

York Region

**Food
Network**



Annual General Report

(for the fiscal period ending December 31, 2005)

Our vision is to ensure that all residents of York Region are food secure. Food security is the assurance that all people at all times are able to acquire nutritional food in a way that upholds basic human dignity.

Our mission is to increase access to affordable, nutritious food for York Region residents. York Region Food Network will:

- Raise awareness and promote food security issues and policy change in our communities.
- Support community-based food security programs and services.

2006 Board of Directors

Rick Albert
Linda Alderson
Cathie Cappucicitti
Marie Jennerich
Lewis Nastasi
Rosanne Rodgers
Tracy Woloshyn
Graham Woodward

Editor: Kirsten Eastwood



The Year in Review

A message from Graham Woodward, Chair

As Chair of York Region Food Network, it is my privilege to share some thoughts on this past fiscal year. I have been on the Board for less than two years and became Chair when Terry O'Brien stepped down. Under Terry's guidance, YRFN has become a strong voice for hunger in York Region. I look forward to further strengthening YRFN, and thank Terry for leaving the organization with such a solid foundation.

Working with the Board has been a great pleasure. Thanks to all the members for your dedication and wisdom - it is truly a working team. We all miss Elizabeth Bishenden who left the Board and whose contributions are too many to list. I extend a warm welcome to Rick Albert, our newest Board member.

As a Board, we would not get far without excellent people to put actions to our words; we are very fortunate in that respect. Our Executive Director Elizabeth Brims continues to show outstanding leadership, vision, and commitment. She has been instrumental in raising YRFN's visibility and securing a number of important grants, such as funding from the United Way of York Region to produce the Region's own food drive bag. Thanks to our Administrative Coordinator Kim Arsenault for keeping things humming and Catherine Cook for her efforts with the community gardens and the food drive. I thank Terry O'Brien again for his fundraising efforts that resulted in our most

successful golf tournament to date.

If you don't already know, you will soon realize that I am a numbers guy by training. Over the past two years, I have surveyed many food bank clients. I am often stunned by the burden some of these people carry, yet they remain optimistic. This is such an inspiration to me. Their circumstances can't be described in numbers; their stories are not widely known to most York Region residents, but should be. Many residents are at risk of needing food bank services; increasing awareness of the growing demand for food security programs will be a priority for YRFN.

Sadly, the demand for food security services has grown rather than diminished over the past year; more people used food banks, more school backpacks were needed, more community garden plots were requested, and community kitchens were in high demand. Thus, I have reserved my greatest thanks to all of the food bank directors, volunteers, and donors for their continued efforts to help the hungry with the dignity we all deserve.

Sincerely,

Graham Woodward

...the voice of hunger in York Region

Food For Thought

A message from the Executive Director

York Region Food Network is not a food bank, but rather, a food security agency working to eliminate hunger in York Region. We are the voice of hunger and strive to speak for those who are unable, for a variety of reasons, to speak for themselves.

Our work over the past year would not be possible without the support of the community. YRFN relies upon many volunteers to deliver its programs and services within York Region. In 2005, 202 individuals volunteered more than 1,500 hours to the Food Network. Revenue Canada acknowledges the importance of volunteers by valuing their work at \$17.38 per hour and thus, in 2005, YRFN's volunteers contributed the equivalent of \$27,269.22 in time to our organization. In addition, during the semi-annual food drives, residents donated more than 235,000 pounds of food to York Region food banks. This food fed more than 46,000 food bank clients, of whom more than 20,000 were children. Sadly, food bank use continues to grow, and demand exceeds supply. YRFN continues to work on long-term strategies to eliminate hunger and, in the short-term, our five food security programs assist many in our community on a daily basis.

The dedication of our volunteers, staff, and board of directors continues to inspire me. As a team, we work hard to give voice to the hungry. Together we can and we do make a difference in our community. Thank you for your continued support of York Region Food Network.



