

Food bank use remains high across region

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More York Region residents are using food banks due to the difficult economic climate of recent years.

Since 2008, food bank usage through the York Region Food Network increased more than 20 per cent.

That falls in line with the rest of the country, where there was a 26-per-cent increase between 2008 and 2011.

According to Food Banks Canada's HungerCount 2011, on average, 851,000 Canadians use a food bank each month.

"The level of food bank use over the past three years has grown at an alarming rate and food banks are stretched to the limit," Food Banks Canada executive director Katharine Schmidt said.

The increase comes as no surprise to York Region Food Network executive director Joan Stonehocker.

"It's frustrating," she said. "It is the same story and nothing has changed."

One contributor to the hunger problem is the lack of affordable housing. Food bank users spend, on average, about 75 per cent of their income on housing, mortgage and utilities.

A second contributor is lack of income.

"Social assistance is about \$592 a month," Ms Stonehocker said. "There is no way anyone can survive in York Region on that. We need jobs where people can make a wage, pay for housing and pay for food."

On average, more than 4,100 residents access a local food bank each month in the region.

Food banks are a band-aid solution, since residents can only take three or four days' worth of food once a month, Ms Stonehocker said.

"It is distressing to watch year after year and nothing changes," she said. "Things go up and things go down, but there is no real solution."

The HungerCount 2011 report includes recommendations for the federal and provincial governments, such as investing in affordable housing, improving employment insurance and creating partnerships and gov-

ernment-led programs to ensure Canadian jobs pay well.

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BY THE NUMBERS

Canada:

851,014 - Canadians received food from a food bank in March 2011. That's about a 2-per-cent decrease from 2010, but it still remains about 26 per cent higher than in 2008 and is the second-highest level of use on record.

395,106 - Ontarians accessed a food bank in March 2011. Of those, 63 per cent were rental market tenants.

93,085 - Canadians were first-time food bank users. That's about 11 per cent of the total users.

114,122 - Canadians who received help from a food bank live in rural areas. That's about 13 per cent of the total users.

20 - per cent increase in food bank use in 2011 compared to 2001.

38 - per cent of people receiving food were 18 or younger.

4.4 - per cent were 65 and older. That increases to 5.7 per cent in rural areas.

11 - per cent were immigrants or refugees. That increases to 18.5 per cent in large cities.

4 - per cent were post-secondary students.

- HungerCount 2011, Food Banks Canada

York Region:

52,000 - York Region residents were assisted by York Region Food Network food banks in 2010. That's a 20-per-cent increase from 2008.

41 - per cent of adults who used a local food bank went hungry at least once per week.

17 - per cent of children whose family used a local food bank went hungry at least once per week.

46 - per cent of households accessing food banks had at least one person employed.

27 - per cent of food bank users said employment was their main source of income.

76 - per cent of food bank users' income is spent on their rent or mortgage, plus utilities.

- Hunger Report 2011, York Region Food Network

New church 'transitioning' members at 19 on the Park

There is a new church in town - In 2 One.

The church, which is affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, was started in September 2010 by a group of local people in a transitional phase in their lives, according to Pastor Graham Clinton.

"Instead of being in transition alone, how can we be in a time of transition

together?" he asked.

After months of moving from one home to another for services, the congregation of about 50 has been gathering at the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment - Nineteen on the Park since April every Sunday at 10 a.m.

The church named itself In 2 One because "churches should work together. People in the churches need to work together," Pastor Clinton said.

For more information, go to www.facebook.com/in2one, e-mail graham@in2one.ca, call 416-898-4774.



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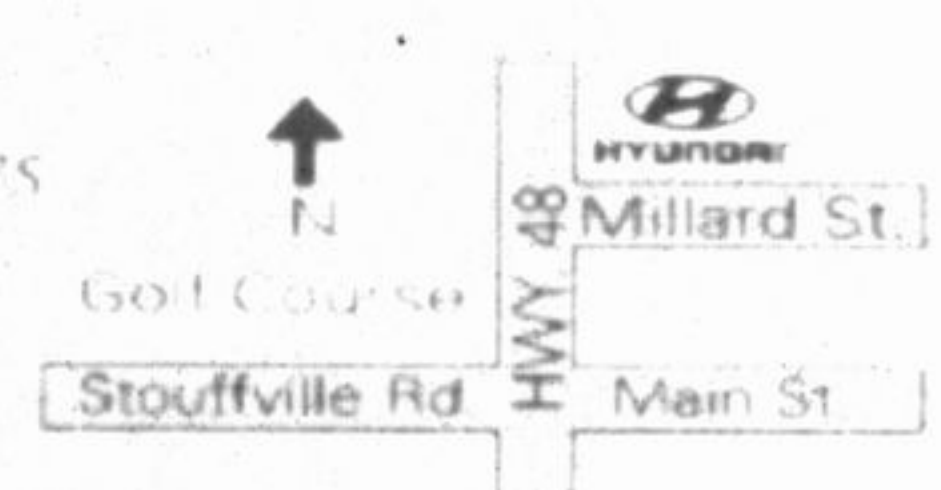
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