



A look at how The Food Bank of Waterloo Region has supported the community during COVID-19.

In the last year, many people have found themselves facing unexpected challenges, such as sudden job loss, limited budgets, illness, or working but struggling to make ends meet.

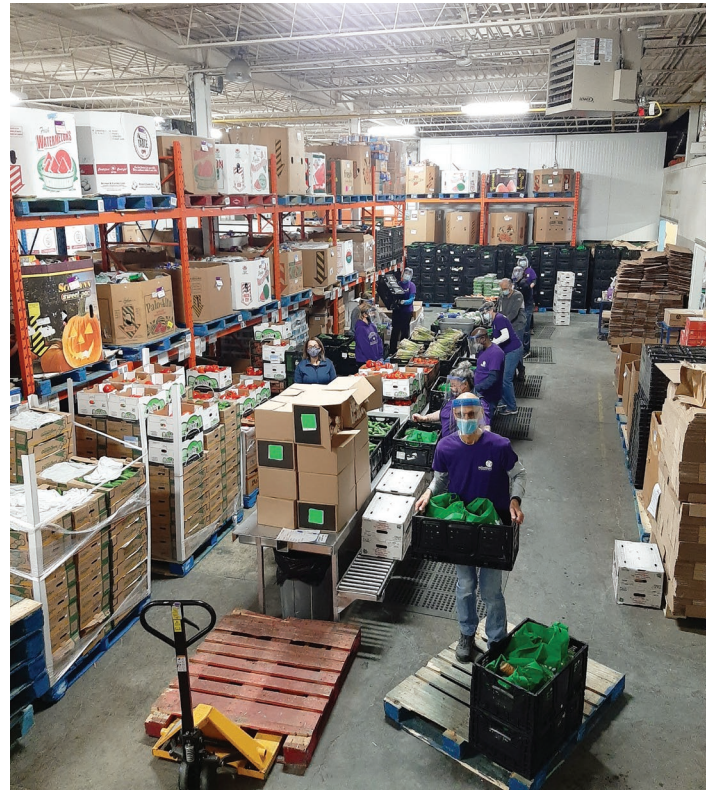
The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the most vulnerable people in our community. And for the first time many people realized hunger can happen to anyone, anywhere at any time and it could be them accessing emergency food supports.

Since March 2020, we have seen an increased need for emergency food assistance throughout the Community Food Assistance Network - a system of 100+ community programs and agency partners working together to ensure no one goes hungry. These programs are located throughout Waterloo Region, which includes Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich townships.

In the early days of the pandemic and in the year to follow, Waterloo Region has come together to help neighbours in need. With your support we adjusted and adapted our operations and approach to ensure the continued delivery of essential services and vital supports. As we shared in our initial Impact Report: Supporting The Food Bank of Waterloo Region through COVID-19, this meant significant changes to our day-to-day operations, including reducing the number of food distribution locations, prepacking emergency hampers on-site, increasing deliveries throughout the Community Food Assistance Network, all while limiting the number of staff, volunteers, and community members accessing our facility.

We wouldn't have been able to adapt our operations so quickly and efficiently without your generosity. You support the entire process, from food procurement to the distribution of fresh, frozen, and non-perishable food to supporting operational costs, such as fuel to keep our delivery vehicles on the road. We can't thank you enough.

This report provides a snapshot of what we have accomplished, together. The last 15 months have impacted our lives in a variety of ways, and while we may not know exactly what the future holds, with you by our side, we can continue our essential work of ensuring no one goes hungry in our community, during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.



From March 2020 - March 2021:

 **107,592**

kilometers traveled to pick up and distribute food throughout the community.

213 volunteers **13,605** dedicated

hour sorting, packing and delivering food to the Community Food Assistance Network.



 **73** community programs and agency partners were supported.

Using Lessons Learned to Plan for the Future

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we faced several unique challenges, from significant changes to our distribution methods, to increased transportation to limited volunteer support. As we move forward, we are using learned lessons to plan for the future.

During the past 15 months, our operations and how we work with the Community Food Assistance Network, evolved. As we’ve shared in previous communications, some community programs and agency partners were asked to temporarily close, while others expanded, and new programs were launched, including the Mobile Pantry truck.

We have learned a lot about operating under emergency conditions, and have found new ways to do things, including procuring new sources of food to supplement reduced community donations or supply-chain disruptions, managing significant increases in transportation, and developing safer ways to distribute food to the Community Food Assistance Network.

We are incorporating the lessons learned to improve our operations, and better support the community in forward-thinking, innovative ways.



Community Collaboration is Silver Lining during Pandemic

A silver lining throughout the last 15 months or so has been the many ways the community has rallied and come together to help each other. Whether it has been financial or food support, donating homemade masks, hand sanitizer, or other personal protective equipment (PPE), you have gone above and beyond to make sure your neighbours are cared for.