Elizabeth Brims

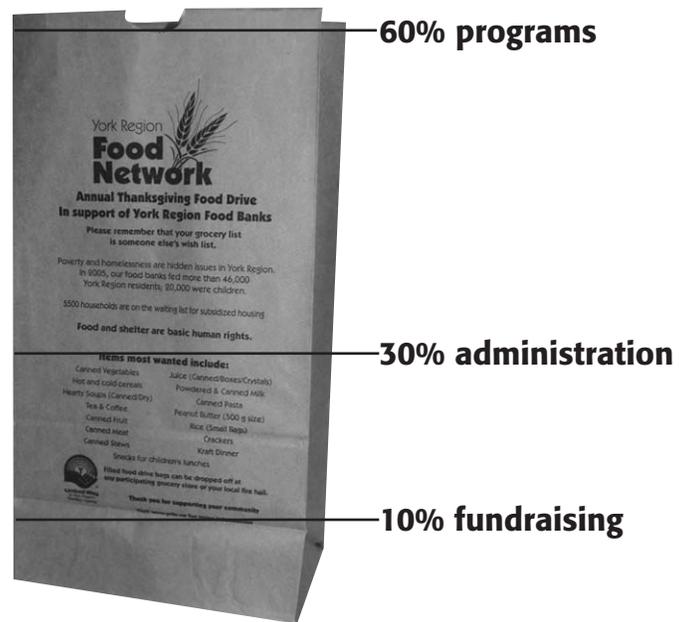
Financial Report

Linda Alderson, YRFN Treasurer

Due to the wonderful generosity of donors, 2005 was an encouraging year financially. Continued support from the Regional Municipality of York and Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) enabled York Region Food Network to provide much needed services within its core programs.

Sometimes the most challenging aspect of managing a not-for-profit organization is ensuring an appropriate balance between money spent on programs and money spent to maintain the infrastructure required to support those programs. Without the infrastructure, the programs would not be available. In 2005, YRFN spent 30% of revenue on administration, 10% on fundraising, and 60% directly on programs. Our goal is to increase the percentage spent on programs. To do this, we are developing corporate partnerships to expand the core programs without having to increase infrastructure.

The increase in the bank balance at December 31 between 2004 and 2005 is due mainly to the timing of grant monies received from York Region and donation amounts reserved for contingencies. According to the grant proposals, the funds from York Region are already earmarked for specific programs in early 2006. The reserved donations will be used to extend the scope of core programs. In the event that funding submissions in 2006 are not successful, these funds will also go to supporting infrastructure. In the interim, YRFN will initiate an on-going fund raising strategy to encourage corporate participation and decrease our reliance on the government sector.



The homelessness and hunger statistics for York Region depict a version of reality that is incongruent with the abundance so many of us experience. YRFN's financial health determines the difference it can make to those it serves, while bringing appropriate attention to the reality so many of its clients experience. By seeking to understand what has created this reality for so many, YRFN offers valuable information to policy makers. It is with the continued support of its donors, volunteers, and partners that YRFN can continue to offer its valuable services. Thank you in advance for your contributions.

Partnership

Jane Wedlock, Public Education Coordinator



York Region

Alliance to End HOMELESSNESS

In July 2005, YRFN agreed to support the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness (YRAEH) by acting as the funding flow through and providing office space to a newly hired Public Education Coordinator. In existence since 1999, YRAEH is a collaboration of agencies, faith group representatives, interested individuals and government representatives that work together to understand, plan and coordinate services and supports to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness in York Region.

The hidden nature of homelessness in York Region and lack of awareness of this issue meant that the need for public education was long overdue. Poverty and the critical lack of affordable housing in York Region are the major underlying causes for this disturbing reality. The cost of housing is a major contributing factor to a household being food insecure.

The partnership has supported a new education and awareness campaign entitled "Close to the Edge: Uncovering Homelessness in York Region" involving the development of public education tools, educational workshops, presentations, and increased media coverage that continues to raise the profile of this issue across the region.

