

Richmond Food Bank Society
Annual Activities Report- June 2015 AGM

Our Work

Through our 32 years of service, the Richmond Food Bank has been committed to learning from our community and responding to its needs. Our community includes persons coming for food assistance; our volunteers; individuals, groups, and businesses who contribute food, supplies, services, monetary donations, and volunteer days; and our neighbours, other food banks, and community partners with whom we collaborate and share resources. Five percent fewer people came to us over the past year, and one third of those were first time visitors – evidence that our service does not foster dependence. Client numbers fluctuate with economic and social impacts and quieter times give staff and volunteers opportunity to envision and implement changes to improve our service and effectiveness. We are committed to maintaining a reliable service for those whose chronic conditions keep them reliant on charitable assistance as well as for people who need help through a difficult time.

Inspired by a staff visit to a food bank that offers all its food by choice, staff and volunteers rearranged distribution to “by choice”, though continuing prepacking bags for Daniels, deliveries, and emergency service. We also reorganized the sorting areas for efficient use of space, easier cleaning, and safety. We also customized our electronic client data base to enable quicker registration and better reporting.

Our Information Table and Wellness Centre is rich with community information and outreach, focusing on free and low-cost programs that are pertinent to low-income persons, people in crises, and immigrants. As well as our regular referral volunteers, these tables are often staffed by nursing students from BCIT or UBC.

Thursday afternoons feature a quiet distribution time for people who don't do well in crowds, continue with Lily's creative Craft Corner, and with Richmond Family Place's Family Fun Café where families with young children have a meal together and children enjoy learning by play while parents gather and learn about other early childhood and parenting programs and collect groceries during the evening distribution.

Richmond Health's nutritionist, Rani is working with nutrition students and volunteers to offer structured and informative Nutrition Demos wherein the array of fresh produce we receive is incorporated into fresh, nutritious, attractive dishes that inspire clients and volunteers to try new foods available at the food bank. Furthering our efforts to provide healthy as well as economical food choices, we are working with Richmond Family Place and with Richmond Health on improving the effectiveness our of Healthy Snacks. Richmond Health and UBC student nurses are educating caregivers on the benefits and risks of formula for infants and children. And in partnership with School District 38, we are developing pilot programs to make food more accessible to school families who are identified as being in need.

Staff and volunteers diligently participate in community meetings and events to stay informed, to raise awareness of the food bank, and to encourage and receive donations. These included membership and leadership at tables that include Richmond Children First, the Falls Prevention Network, the Homelessness Coalition, Richmond Poverty Response Committee, Richmond Food Security Society, the Richmond Community Services Advisory Committee, and the joint outreach groups at St Alban committee. Weekly structured bulletins to our volunteers, daily announcements, colourful wall calendars, and regular website and Facebook updates are proving to be valuable communication tools, keeping volunteers and clients informed of resources and activities at the food bank and in the community.

Our Community

The second Multi-faith food drive in July was productive despite competition from the World Cup final. The City invited the RFB to have a booth at its summer Play Day at the Oval: a colourful event that returned modest donations but much goodwill as city staff complimented our volunteers on their outgoing friendliness. The Richmond Centre Mall's Annual BBQ is an effective summer fundraiser, and the first Bowling with the Pirates raised much-needed food and funds during the late summer. Donations from the Candy Dish in Steveston, in return for a Storybrooke map and brochure, are growing alongside Once Upon a Time tourism. Other community initiatives included the Latter Day Saints at Thanksgiving, the Richmond Auto Mall merchants' at Christmas, and school collections scattered through the year. Despite the end of the popular and productive Gilmore Park Dream Auction, we still received an equivalent donation from the congregation. And the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans Unit 284 once again made a very generous donation from their meat draw proceeds. Staff attended Richmond Chinatown Lions Club annual investiture night, yielding a generous cheque and volunteers represented the RFB at Global BC's Thanks for Giving campaign at our local Safeway stores, generating awareness and huge donations of Safeway products. For the first time, we did not need extra storage space at Christmas, having received more donations of cash rather than food, allowing us to buy fresh and more nutritious foods as needed.

We continue to be on the itinerary for students of sustainable environment systems from Ritsumeikan University, and a regular site for visits from local schools from preschool to university levels, as well as businesses and service groups – several making donations and giving volunteer time to tackle sorting, deep cleaning, and maintenance tasks. Visiting groups included Apple, SUCCESS, St Joseph the Worker's religious education program, Chinese Christian Ministries, Youth Unlimited who come several times a year, several volunteer days by RBC employees, and groups from Sage who came through May for cleaning, assembling shelves, and IT help. We are often invited to present to various groups including Global Federation of Chinese Business Women, Richmond Chinese Community Society, Thrive Church, and to 400 guests at the Richmond Rotary Sunrise Gala – this yielding generous donations. We also attended and participated in events hosted by SUCCESS, Richmond Chinese Community Society, the Richmond Youth Concert Band, the Tzu Chi Foundation, Pathways Clubhouse, and Buddha's Light, among many more.

We had an excellent turn-out of 35 volunteers at the July 1st Salmon Festival parade. The addition of our van and a good spot near the beginning of the parade gave us good publicity too. In support of our wider community, twenty RFB volunteers and staff came out for the Alzheimer BC's Walk for Memories, several attended the Tzu Chi Blessing event in January, and again the Buddha's Light ceremony in May.

The volunteers loved our new barbecue location at Paulik Park. Many volunteers willingly helped to prepare the food, set up, and tear down. Tsawwassen Lions cooked burgers, volunteer musicians entertained us with jazz standards, and Master Gardener Gary Lake gave tours of the gardens. Other volunteer appreciation activities included the November potluck lunch, the Volunteers Tea & Cake social in February, and our April Volunteer Appreciation dinner at ANAF Unit 284. The RFB Volunteers Team is out on the river again this year, preparing for the annual Steveston Dragon Boat Festival in August.

Gratitude

We thank everyone in our RFB community for coming together to support each other with food, information, purposefulness, and camaraderie, creating a hub of services and activity. We thank our 180 regular volunteers for their hard work and their cooperation; the many anonymous persons who organize fundraising drives and events; the thousands of people who have come for help as they go through a difficult time, and the many who return to help as volunteers or donors; our community partners who offer their services on site at the food bank to reach people who are too overwhelmed by circumstances to seek out the many resources available to them; our dedicated and visionary staff, including Larry who is leaving us to

fulfill a dream and Brent who is stepping in to continue the valuable work of Greeter. We are grateful that our landlords extended our lease so that we have some short-time security, and our vibrant and deeply engaged Board of Directors who balance prudence with vision as they work to maintain stability for the Richmond Food Bank for as long as it is needed.