

St. Thomas Elgin Food Bank
MANAGER OF PUBLIC RELATIONS & ADMINISTRATION ANNUAL REPORT 2024

March 25, 2025, Board Meeting

Highlights of 2024:

Food Related:

We have been so very fortunate to live in such a generous and giving community – food donations were plentiful this year most likely due to the fact of the rising costs of groceries for our clients in need. Throughout the year we continue to receive frozen and dry food items from the “One More Bite” program via Feed Ontario. We receive regular pickups at our local Walmart and Food Basics grocery stores. We also pickup perishable and non-perishable food items via the “Second Harvest” program at Superstore and Freshco once a week. We maintain a wonderful working relationship and partnership with Harvest Hands! They continue to supply us with fresh produce, bread, bakery, frozen foods, and canned food items at least twice per week! We pickup from our donation bins at the grocery stores located at Superstore, Food Basics, Foodland, Freshco, Giant Tiger, Metro & Geerlinks Home Hardware. Knights of Columbus “Soup Brothers” supply us with homemade soups for our clients monthly. Kentucky Fried Chicken continues to supply us with frozen surplus chicken every Monday.

Amazon has been extremely generous in supplying us with pallets of assorted foods, cleaning supplies, hygiene items, pet food, and sundries throughout the year. Jim at Harvest Hands lends us his full-sized trucks to pick up these skids. The Chicken, Beef, Dairy, and Egg Farmers of Ontario continue to supply us with perishable food products throughout the year via Feed Ontario. The SNAP (Smart Needs Allocation Program) delivered assorted skids of perishable and non-perishable food products via Erb Transport delivery (such as frozen fries, margarine, rice, baby formula, deli meats, carrots, produce, shredded cheese), to name a few. The Health Unit continues to supply us with much-needed adult & children’s toothbrushes & toothpaste. Clifton Parker & Son Limited deliver truckloads of wonderful fresh potatoes donated by Yarmouth South Optimists Club.

Food Banks Canada “After The Bell” program delivered 3 skids of children snack bags the end of June to help supplement our “Summer Top-Up” program of meals and snacks for school-aged children for 9 weeks throughout the summer months. They delivered 840 snack bags and provided a grant of \$2,520 to purchase extra perishable food items. We continue to receive skids at the London Food Bank hub for the “Full Shelves” allotment program via Feed Ontario quarterly. Natra Chocolate in London has provided us with nearly 4,000 jars of Great Value Chocolate Hazelnut spread! We allow Christmas Care to take over our grocery store donation boxes for 6 weeks prior to Christmas, and they in turn donate a massive number of extras and surplus dry food products to us. The Christmas Shoppe said they were extremely busy this year with their program, we handed out around 350 referrals to our clients, so they were able to purchase toys & clothes for their children ages 12 & under for only \$10 per child.

Food Purchases:

We continue to purchase eggs, milk, and margarine on a regular basis along with any other dry or canned food items need to stock our shelves. We currently have accounts at Superstore, Food Basics, Shopper’s on Elm, Worldwide Foods, and Wholesale Club in London, we ad match and are always looking for the best deals possible with our suppliers.

Building Facility / Equipment / Van:

I organized removal of some of the old cupboards in the kitchen – big thanks to our handyman & volunteer, Murray VanZanten for helping with anything that needs to be removed, repaired, or upgraded in the food bank! Murray also tore down the bar area and discovered the floor was rotted, so he replaced it and made some extra space for us. He did not charge us for this labour-intensive job – the supplies came to \$291.99 which he donated and will receive a receipt in kind from the food bank. I also arranged for removal of a large drink cooler that had been behind the bar forever but no longer worked, so I had HD Hauling pick it up for scrap.

The old gas stove, warming oven, and dishwasher have all been disconnected and moved out of the kitchen also by HD Hauling. I had to hire a plumber, electrician, and Brennan Fire Equipment for safe removal and disconnection of everything. Murray was also able to remove the huge stove hood and pipes. There is still some cosmetic work needed in the kitchen area, but it is well on its way to looking a lot better and brighter than it did! We have much more space now for our potatoes and supplies!

My plumber, Charlie Corriveau was able to install a sink spray nozzle in the kitchen for the 3 sinks and capped off the water supply from the old dishwasher in the kitchen area. I also had Murray add door seals to our receiving and legion doors for draft protection. I had Skyline Elevator Company stop by to replace the fluorescent bulbs in our lift and they also come by for safety inspections of the lift annually.