The funding for this initiative has been extended to March 2007 and YRFN continues to support this important work.

Community Gardens

Catherine Cook, Program Coordinator



In 2005, 169 families and four service groups participated in YRFN's three community gardens. The gardens are located in Newmarket, Aurora, and Markham and are made possible with the generous support of the Region of York, the Town of Aurora, and a private donor.

We welcomed 62 new gardeners and two new service groups to our garden families.

This represents a 19% increase in participation over 2004 and, as a result, our gardens are reaching capacity. YRFN continues to seek out new garden space and hopes to expand the program to include other municipalities.

Donations were received from 28 different sources: 17 companies and 11 private donors. Many donated on more than one occasion, bringing the total number of donations to 43, an 80% increase from 2004. The total donation value was \$2517.28, which represented a 50% increase over 2004. Gardeners continued to support the food banks and donated approximately 1000 pounds of fresh produce.

Each year, Millar Waste Management donates approximately \$8500 in compost annually to the three community gardens. We would like to extend our thanks to Millar with the presentation of a "Brown Bag" award.



Volunteers continue to make a significant contribution at the Community Gardens. In 2005, we introduced "Friends of the Garden" to each location. "Friends of the Garden" are people who expressed an interest in

assisting at the gardens but did not want to take responsibility for their own plot. This year, we had five friends supporting the community gardens.

In total, more than 1100 volunteer hours were contributed at the gardens. Our gardeners contributed 867 hours, and students added another 176.5 hours by distributing compost, painting garden stakes, spreading wood chips, weeding the paths, and assisting with such projects as the creation of the new arbour entrance at the Aurora Community Garden.

The Backyard Gardening Kit program expanded its boundaries this year to include the Markham ABC (All Babies Count) participants. A total number of 67 families participated, which is a 16% increase over last year. Seed, compost and plant donations as well as discounts for supplies were secured through community supporters. The cost of the supplies for this program continues to be funded by a private and anonymous donor.

Our gardening program continues to thrive as more residents learn about the program and join our gardens. We look forward to welcoming more participants next season.

Fundraising and Corporate Relations

Terry O'Brien, Corporate Relations

Since starting my new position in Corporate Relations just a few short months ago, I am pleasantly overwhelmed with the immediate support the community has shown. The fundraising position already promises to fill an essential gap that will allow YRFN to accelerate its programs and make substantial inroads towards its mandate.

A number of new events at our 4th Annual Charity Golf Classic created a great deal of excitement among golfers and allowed for greater participation from corporate sponsors. This resulted in a record breaking \$9,400 in fundraising! Next year's tournament has been moved up to Wednesday August 29th, 2007, and promises to be even more successful.

The Food Drive Bag initiative funded by the United Way gained essential additional support from the York Region Newspaper Group (YRNG). On very short notice, they were able to distribute close to a quarter of a million bags through The Era-Banner, The Liberal, Economist & Sun, Sun-Tribune, and the Advocate. Their phenomenal support resulted in immediate and significant increases in both donations and awareness. Early in the drive, Rosanne Rodgers, Newmarket Food Pantry Director stated that *"Having the paper bags in the Metroland papers has really paid off - just over 24,400 lbs as of this morning! And we are expecting more deliveries throughout the week."* This is a good indication of the power and scope of the YRNG in our community!

The website has also been updated to reflect many of our new activities, and provide easier access for those wishing to volunteer, participate in events or sponsorship opportunities, or simply donate. Further work is planned to encompass Trust and Estate Planning donations.

A new twist to fundraising will take place next month as we launch a Christmas Poinsettia Fundraiser at Upper Canada Mall. Over three weekends, six community groups will staff the YRFN's booth and face off in a friendly competition to see who can sell the most poinsettias.



