

Hamilton Jewish Family Services Annual Wine Tasting Food Bank fundraiser a success

By: Rachel Bernholtz, HJFS Food Security Manager

This week I fed my family canned chili for dinner. We finished what was on the table and my kids wanted more. So I told my daughter to grab another can from the pantry. I thought to myself, "I am really lucky that it is that simple." That led to a conversation at the table explaining to my kids how lucky we are that we have food to take whenever we are hungry, and that not everyone does. My 5 year old daughter told me "And when they don't, they can go to the foodbank and you give them food."

And she is right. Carol's Cupboard is a resource for people who need help with food. Each month over 60 families come to Carol's Cupboard for non-perishables, fresh produce, meat and hygiene products. We do our best to give as much healthy food as possible, but with the price of food rising, our food costs rise with them, and so do the number of clients we expect to see. Not just at Carol's Cupboard, but across Hamilton.

Recently, HJFS held the annual fundraiser for Carol's Cupboard, Bring Back the Magic. It was a return to an in person event. There was a wine tasting, a roaming magician, and a great crowd. There was also an online silent auction and a portion of all wine sold was donated to the event.

The fundraiser was a success due to the efforts of many dedicated volunteers and supporters of the food bank. These individuals worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the issue of food insecurity in the community, and to encourage others to donate to the cause.

Bring Back the Magic raised over \$40,000. This amount is approximately one third of the food bank's annual food budget, and will go a long way in helping Carol's Cupboard provide food to those in need. The funds raised will be used to purchase food items that are in high demand, including fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, and kosher meat.

Food insecurity is a complex issue that affects people of all ages, backgrounds, and circumstances. Food insecurity refers to a situation in which individuals or households do not have reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food to meet their basic needs for an active and healthy life. Put simply, it is the inability to obtain culturally appropriate food reliably, consistently and with dignity.

Food insecurity can and does affect anyone. It may be the person next to you at school pickup, or a friend you see at shul. Someone you recognize at the grocery store. It affects singles and families. Most people have a job or want one desperately.

Food insecurity is a significant issue in Canada, affecting millions of individuals and households across the country. According to a 2020 report by PROOF, a research group on food insecurity, over 4.4 million Canadians experienced some level of food insecurity in 2017-2018. This represents 12.7% of Canadian households.

In Hamilton, food insecurity is also a concern. According to a 2018 report by Hamilton Food Share, over 20,000 individuals accessed food banks and meal programs in Hamilton every month, with over 10,000 of these individuals being children. This represents a significant increase from 2010, when approximately 12,000 individuals accessed food banks and meal programs in Hamilton each month.

While food banks and other emergency food programs can provide short-term relief for individuals and families facing food insecurity, they are not a sustainable solution to this complex and multi-faceted problem. At its core, food insecurity is a financial problem. Food banks are not designed to address the root causes of food insecurity. While food banks can help to alleviate immediate hunger, they do not address the underlying issues that lead to food insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of affordable housing.

In order to address food insecurity in a sustainable way, we need to tackle the root causes of this problem, such as poverty and income inequality. This requires a comprehensive approach that includes advocacy for federal and provincial government support for social programs like housing and childcare.

In the meantime, it is up to organizations like Hamilton Jewish Family Services and food banks like Carol's Cupboard to fill in the gaps. Until our services are no longer needed, we will continue to work hard to meet our clients where they are. One thing I have heard from clients is how hard it is staying afloat and how much receiving food helps them. "[Carol's Cupboard] allows me to keep kosher and keep healthy food on the table during a difficult time; there is a good Jewish community that supports those in need"

Carol's Cupboard exists because of the incredible support of volunteers, board members, staff and donors. A huge and sincere thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of the fundraiser and everyone who supports Carol's Cupboard throughout the year.