I purchased some nearly new wooden shelving at "Given" downtown that was closing and relocating. We never seem to have enough shelving, but Kim was able to fill them with her extras and sundry items for client hampers. I also purchased 2 sturdy tables for our bagging ladies and for volunteers and staff to have somewhere to sit for lunch.

Kettle Creek Landscaping did an excellent job with salt application and snow removal throughout the winter months – even though we didn't have much of a winter – they made the parking lots and areas safer for our clients, staff, and volunteers in the food bank and Legion! I hired Darren at Kettle Creek to do the painting in our parking lot areas in the Spring. He did a fabulous job with the arrow & handicapped signs, etc. Everything looks clean and tidy.

I had signage made by Ken Jones Signs for our back and side parking lots, handicapped signage, enter and exit signs with arrows, along with a food bank sign next to the Legion sign out front – they all look fabulous and I feel that the signage has helped with some of our parking issues.

Our new electrician from MacKinnon Electrical Services is prompt at getting the job done and at a reasonable rate! I had him replace the old and broken light fixture at the back of our building along with replacing a fixture in the Legion games room recently. He also disconnected the old dishwasher feed and range hood motor feed and capped them off.

We experienced some major problems with our WIFI connection. Our food bank had been using the Legion system since we moved in, but it was unpredictable and caused some headaches. Rogers came in and installed a new system for the food bank and Ian Chantler from IC Technology has been helpful with the transition.

I contacted Pest Protection Services to get rid of any unwanted critters in our food bank and Legion. Peter Inch & Associates Heating & Air Conditioning checked the newer heating unit on the 3rd floor and did maintenance on our rooftop HVAC units. I had K & K Locksmiths repair a lock in the hallway...so many keys so many doors in this old building for sure! Jan-Pro Commercial Cleaners came for the first time in September on a Saturday – they will be here only once per month to deep clean the floors, bathroom, and kitchen spaces. Gary Yeo is still here for a few hours per week to keep up with the daily cleaning, garbage, recycling, bathrooms, floors, etc.

Our 2014 Dodge Caravan is looking quite spiffy now that Bridgeview Motors repaired all the scratches and dents for us! Our volunteer Carl Bagshaw arranged this; Bridgeview donated their bodywork costs of over \$1,500 to support our food bank! I purchased new summer tires at Bridgeview – and they gave me a decent deal in comparison to other quotes. The van is well used and still not in bad shape – it has 58,846 km as of November 2024.

Ian Chantler, from IC Technology, came by to upgrade our WIFI as we were having problems with it – so he did some wiring and fixed part of the problem but must come back as Sarah is still having problems with her computer being slow and her WIFI acting up. Ian said she may need a new computer, so he is looking into that for us. I had my plumber & friend, Charlie Corriveau come by to repair the toilet in the handicapped washroom in the Legion a few times and to also repair the spray hose on our kitchen sink. Charlie generously donates his labour, and I only need to pay for the parts needed.

Food Drive Results:

We receive an abundance of donations at holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter from our local schools, hockey teams, businesses, churches, organizations, birthday & anniversary celebrations and the list goes on. I continue to partake in the myFM "All Hands On Deck" and "Jam-A-Ram" food drives held at Superstore annually which provide truckloads of much needed food & monetary donations to our food bank. The "Holiday Food Drive" held at St. Anne's Centre was an amazing success again this year with a massive collection of food and monetary donations! This annual event is "In Memory of Liette Dalla-Vicenza" (mom and grandmother to the fabulous musicians). The Railway Museum held a "Christmas Tree Spectacular" from November 15th to December 23rd and gave us a tree that we decorated with a food bank theme – it looked amazing! The museum collected a huge amount of food donations that were given in lieu of purchasing a ticket to see the wonderful display of over 300 Christmas trees!

Donor Highlights & Charitable Tax Receipts:

We were once again chosen as the charity for the "Tim Horton's Holiday Smile Cookie 2024" campaign and raised \$20,050.16 from cookie sales at our 7 Tim's locations. I helped ice the cookies and handled some Public Relations and Media for the week-long event held in November! I continue to email or mail charitable tax receipts to our donors along with thank you letters with the majority being sent at year-end.

A few extraordinary monetary donations received in 2024 were, Aqueduct Foundation-Forever Legacy Foundation \$20,000, Entegrus \$7,000, Canadian Railroad Men's Mutual \$20,000, an individual donated his personal shares of \$10,380, \$5,000 from our friends at Legion Branch 41, and the list is endless of generous monetary support from our community.

