

Food bank demand highest in 15 years, report states

By Chris Traber

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The recession may be over, but it left more hungry people in its wake.

A Daily Bread Food Bank report on hunger in the Greater Toronto Area released Thursday indicates the largest increase in food bank use in 15 years.

Need is at an all-time high as donations have dwindled and there were 123,000 extra visits over last year, according to Who's Hungry: 2010 Profile of Hunger in the GTA.

Single adults are increasingly the new face of vulnerability throughout the GTA.

The study notes a 4-per-cent increase in single adults accessing food banks. Single adults now make up nearly half of all food bank clients, while one in three clients are children.

Daily Bread's research is an accurate reflection of hunger in our communities, York Region Food Network executive director Joan Stonehocker said.

As such, meeting and exceeding the network's fall food drive goal of 179,000 pounds is imperative, she said.

"It's important to note that despite everyone saying the recession is over, we're not seeing any declines in visits to food banks," Ms Stonehocker said. "At this time, food banks are struggling to keep food on shelves. During the summer, donations are typically down, but demand has been steady. All the food banks are desperate to restock shelves."

Visits to York food banks spiked 29 per cent last year compared to 2008.

In the first six months of this year, 26,000 people have been feed by regional food banks, Ms Stonehocker said.

The average food bank client spends 68 per cent of his income on rent and utilities. With an average monthly income of \$1,000, that leaves about \$300 for everything else, including school supplies, winter clothes, medications and food, the report stated.

Most people are going into debt to make up the shortfall. About 60 per cent of people have borrowed from family or friends and 28 per cent have used credit cards recently to pay the bills.

The issue with hunger isn't about food security, it's about income security, Daily Bread Food Bank research director Michael Oliphant said.

"There is enough food for everyone, but people on low incomes do not have enough money to purchase the food that is available," he said. Â

These are not single, young, healthy individuals in their prime, he said. They are about three times as likely to have a disability or serious illness as all other food bank clients. They tend to be male, older, in the 45 plus age bracket and are suffering from multiple barriers to employment.

The York Region Food Network fall food drive launched Friday and runs through Oct. 15.

Donations of nutritious, non-perishable food can be dropped off at any York fire hall and food bank or at participating grocery stores. Financial donations can be made securely, online at yrfn.ca. Cheques should be payable to York Region Food Network and mailed to 510 Penrose Street, Newmarket, Ontario, L3Y 1A2.

For information and donation locations, call 905-967-0428, e-mail 4moreinfo@yrfn.ca or visit yrfn.ca.

York Region Food Network is an incorporated, registered charity. Tax receipts will be provided for all donations of \$10 or more.

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