

# Halton Hills Food Network aims to end hunger in this community

By **Melanie Hennessey**  
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Imagine having such a limited food supply that you give it all to your children. You haven't eaten in three days and can't take it anymore; you get in your car and drive down to the local food bank. As you sit in the parking lot, you realize you can't bring yourself to go into the building. The feeling of shame is more than you can bear.

This desperation is the tough reality for some in the local community, according to Food for Life Executive Director Brenda Hajdu. It's situations like this that have motivated several like-minded individuals to come together and form the Halton Hills Food Network—a task force that's aiming to end hunger for all in new and creative ways.

The network recently met at St. Alban's Anglican Church in Acton to establish its mission statement and next steps to improve and co-ordinate food services for people in Halton Hills and connect those in

need to the services available.

Among the group's first undertakings is the creation of a card that will be distributed in the community with listings of local food sources for those in need, along with emergency food sources.

During the meeting, Hajdu described the different levels of poverty in the community that lead to hunger. The highest level includes those living with disabilities and mental illness, followed by moderate poverty, which is often faced by households with adults earning minimum wage and struggling to make ends meet.

"If a crisis comes up, they can quickly spiral. This is very concerning to me," said Hajdu.

The third level of poverty is seen in households where a single mom or one spouse falls ill or loses their job.

"That's when people have to decide, do I want to buy diapers or do I want to buy food? Do I want to pay my heat bill or do I want to buy food? You can quickly see how it's very



**BRENDA HAJDU**  
**FOOD FOR LIFE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

difficult to make ends meet," said Hajdu. "We need to give them that boost so they have the extra funds to make those important decisions."

Hajdu said she thinks the network could have the greatest impact on the latter two groups.

St. Alban's priest Brian Galligan noted it's clear that poverty and hunger go hand-in-hand.

"If we can keep people well-fed, they will be better able to escape that spiral," he said.

The biggest issue to overcome will be ending the judgement people who can't afford food face from others who are not in their situation, said Galligan.

"We need to try to convince people to not be judgemental and be grateful they're not walking in that person's shoes," he said. "I don't think anybody enjoys or wants to come to a food bank, but it's a necessity."

The network is looking at how to create equitable access to food with dignity for local residents. Meaghan Richardson of Feeding Halton suggested creating 'farm-fresh markets' that would operate at community dinners—an initiative that's currently under way in south Halton.

At these markets, fresh local produce would be made available at affordable prices, such as \$1 for a head of cauliflower.

"It's meant to create a dignity aspect because people are paying for their food," she explained.

Galligan informed the group of a new initiative at St. Alban's—free

cooking classes that utilize food arriving at the church through the Food for Life program.

As access to a proper kitchen to cook in is a barrier for some in the community, Galligan said he would welcome them to use the St. Alban's kitchen in the evenings.

Carol Clark of Acton Food Share encouraged residents who wish to help others by donating to the local food bank to consult its website, [www.actonfoodshare.com](http://www.actonfoodshare.com), and find out what non-perishable products are needed. She emphasized that donations of pasta are not needed at this time.

According to recent statistics, 6.3 percent of families in Halton Hills are considered low income. Currently, Food for Life distributes food to eight food banks and hunger relief agency sites in Halton Hills and the average number of client visits each month is over 8,000 and rising, with 10 more families needing assistance compared to this time last year.

For more information on Food for Life visit [www.foodforlife.ca](http://www.foodforlife.ca).

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