

Steel
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P. D Z
HENRY BURY
Intelligencer

Kellie Brace is fortunate enough to enjoy a healthy breakfast before going to work each morning.

Unfortunately, she sees too many students going to school hungry in her role as co-ordinator of Food For Learning for the Hastings and Prince Edward Learning Foundation.

"I feel privileged to have a hand in ensuring that all students attending school are well fed and ready to learn," said the 36-year-old Trenton resident.

Each week during the school year, more than 7,000 breakfast and lunch meals and healthy snacks are provided for any student who requires food within the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board, Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board and the two public francophone schools in Trenton.

The need for food remains a priority even in this new school year that is just days old.

"I have already talked to several schools during this first week of school requesting initiation of our program as soon as possible because students were asking for food because they were arriving at school hungry," Brace said from her third floor office in the Education Centre on Ann Street.

"The program is open and inviting to any student who needs food," she said.

Brace does not have names of students who make use of the program; registration is not a requirement to ensure the anonymity of the children and families.

In her three years as program co-ordinator, she has made a point of visiting participating schools throughout the academic year to see the program in action.

"It makes the job all worthwhile to see children fed, happy and healthy," said the Maritimer.

Born in Bathurst, N.B., Brace earned her Bachelor of Commerce degree in 1991 from Dalhousie University in Halifax and spent the next eight years as program manager for Junior Achievement in Halifax.

She married Warren, a member of the Canadian Air Force, in 1999 and the couple moved to Calgary. They transferred to Trenton in April of 2002 after her husband was posted to CFB Trenton.

The Braces have a four-year-old daughter, Caitlin.

Brace was hired as the Food For Learning co-ordinator in August 2002.

Food For Learning, in its current model, was established in 2000 as a program of the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board. In 2003, it came under the jurisdiction of the Hastings and Prince Edward Learning Foundation, the charitable organization of the district school board.

"I find this job extremely rewarding because it makes a direct impact on the lives of children," Brace said. "We see 7,000 meals and snacks served to students each week and that helps with their learning in the classroom."

She cited studies which show that students who have proper nutrition perform better academically, socially and even behaviourally.

"The object of Food For Learning is to ensure that all school-aged children are getting proper nutrition to maximize their learning potential," she said.

Her co-ordinator's role involves assisting schools in creating and monitoring proper nutrition programs. Those responsibilities include administering the program, ensuring there is sufficient funding and working with school principals and volunteers to ensure the

food goes to the students who need it most.

Brace said students making use of the program come from all social, economic and geographical backgrounds.

"Their reasons for coming to school hungry extend far beyond poverty," she said.

Some children do not eat breakfast because their parents never do or they don't feel like eating when they first wake up, Brace said. Many parents commute long distances to work and are forced to leave early in the morning, leaving children to prepare their own breakfast. And for some families, there is little

food available at home.

Brace is proud of the fact the program is made available to all children in both Hastings and Prince Edward Counties.

There are 91 child nutrition programs offered through Food For Learning, including at 40 elementary, six secondary and three alternative education programs with the Hastings and Prince Edward district school board and another 17 schools with the Catholic board.

The cost of the program is not cheap, either, for the 7,000 meals and snacks that are eaten by students each week.

Brace said it costs an average 85

cents a day for breakfast, 55 cents a day for a healthy snack and \$2 a day for a balanced lunch.

"The money to support that program is provided by generous donations from the community and various initiatives through the Hastings and Prince Edward Learning Foundation," she said.

The foundation just wrapped up a back-to-school raffle draw that generated \$6,000 for the program.

"If someone wants to support a nutrition program at a school in their neighbourhood, they can call me at 966-1170, ext. 2232. Support could be monetary, food or volunteer time."