At the start of the pandemic, things shifted at The Food Bank of Waterloo Region (The Food Bank). We reduced the number of on-site staff and volunteers to help flatten the curve and prioritize their health, safety, and well-being. But that left gaps in the people power needed to continue providing access to emergency food assistance and other vital supports.

In the early days and in the months that followed, some community programs and agency partners temporarily closed – to streamline the number of food distribution locations and help support physical and social distancing – leaving their staff and volunteers looking for other opportunities to help and stay busy during a critical time of need.

After learning about the immediate need for volunteer support at The Food Bank, Peter Sweeney, Leader & CEO, YMCA of Three Rivers Waterloo Region – Canada’s newest YMCA and a merger of all the YMCAs throughout Cambridge, Guelph, Kitchener, Stratford, and Waterloo – put a call out to his staff and volunteers, and the response was positive.

“In early March 2020, we had just [temporarily] closed our doors and I was chatting with Wendi Campbell and John Neufeld and mentioned that some of the staff were looking for ways to help,” explained Sweeney. “Wendi said The Food Bank could use some extra hands and I put a call to our staff and the response was positive.”

Jamie Matthews, Fitness Instructor at the YMCA of Three Rivers Waterloo Region, and his wife Jenny jumped at the chance to volunteer.

“We started volunteering at The Food Bank around mid-March 2020 for five days a week,” he explained. “We are both volunteers at the YMCA of Three Rivers Waterloo Region and since we had the downtime and The Food Bank needed the help, it just made sense.”

For both Matthews and his wife, it was the first time they had been to The Food Bank. “I had never been to The Food Bank prior to volunteering, and it was very eye-opening. I had the misconception that what you see in the bin at the grocery store is all people receive. I had no idea about the sheer variety, volume, and scope of reach The Food Bank has in Waterloo Region and throughout the province.”

Jamie and Jenny were joined by several other staff members and volunteers from YMCA of Three Rivers. And while they most often sorted and built perishable and non-perishable food hampers, they also provided an extra set of hands wherever and whenever they were needed most.

In total, YMCA of Three Rivers Waterloo Region staff and volunteers helped sort 120,262 pounds of food and built 3,348 non-perishable hampers, and 4,338 perishable hampers that were distributed to vital service programs – such as shelter, residential, community meals, and outreach programs, including the temporary homeless shelter operating at the A.R. Kaufman Family YMCA Kitchener.

Just two weeks after the pandemic was declared in Waterloo Region, the A.R. Kaufman Family YMCA Kitchener – which falls under the YMCA of Three Rivers umbrella – was transitioned to a temporary homeless shelter. The space, which was donated by YMCA of Three Rivers, was run by the House of Friendship and food was provided by The Food Bank. During that time, The Food Bank provided 12,630 meals, such as breakfast bags that included fresh fruit, yogurt, and granola bars, sandwiches and snacks for lunches and prepared meals like stir-fry and lasagnas for dinner.

Matthews went on to explain that not only was volunteering at The Food Bank a fantastic opportunity to learn about hunger and food insecurity in our community, but also a great way to give back.

“When you know that what you are doing is making sure people are getting fed and that they might not have food otherwise, it adds a bit of a fire under you to get as much done as possible,” shared Matthews. “It was a lot of work, but it was rewarding.”

For more information, please visit: thefoodbank.ca

Financial Accountability

Whether it has been donations of food, funds, or time, your support has allowed us to continue to respond to the pandemic and our community's needs.

The infographic below shows how, with your support, we have allocated COVID-19 donations throughout the last year.

27% of donations helped purchase urgently needed food and ensure safe storage.



27% of donations were disbursed to the Community Food Assistance Network for neighborhood food distribution.

12% of donations were allocated to increased staffing to help manage the decrease in volunteer support during the stay-at-home orders.



2% supported strategic re-visioning within the Community Food Assistance Network to allow us to proactively plan for the future.

3%

supported fundraising efforts.



26%



of donations were allocated to transportation and infrastructure improvements to ensure continued service delivery to the Community Food Assistance Network.

3%

helped purchase unexpected supplies such as perishable hamper bags and personal protective equipment (PPE) as well as increased cleaning measures.



A Year + in Review

As we review the last year, it's incredible to look at all that's been accomplished. From March 23, 2020 to March 22, 2021, we have:

Managed a 276% increase in calls to the Food Assistance Referral Line. Answering 2,759 calls throughout the year and an average of 53 calls per week.



6,223

deliveries to community programs and agency partners.



4,061

hamper deliveries to households.



30,960

individuals received emergency food assistance and hunger relief support.



34,895

food hampers distributed to 26 community programs and agency partners.



2,602

new households accessed food assistance compared to the same time last year.



749,794 meals

were served at 41 shelter, residential, community meal and outreach programs.

4,601,545

pounds of fresh, frozen, and non-perishable food

was acquired, coordinated, and distributed throughout Waterloo Region. A 26% increase compared to the same time last year.

