

2016 - A Year of Many Changes and Challenges

What a year we've had at the RFB. We've been busy analyzing our programs and making changes to improve access and service, all while continually responding to the ever-changing needs of our community. It was a successful year and we accomplished much, thanks to our willing volunteers, engaged directors, supportive donors, and proactive staff.

Two new depots in West Richmond and Blundell opened simultaneously in November. We now have a total of seven distribution times at 4 different locations serving the different communities within Richmond. Each distribution uses the new distribution method Keith designed, whereby all items are available by choice and offered by a point system that more accurately matches household size, a system that is praised by clients, community partners, and volunteers. In partnership with Richmond School District 38, we also launched a pilot back-pack grocery program, a breakfast, and a bagged lunch program at three different schools.

Our new digital registration was successfully designed in house by capable staff and volunteers and is very effective in enhancing the quality and speed of service. Rick's work with the client database has made it possible to monitor client use across the four distribution sites and seven distribution times, including the quiet distribution on Thursday afternoons.

The quality of food donations we receive is steadily improving and we are delighted to be able to distribute substantial amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables (much of it locally grown) as well as fresh milk to families with children up to 18 years old. We are hopeful that the new additional tax credit for donated farm produce will generate even more fresh produce donations. Reorganization of receiving, sorting, and storing, processes is a work in progress, aiming to free up space that had been used for storage, better protect product from mouse damage, and facilitate more frequent and thorough cleaning and better stock rotation.

We continue to serve as a receiving hub, distributing food and supplies to five community meals, two shelters, a drop-in centre, and other agencies that serve people who are marginalized or in transition, extending our reach to many more than the 1,400 people we serve directly every week. Brent stepped into the post of Greeter when Larry retired and in his current capacity as a Client and Volunteer Assistant, greets clients, assists volunteers and also manages two depots, making staff responsibilities more manageable as we partner with more organizations and serve more people.

Volunteers at work and play

This April, volunteers and staff attended a celebration of life for Vi Mar who faithfully volunteered with us every week through her retirement, despite serious illness and family bereavements for more than 30 years, up until just months before her death. There are hundreds of stories of generosity, dedication, and belonging from our 200 current volunteers and the hundreds of others who have served their community and supported each other at the RFB over its 33 year history.

Hajira continues to welcome and manage many, many corporate, school, and service club volunteer groups who perform tasks ranging from helping with distribution, to sorting and deep cleaning. We are very grateful to a local construction company for its donations of supplies and labour for repairs and redecorating through July. A local software company and regular workplace volunteer group donated an accounting program upgrade that has helped to streamline our bookkeeping processes.

Margaret worked with our volunteer consultant to design volunteer and employee satisfaction surveys as well as a board self-assessment in preparation for the annual Strategic Planning session for directors and staff. There was almost 50% response to the volunteer satisfaction survey, including several follow-up conversations during which volunteers clarified their concerns and made practical and achievable suggestions, such as regular emergency evacuation drills which we have implemented very successfully. Staff continuously strives to provide a satisfying experience for both clients and volunteers.

We celebrated Canada Day 2015 with participation in the Steveston Salmon Festival parade. Once again, our volunteers were roundly applauded for their work and after a brisk walk enjoyed a casual lunch together at a volunteer's home. In August, our volunteer appreciation barbecue was hugely successful, with high participation by Directors, some of whom manned the barbecues. We were grateful to be permitted to use the indoor facilities at Paulik Park, thanks to our diligent cleaning after the party the previous summer and are told we will be welcome again. Our annual autumn potluck lunch gets bigger every year, attracting current, new, and former volunteers, as does our spring Cake & Tea Tasting, both held at the food bank. The highlight of the Cake and Tea Tasting social was a talk on the history of the Richmond Food Bank by Jack Pearson who is one of the pioneer members of the RFB. Attendance at our main appreciation dinner at the ANAF Unit 284 outpaces the growth of our volunteer corps, we believe a sign of engagement in our organization and satisfaction in how we recognize our volunteers' contributions.

We thank both Dragon Boat BC for sponsoring our Volunteer Dragon Boat team and the UBC Boathouse for letting us use their practice boats. Paddling together has helped volunteers get to know each other better and has attracted new volunteers for our expanded distributions. Our team's participation in the Steveston Dragon Boat Festival also brought in almost \$1,000 as well as food donations.

Judy's knitting group has grown to include individuals and groups from across our population and surprised itself by having knitted more than one thousand scarves by August. Another surprise was the enthusiastic participation in an appreciation dinner Judy organized for her knitters. This year, the group has embarked on a challenge to knit one thousand toques by December, to add to the Winter Relief packages donated annually by the Tzu Chi Foundation. Other activities included a Seawall Walk, a Line Dancing class, and the Alzheimer's Society Walk for Memories, each of which had participation by 20 to 30 persons.

All these team-building and volunteer appreciation activities are made possible and successful by the willing and generous work of volunteers who help prepare the food, set up, serve, and tear down after the party saying, "that's what we do – we help".

Donors and Community Partners

Generous community support from longstanding and new donors enables us to expand our Dairy program to include children 18 years and younger, to give greater quantities of fresh produce, and to support the increasing number of people coming to us for food assistance. This past year was notable for substantial and longstanding food and cash drives, successful several first-time initiatives by local businesses and community groups, and significant corporate food donations. Plaque presentations to significant donors was a laborious and sometimes challenging process for staff and directors (on especially Christmas Eve), but was well appreciated by the donor recipients.

Important non-food support is made possible through collaborations with community partners which include Richmond Health Services who sent nurses to provide on-site flu inoculations, as well as the city nutritionist to oversee students from University of British Columbia conducting Nutrition Demonstrations. UBC nursing students assisted with our Information & Wellness Centre, providing blood pressure clinics and health information. Both Immigrants Services Society of BC and Richmond Family Place provided invaluable translations and guidance for dozens of new non-English-speaking refugee families who came to us for groceries. Of the twenty-nine Syrian refugee families who have come for help since the beginning of this year, 8 families are still living in Richmond and receiving our help as they settle into Canada. Richmond Family Place continues to provide the valuable Play & Learn program and Family Fun Café to connect isolated children and families with programs and each other.

Outreach and Awareness

Staff, directors, and service volunteers ably and enthusiastically represented the RFBS at a myriad of events, including concerts, galas, worship services, cultural celebrations, schools, as well as engaging in organizations and at community tables that address the underlying causes of poverty and the need for food banks. Tours of the RFB are scheduled regularly, at least once every week. Thanks to Alex's regular Facebook postings and active staff presence, presentations, and leadership at community tables, we are receiving invitations to participate and present to collaborative groups including health and refugee services. In May, Alex and Keith represented the Richmond Food Bank Society at Food Banks BC's AGM in Victoria and attended a timely presentation on the implications of the new tax credit for farm produce donations. Our best publicity and outreach comes through providing our service as responsively, equitably, and cheerfully as possible. Visitors from a neighbouring agency who observe people as they mingle outside our doors, that we seem such a happy place.

Always With Thanks

Again and yet again we thank each of our volunteers, directors, donors, staff, partner organizations, and clients for working together towards achieving health and wellbeing for everyone in our community. We thank each one of you for your patience and tolerance, your humour and commitment, your energy and enthusiasm, and most importantly, your support to each other.