
DATE: June 1, 2010

REPORT TITLE: **FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN PEEL**

FROM: Janet Menard, Commissioner of Human Services
Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services

RECOMMENDATION

That staff continue to engage and support food organizations in Peel in working toward a collective solution of providing more and fresher food to Peel residents.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2008, at Council's direction, Regional staff hosted several meetings with a number of stakeholders to discuss whether there exists a need for a review of food distribution and food security in Peel.
- In April 2009, food organizations in Peel formed a Food Distribution Network and have been meeting monthly to gain consensus on how to increase access to more, fresher, culturally diverse foods to a larger number of Peel residents in need.
- As a collective, the Network has achieved several significant milestones and therefore is at a crossroads.
- After one year, Network members have not gained consensus on a regional collaborative solution that would put more food in the system but Brampton organizations have taken steps to address their operational concerns by coordinating and sharing existing resources.
- The Network requested a continuation of the process and Regional staff support through 2010. It is anticipated that the end of 2010 will bring closure to Regional involvement in this process.
- The work of the Network is part of a larger poverty reduction strategy being developed by The Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy Group, co-chaired by United Way Peel Region and the Region of Peel.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

In 2008, Council directed the CAO to arrange a meeting with the Commissioner of Health Services, the Commissioner of Human Services and the representatives from food organizations in Peel Region to discuss the feasibility of preparing a report similar to the one prepared by the Region of Halton, which includes solutions to growing concerns about quantity and quality of available food for Peel residents experiencing hunger, for consideration at a future Regional Council meeting. Halton Region identified a need and opportunity to create a region wide system of food acquisition and distribution in 2006 and

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launched Refresh Foods, a regional hub in December 2008. Halton's initial stakeholders and project team included the Region of Halton, United Way, an external consultant, logistics expert, two food bank representatives and a Food for Life representative.

In initiating Peel's process with food agencies, Regional staff made several assumptions:

1. there is insufficient access to food for all peel residents who require it;
2. working with charitable food organizations to put more food in the system for people experiencing poverty is a worthy investment and aligns with the mandates of both United Way Peel Region and the Region of Peel;
3. a collective and coordinated approach to increasing the amount of food available to people experiencing poverty is more cost effective;
4. food organizations would see the value in a collective system that enabled them to access food; and
5. a collective coordinated process could involve smaller organizations.

As a result of preliminary consultations in 2009, food organizations formed the Food Distribution in Peel Network to work toward the creation of a sustainable plan that would increase the amount and quality of food in the charitable food system by connecting food agencies in Peel to each other and to the Provincial Food Distribution Network.

Food organizations determined that the need for this initiative is great, as:

- community agencies do a lot of their great work in isolation, and don't have a formal way of sharing their strengths with other agencies;
- frontline agencies need access to more, fresher, culturally diverse food for their clients;
- frontline agencies faces issues with finding/transporting/storing food; and
- frontline agencies are all working at or very near their capacity.

Other stakeholders such as the Funder's Consortium, Peel Federation of Agriculture, City of Brampton, the Ontario Association of Food Banks and EcoSource, were also very interested in the work of this Network and how they could contribute to the overall goal.

2) Findings

Early on in the process, it became clear to staff that food organizations, many of whom are faith based, are very passionate about helping people in need and are committed to going above and beyond. Volunteers are the cornerstone of all of the organizations and all rely in varying degrees on the generosity of Peel residents to enable them to provide food to those that need it. It became apparent however, that the diversity and number of organizations involved in feeding Peel residents has resulted in challenges of communication, lack of coordination and food sharing and negative perceptions of each other. Several important lessons were learned as a result of bringing the food organizations and other stakeholders together:

1. There is a significant difference between Brampton and Mississauga in the coordination and distribution of food – there is no official food bank in Brampton and therefore needs are being met almost exclusively by faith based organizations;
2. For the most part, the various providers were not aware of each other's initiatives and therefore did not work together;
3. Many of the organizations rely exclusively on volunteers which limits their ability to participate fully in collaborative efforts;

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4. There is confusion and negative opinions by some members about the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB), the benefits or restrictions of membership and the role it plays in Peel.

a) Accomplishments

Since April 2009, several significant accomplishments have been achieved:

1. Sustained interest in the process – more than twenty-five organizations signed the Network Agreement form and average attendance at the monthly meetings averaged more than thirty organizations and other stakeholders;
2. The creation of a report that includes first ever comprehensive research on food insecurity in Peel as well as areas of agreement on a design criteria for a coordinated system that could provide more and better food in Peel;
3. Organizations established or strengthened relationships with each other and began sharing food, best practices and other resources;
4. Connections were made with food organizations outside of Peel Region including the Food Bank of Waterloo Region, Daily Bread Food Bank, Second Harvest, Northumberland Food 4 All and Halton Food Bank;
5. Fourteen agencies participated in the 2010 Hunger Count, a national survey of food banks administered by Food Banks Canada. This data will provide a more accurate picture of the need being met by food organizations in Peel;
6. Under the leadership of the Salvation Army Brampton, Ste. Louise Outreach and Knight's Table, fourteen small faith based organizations have come together and created the Brampton Food Sharing Network. Salvation Army serves as a 'hub' for this Network and resources are shared as needed.

2. Proposed Direction

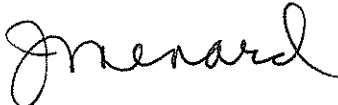
With the organization of the Brampton agencies under the leadership of Salvation Army Brampton, Ste. Louise Outreach and Knight's Table, staff will shift the focus of the food distribution project from relationship building among members and the sector and identifying challenges and barriers, to working with the five largest Network members, namely The Mississauga Food Bank, Eden Community Food Bank, Salvation Army Brampton, Caledon Community Services and the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB), to attempt to create a broader, more systemic regional solution. Bridges Consulting will continue to work with staff, these members and other stakeholders to find solutions to the challenges and barriers identified by these organizations and create a plan for moving forward, with the aim of bringing the process to a clear resolution by the end of 2010. Staff will provide a comprehensive update report in January 2011.

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CONCLUSION

During the past twelve months, the Food Distribution Network in Peel has made significant progress in establishing and building local relationships with each other. Brampton organizations which are primarily small and faith based, found a solution that meets their current operational needs. Food insecurity is a key part of reducing poverty in Peel and therefore it is important that the Region of Peel continue to make attempts at encouraging food organizations and other stakeholders to find an effective solution to increasing the amount and quality of food available to Peel's most vulnerable residents.



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Approved for Submission:



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