

Hub Kitchen Report- January 2021

Introduction

As we move into a new year, the Hub Kitchen is now in its third full month of operation; the fall period saw a general evolution from 'first steps' into an established model that is feeding children in multiple schools. The program has been able to meet regular day-to-day need therein, while adapting (on several occasions) to a fluid COVID 19 reality.

Overview

We are now feeding children in five schools- Centennial, Hazen White, Centennial, Glen Falls, Princess Elizabeth (PES) and St. John the Baptist/King Edward. Brown bagged lunches are provided each Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, prepared at the Hub Kitchen site at Threshold Ministries, and then shipped out to each school for disbursement. Erin Rideout of Inner- City Youth Ministry is on site each day to supervise the groups of volunteers coming in to assemble lunch bags and prepare them for delivery.

Lunch Numbers (through COVID Phases)

When the program commenced at the end of September, the province was in COVID Phase Yellow- the relatively light restrictions of those weeks facilitated growth through the fall, and we reached a daily peak of around 430 units produced in the period leading up to November 20th, when the province was returned to Phase Orange. Consequently, numbers dropped significantly through the following two weeks, due largely to absenteeism at the schools- many parents chose to keep children home during this period. Numbers gradually increased again in December, carrying over into the new year; at the moment we are averaging between 380-400 bags prepared each day for all schools. The current Phase Orange seems to be having less of an effect on attendance than was the case two months ago. We anticipate a rise in lunch numbers as the COVID situation improves in the coming weeks.

Delivery Services

PALS Coordinator Debbie Fisher, who has a long association with our schools, has established a full delivery service for the program with volunteers (and vehicles) from companies in the JD Irving Group. Personnel from Kent Line (Tuesdays), Universal Truck (Wednesdays), and the Saw Mill Division (Thursdays), come to Threshold at 10:45am, load their vehicles, and then follow a schedule of delivery to each school- they are met there by the Community Schools Coordinators who then disburse lunches. This work will continue through the rest of the school year (and remains active during Phase Orange); the value therein cannot be overstated.

Volunteers

We continue to see a healthy influx of volunteers. We have many individuals who have 'carried over' from previous nutrition programs at the various schools, as well as group and corporate participants. COVID phase changes have resulted in some people pulling back, but most of these return as the general situation improves; there is a dedicated core of individuals who have remained with the program through all phases and help guarantee preparation. As of this writing, we have two new volunteers ready to start.

'Red Phase' Considerations

COVID Phase Red entails closing schools and shifting to online learning. Given the vulnerable nature of our priority neighbourhoods, it has been decided to maintain program operation in this event. This would entail ASD-S Community Schools Coordinators assisting Erin at Threshold to prepare lunches, which would then be offered to students/families in need outside the front entrance of each school. Volunteers would not be required to participate, though we would consider offers of help from interested parties at their discretion.

Hiring Process

As per our application with the Brewer Foundation, an advertisement for a part time position for the program has been put out by Erin through Inner City Youth Ministry. Erica Lane and our Hub Kitchen Team will be a part of the hiring/vetting process- deadline for applications is January 25th. This extra staff member will greatly facilitate our ability to maintain and expand the program in future. In the short term this will help us maintain service through fluctuating COVID phases during the next five months. We will inform you upon hiring someone.

Final Thoughts

Approaching four months of operation, the program is a definite success, meeting with approval from school staff, families and, most importantly, the children it serves. Lunches are popular with students, and the range of items provided in the bags is such that there are often pieces that can be taken home and consumed later. This versatility is one of the great strengths of our bagged lunch model. Logistically, we have smoothly running system in place with many elements all gelling together. We look forward to the coming year, to meeting need and expanding our service to as many children as possible.