Over the course of the last few months I have also had the opportunity to attend a number of Chamber of Commerce networking events throughout the region. Not only has this sparked corporate interest in YRFN, but has already resulted in some direct and immediate support. I ask all of you to acknowledge and support all of our community and corporate sponsors.

In my view, fundraising is not just about asking for money. It is also about creating awareness and providing the opportunity to participate. If the results of the last few months are any indication, YRFN is well on the way to reaching its goal of long-term, sustainable funding.

Public Education and Advocacy

Marie Jennerich, YRFN Board of Directors

One of the challenges for those of us affiliated with the YRFN is describing how difficult life is for families living in poverty within the Region.

Last year, YRFN updated the Poverty Game, which was originally created in British Columbia. The updated version was used with four youth groups in York Region. This year, the game was modified once again in order to make it more appropriate for an adult audience.

The Poverty Game is like Monopoly. Before starting the game, each participant is provided with an identity and profile. Each profile is a typical situation of someone on a low income; participants are asked to stay in character throughout the game. They are provided with a monthly income based on current social assistance and minimum wage rates and are asked to pay monthly and weekly expenses from that income. As players move along the board, they are challenged by real life situations, such as unexpected medical expenses, transit costs, lost money, and the costs of feeding and clothing themselves and their family.

The purpose of the game is to provide an opportunity for players to briefly experience what it is like to be poor; of not having enough money to meet bare minimum needs.

Here's what teenaged participants told us about playing the Poverty Game:

- "It was hard to turn down some necessities that I wanted."
- "In this game I had hardly any socialization with my friends. If I actually was that person, I know that I must be unhappy because I would never have any fun."
- "I felt bad about my family. I was grateful for my friends. I lived in the moment but said no to a weekend trip to see my parents. I was haunted by the memory of it."

In 2006, York Region candidates running for municipal office were invited to play the Poverty Game. We hoped that the experience would provide a heightened awareness of an unfortunately growing segment of the population in York Region. At this point we need feedback and ideas from government, businesses, and individuals on how we can address the issue of poverty. We would be pleased to provide facilitators to work with groups in the community interested in playing the Poverty Game and in spreading this message.



York Region Food Network would like to acknowledge the following individuals, corporations and community partners for their outstanding support of our organization.

Brown Bag Recipients

The Brown Bag award is YRFN's highest form of recognition. It is given to those whose support of the Food Network has made a significant impact on the daily operations of the organization.

Individual

Chris Traber, Regional Reporter,
York Region Newspaper Group

Corporate

Creative Colours Fashions
Miller Compost

Gail Johnston

Certificate of Recognition

Gail Johnston was one the founding members of York Region Food Network. She died prematurely of cancer in 1995. In memory of her dedication to our agency, this award is bestowed upon members recognizing their years of service.

Elizabeth Bishenden
Terry O'Brien

Certificates of Appreciation

Certificates of Appreciation are given to individuals, corporations, and community partners in recognition of their on-going support of York Region Food Network.

Corporate

ACE Bakery
Blue Willow Garden Centre
Canadian Children's Theatre
Canadian Tire - Aurora
Dolce Publishing
Dymin Steel Ltd
Healing Hands Chiropractic and
Wellness Centre
Home Hardware
HV Gardenland
IKEA Vaughan
Olivia Chocolates
PowerStream Inc.
Snowball Garden Centre
Vandenbosche Jewellers
Weston Produce
YardWorks4Life!
York Region Newspaper Group

Individual

Joe Donia
Kirsten Eastwood
Magdalena Hoeffle
Carman Lewis
Sheila Jaimeson
Barbara Paley
Janet Rodger
John Sargent
Jane Taylor
Jean-Phillippe Thompson

Community Partners

Aurora Optimist Club
Junior League - Northern Branch
Unionville High School

York Region Food Network would also like to acknowledge the significant contributions of more than 200 individual and corporate donors to our organization. Together, their financial contributions exceeded \$18,000 in 2005.



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