I also send a personal thank you to all donors via Canada Helps online. My "Software4NonProfits" donation/receipt program is working well to provide the distribution of the receipts and track all donations received throughout the year. I continue to make all bank deposits and maintain spread sheets for our donations and e-transfers received. I also keep tallies of all gift cards received and used on spreadsheets and copy our treasurer on a regular basis. I continue to recognize monetary and food donations received on our social media via Facebook and Instagram.

Grants:

I continue to investigate potential future grant opportunities from Feed Ontario and Food Banks Canada.

Volunteers/Board Members/Staff:

I truly value my fellow co-workers, Sarah Coleman, Kim McCaw, Tamara Witlox Peters, and Sue Gillick for their dedication and commitment to being part of a team that serves and feeds those in need within our community! A huge thanks goes out to my amazing and dedicated "Amazon Team" of volunteers willing to help load and unload whenever needed! Welcome to our newest board members, Vicky Heddle, Carl Holland, and Dave Palmer! Our volunteers have been truly amazing during this extremely busy year! Their dedication and hard work does not go unnoticed, they are all genuinely appreciated, and this food bank could not run as well as it does without them!

Professional Development/Public Speaking/Community Involvement:

I remain in regular communication with area media outlets such as Eric Bunnell at St. Thomas Times Journal, myFM Radio Station, Geoff Rae from Villager Publications, London Free Press, Aylmer Express, City Scope with Ian McCallum, CBC Radio, CBC News, CTV News, Charitable Gaming press releases, Mayor's Update with Grayden Laing of Establish Media & Mayor Joe Preston etc. I spoke at Metro's official celebration of their newly renovated store opening. Our food bank is now a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and we attend monthly "Business After 5" meetings. Sarah & I attended the Chamber "New Member Breakfast" at the CASO building to introduce ourselves to fellow members. We are a member of the "Food Provider Network" and attend monthly meetings via Zoom. Sarah and I attended a Link2Feed Webinar "Field Changes" – to update us on some added features to our client registration program.

Sarah & I attended the annual Feed Ontario 3-day Conference "Rise Up" held in Kingston. I found this conference to be a valuable learning & networking experience. Sarah & I also attended a "Community Consultation Day" held at Memorial Arena all day organized by "Elgin St. Thomas Coalition to End Poverty." We also attended a workshop for charities and community builders "Building Capacity Series" held at Railway City Brewery organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Elgin St. Thomas Community Foundation. Our keynote speaker was Pete Bombaci, Founder & CEO of Genwell – "A Canadian company that exists to address the issues of social isolation, disconnection, and loneliness through the power of human connection." He was an engaging and inspirational speaker. There was a Feed Ontario "Standards of Excellence" webinar that Sarah & I attended via zoom.

St. Thomas myFM 94.1 interviewed me as their "Community Partner" spotlight for the month of August with free airtime mentioning who we are, what we do, and what we need to help those in need.

The honourable Rob Flack, MPP Elgin-Middlesex-London & Minister of Agriculture, Food & Agribusiness stopped by to interview us and have a tour of our facility! Rob included our food bank in his recent Newsletter sent out to his local riding with a picture of Sarah, myself, & Rob speaking with us at our food bank, we were fortunate to make the front & back pages of his release!

We also had a Dock Committee meeting with Bob Barclay, our project Coordinator, in attendance. Bob was very hands-on and explained the blueprints of the dock in detail, also showing the setup of the proposed dock on the outside of the building. Sarah & I attended the "CFO Cares: Farmers to Food Banks Program" event hosted by London Food Bank partnering with the Chicken Farmers of Ontario, Maple Leaf Foods, & Feed Ontario. This program will ensure that food banks across Ontario will be provided with an ongoing supply of Ontario packed chicken! Sarah & I also were invited to set up a display for our food bank at Southwold Public School's "Meet the Community" event. Sarah and I attended the Christmas Care Open House held at the Memorial Arena. I attended a "Professional Development Session for Charity & Non-Profit Clients" held at Stoneridge Inn organized by Graham Scott Enns. I received a certificate of completion for the program.

On a Personal Note:

A special thanks to our treasurers, Kiara Tilford-Kastner & Kelly Ward along with our accountants at Graham Scott Enns for their ongoing support. Thank you to our Chair, Ward Houghton and board of directors for their ongoing support throughout the year. Our food bank continues to offer a vital service to St. Thomas and Elgin County and our main goal is to continue providing this essential need to those most vulnerable. I am very proud to be a part of this amazing organization.

Sincerely,

Karen McDade
Manager of Public Relations & Administration