

SUPPORT REMAINS STRONG THROUGH PANDEMIC

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utive director of Food4Kids Halton, of how community partners have stepped up to the challenge.

The charity organization provides healthy food packages to hundreds of kids in more than 90 schools across Halton every Friday.

To avoid stigmatizing any children that need food assistance, she said, the food items are discreetly tucked into the backpack of students — so that they don't come home to "empty cupboards" on the weekends with very little food in the household.

"Before COVID, we were already experiencing a high demand for our services. We were adding approximately 16 children per month to our program," she said. When the pandemic hit, "our numbers just skyrocketed with so many families needing support."

"We have not turned away any child through this whole pandemic, and that is due to the community coming together," she added, whether it's the volunteers or donors.

Among those helping fight child hunger is Doug Lounsbury, a volunteer with Georgetown's Kiwanis Club, which runs the Georgetown Craft Beer Festival with other local service clubs in support of Food4Kids and other charities.

The pandemic has been very difficult for many families, he said.

"Hearing the number of kids in Georgetown and Acton that needed the (food) assistance was astounding," said the insurance business owner.

"Our sense of community ... is what's going to get us through this," he said, whether it's looking after the neighbour down the street or local businesses making sure that the community cause has volun-



Love Local is a series that explores the vital role locally owned businesses play in our communities.

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**- Gayle Kabbash,
executive director of
Food4Kids Halton**

teers and funding.

"There are so many people in this community that do such wonderful things," he said.

Brandon Parkes was also among those recognized by Food4Kids for going "above and beyond."

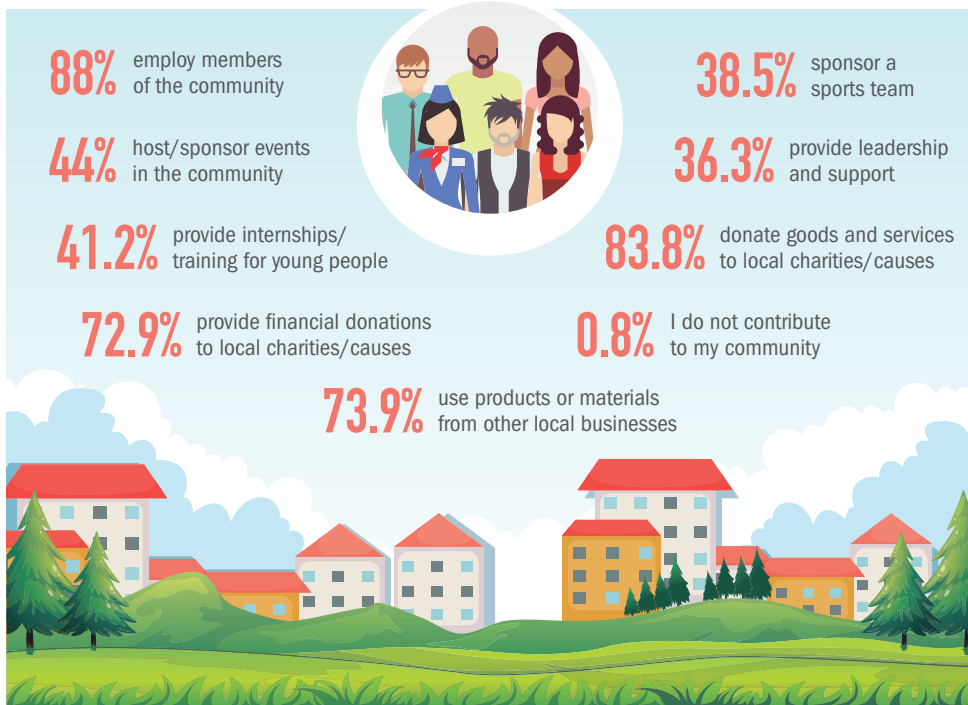
The Milton father of three, who is a consultant at IG Wealth Management, has donated money and time for the past four years by volunteering at the facility to pack food, raising awareness about the persistent hunger problem and holding numerous food drives — the last being on Christmas.

"Every Sunday night for about five or six weeks leading up to Christmas, I would just drive around all night on Sunday and pick up all the bags" for Food4Kids, he said.

He also opened up his garage for people to safely drop off their donations, essentially turning it into a makeshift distribution and storage centre.

"We got food, we got gift cards, and tons and tons of

How Small Business Owners Support Communities



Source: CFIB, 2019 National Retail Sector Survey of 1,663 small retail business owners across the country from Nov. 11 to 25, 2019.

Metroland graphic



Source: Kawartha Chamber of Commerce

Metroland graphic

deliveries from people," he said. "That was just a really nice way to finish off the year."

In Burlington, the organizer of a popular annual event has been raising funds for Food4Kids for

years.

E-A-T, which usually runs in September, takes participants on a walking culinary tour to a number of neighbourhood restaurants to sample various dishes. Part of the ticket

sales go toward Food4Kids.

Andie Weese, one of the event co-ordinators, said that they have raised more than \$10,000 during its four-year run. While the event was cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic, talks are ongoing to bring it back this year.

Weese said many local charitable and non-profit organizations are struggling from the impacts of the pandemic.

"There were a lot of missed opportunities in terms of their fundraising," she said, making it even more important to support local charities and to continue to build a positive community.

While funding events have taken a major hit during the pandemic, Oakville's Peter Moorhead, a local Tim Hortons franchisee, came through with \$51,000 for Food4Kids last year through the Smile Cookie campaign.

SCAN FOR MORE

SMALL BUSINESSES 'LIFEBLOOD' OF LOCAL ECONOMY

Studies show money spent at locally-owned businesses recirculate throughout the community, offering a lasting benefit to its residents.



DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES A MEASURE OF COMMUNITY'S VIBRANCY

When Main Street businesses thrive, that success extends to all areas of a town's economy, and ultimately helps local groups and organizations.



SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

Countless small businesses across Ontario have closed up shop during the pandemic, and the future looks bleak as COVID restrictions continue.



"Everybody has the image of Oakville as a more affluent area, but there's still a need in our community," he said. "Seeing how much they were doing and still not being able to meet the true need of the community from a food security standpoint really motivated us to work with them for the past couple of years."

Realtor James Stanley, another longtime donor in Oakville, said he's worried about the lasting effect that food insecurity could leave on children. That's why he tries to support as many kids as possible every year.

"We only get our childhood once," he said.

On the importance of giving back he said, "If you put others first, you'll never be second."

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With food insecurity continuing to be a problem in Halton, we explored one organization's efforts to eradicate child hunger, and the collective support it has received from local businesses.