

Hamper program in urgent need of donations

Christmas initiative serves seniors and families across Surrey, Langley, and White Rock

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The Cloverdale Christmas Hamper Program is in urgent need of donations.

"We're in a bigger need this year than we've ever been in," said Matthew Campbell, director of the Cloverdale Community Kitchen, the organization that runs the hamper program. "It's just that a lot of the schools and businesses that hold toy drives and such won't be doing them this year because of COVID."

Campbell said they need toys and other grocery items. He added they have been receiving cheques from some businesses that would normally host toy drives, so he's thankful for that.

"We're still doing a toy drive this year," he said. "We're still collecting toys for the families, but they won't get to pick their toys this year. We're asking people to put down a few choices for the child and we're going to try and match up a toy with the child as best we can."

Campbell said if anyone has toys they want to drop off, they can drop them off at the Community Kitchen between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday to Thursday and from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Fridays.

The annual hamper program started Nov. 9, with registrations being done outside of the Cloverdale Community Kitchen.

"We had a little more than 80 families register on our first night and we had another 60-or-so register Thursday (Nov. 12)," said Lindsay Rempel, the Christmas Hamper Program manager. "That's already about a quarter of the families we signed up last year."

Last year the hamper program served about 500 families.

"The need has definitely increased."

Rempel said they'll take registrations for another three weeks and then they'll concentrate on filling the hampers. She said a lot of the recent sign ups have been from new families that did not participate in the hamper program last year.



Lindsay Rempel

"We've had to switch things up this year," added Rempel. "Normally, we have the big event on Saturday and Sunday, but we can't do that this year, so we're going to be delivering the hampers."

That big event is the weekend-long distribution effort held at the Cloverdale Fairgrounds. Over two days, families arrive and receive hampers, which are boxes filled with food and other grocery store items (the amount of boxes one receives is based on the size of the family); then they get to shop at an additional free food store made up of last-minute donated food items; they also get to shop at a free—new only—toy store (one toy per child); and then they get to shop at a free second-hand store filled with mostly clothes and toys.

"Usually people come on one day during the weekend at the fairgrounds

and they shop for their kids' toys for Christmas and they get their hamper," said Campbell. "But none of that will be happening this year because of COVID."

He said the hamper program is committed to fighting through COVID because people are in need. "But we're committed to keeping everything COVID-safe, as well."

Campbell said they already have a lot of volunteers signed up to deliver the hampers over three days from Dec. 17 to 19.

"We wanted our mission to remain the same and to help as many people as we can," added Rempel. "We've dropped off a few donation boxes to businesses and some schools, but there aren't a lot of schools participating this year."

She said the program usually gets its biggest amount of food donations from schools.

Rempel said the program has expanded slightly this year as they've allocated more resources for seniors. They've set up a special "seniors division" as part of the program.

"We found that the pandemic has especially impacted the seniors in our community," explained Rempel. "They're a vulnerable population and a lot of them are experiencing isolation and loneliness. So, we wanted to address that."

Rempel is signing up as many seniors as she can from across Surrey, Langley, and White Rock.

"We are obviously still helping families, but we wanted to focus on seniors and make sure we don't forget about seniors too."

The plan, Rempel said, is that volunteers will deliver Christmas hampers to seniors and then hang out for a bit and have a socially-distanced conversation with them.

The Community Kitchen is also enlisting an army of school kids to write special letters, notes, and cards for seniors that they'll stuff into each hamper.

Campbell added that while they have a lot of volunteers signed up to deliver hampers, they are still short on volunteers to help sort and pack all the donations into the hamper boxes.

If anyone's interested in helping to pack and sort, Campbell asked that they email hampers@mycck.ca to sign up.

The CCK is also holding an online silent auction, which can be found by visiting 32auctions.com/cck2020. The auction will benefit the Christmas Hamper Program. It runs from Nov. 23 to 30.

The hamper program has been running for nearly 30 years.