



Cornucopia

NDG Food Depot's NEWSLETTER

25th Anniversary edition

The NDG Food Depot strives to eliminate hunger in a manner that ensures dignity, community engagement and the development of human potential. We have been serving NDG and the surrounding Montreal boroughs since 1986



Falling through the Cracks

Written by a Depot staff member

People come to the food bank because they are hungry. Many are hungry because their social assistance benefits are too low to eat properly after they pay the rent. Others are immigrants who cannot practice their professions in our country and join the ranks of the working poor. Often we meet people who live with chronic illnesses, some of whom are diagnosed, some are not. What they all share in common is that their very hunger is a testament to the failures of our social welfare system. Take Sheila for example.

I was all alone at the end of a long week. I heard the door open and looked to see an extremely thin woman in her early sixties with wispy grey hair. She asked about food in a tired way. I was troubled, but I also wanted to go home, so I asked a leading question, 'How did you hear about the Food Depot?' She told me quietly that a social worker from the hospital had sent her.

Over the next hour Sheila told me her story. A year before, Sheila had lost her job. She had just signed a new lease for her apartment and didn't expect to be out of work for long. She went on welfare to tide her over. But to her surprise, there was barely enough left to eat after she paid her rent. It proved hard for someone in her early sixties to find work. Over the next few months, Sheila began to eat worse, lose weight, and eventually developed diabetes.

Her diagnosis came with a referral to a social worker from the CSSS. The social worker told Sheila that the only solution was to move into a cheaper apartment. Sheila agreed, but was quite unwell at this point and was unable to either move on her own or to pay someone to help her. Moreover, she would have been stuck with the old lease on her apartment. Sheila was depressed and alone. She continued to lose weight. When she was down to 90lbs, her diabetes caused her to suffer from blackouts. Eventually she called an ambulance and was admitted to a Montreal Hospital. After three months, she had gained back 30lbs and got in touch with her disabled son in Ontario who agreed to move back to Montreal to take care of her.

The day she left the hospital she had a fifteen minute visit with a social worker. Sheila confessed to the social worker that she was afraid to go home. Her great fear was that if she did not eat regularly, her diabetes would make her black out again. The social worker gave her directions to the Food Depot. Without bus fare, the walk took her two hours.

I fed Sheila, brought her some orange juice for her blood sugar, and spent an hour explaining how she could apply for rental subsidies and tax credits to boost her income and provide her with another \$130 a month to pay the bills. No one, not her welfare agent, her social worker from the CSSS, or the hospital addressed the poverty that was at the root of the problem. Is every branch of the system so cash-strapped and over-regimented that care has become a game of hot-potato? I reflect with shame that I too had almost sent her away. It is hard to refuse food though, hunger makes visible that which is easier to ignore. The Depot is often the last stop...

Sheila's convalescence surely cost tens of thousands in hospital bills. Could we as a society have better used these resources to actually help Sheila before she hit rock bottom? Why is it that only an under-resourced community Food Bank is able to look at her as a whole human being?

This story is not an anomaly. Social workers refer so many elderly and mobility-reduced people to us that we employ a full time outreach worker to help them navigate through the social welfare system. We meet people like Sheila, who have fallen through the cracks, every day. Little by little, we are trying to address the shortcomings of our social safety net by implementing new intervention strategies at the Depot as well as engaging in conversations with people on how we can create real change.



Some alarming facts:

- *Over 140 000 Montrealers turn to food banks every month. 1/3 of them are children.*
- *13% of households receiving help are working families and individuals.*
- *The fastest growing group of people living in poverty are the working poor*
- *Since 2009 demand for our emergency food baskets has increased 25%*
- *Since April 2011 we have registered 423 new people for our food basket program*

Emergency Food Service Update

In April 2011 we noticed a major increase in demand for emergency food baskets. We were concerned that if this trend continued, the impact on our budget would be significant, especially given our commitment to providing high quality protein rich foods in our baskets. In response, a task force was formed to discuss the possible causes of this spike and ways to address it.

Harsher measures for eligibility, which can compromise dignity, were rejected in favour of implementing a more comprehensive registration process that would actually be helpful for people in need of emergency food. Our objective: to better address long-term needs and ultimately accompany people out of poverty.

To do this effectively we realized we needed to take time to go deeper with people. We had been doing this when we could, but are now implementing a more systematic approach. We have documented the many government programs that people with inadequate incomes might be able to access, and have discovered that many are not aware of them or even able to access them without support.

Today, when someone comes in for the first time, they are given at least 20 minutes of individual attention. Most importantly, they are given a chance to share their experiences living in poverty.

The conversation ends by establishing how long someone may need the food service and what next steps they need to take to reach greater stability. Our aim is to find out how we can support people in reaching that next step.

In talking with other emergency food providers across the country we are recognizing the limitations of the traditional food bank model and are implementing exciting new approaches, which have the potential to create lasting change for people. Of course ours is a work in progress as learning, reflecting and evolving never ends.

Please write and send cheques to:
NDG FOOD DEPOT 2121 Oxford, H4A 2X7, Montreal, QC
Or Donate On-line at www.depotndg.org
admin@depotndg.org (514) 483-4680





NDG Food Depot ‘feeds souls’ through urban beautification

Article by Stephanie O’Hanley courtesy of Openfile.ca

It used to be bleak and industrial around the NDG Food Depot’s headquarters. But now cheerful works of art hang from a fence above a flower garden bordering the de Maisonneuve bike path. This summer hostas grew behind rows of pink and white impatiens. Paintings and glittering mosaics include signs that say “A la beauté”.

“Whenever we’re outside reviving the space people cycling on the bike path will stop and say ‘this is so great, thank you for doing this,’” says Fiona Keats, the director of the Depot. Since last spring the Depot has inspired over 200 people, including staff, clients, volunteers, community partners, NDG Arts Week Festival participants and neighbours to add art, gardens and greenery to the neighbourhood.

The model? The City Repair project in Portland, Oregon. The mission? To get citizens to help out in “transforming space into place,” both ecologically and artistically.

At first glance, urban beautification may seem unrelated to the Depot’s role as provider of emergency food to people in need. But Keats says getting people working together helps reduce isolation, builds community ties – and ultimately feeds souls.

“You look at some of the core issues with poverty, social isolation and lack of community and support – if you create more community gathering spaces that are uplifting where people can come together, you can start tackling some of those issues,” Keats said.

Projects so far include:

- Reviving a strip of land along the bike path outside.
- A paving stone patio in front of the Depot – a 25th birthday gift from the CDN/NDG borough – that features garden boxes volunteers built from donated pallets.
- A mural on the south side of the Depot’s building with urban/rural, multiculturalism, social justice and environmental sustainability elements – the result of cooperation between the Depot, Prevention NDG and eight muralists.
- Cleaning up the back alley! The Depot and Eco-quartier NDG held meetings with residents to discuss greening the alley, neighbours formed a committee, rid the lane (now called “Butterfly Lane”) of trash and held a garage sale and eco-awareness kids’ day this summer.

The green alley project attracted people like Marciel St. resident Katrina Janosy. A former kindergarten teacher, the 61-year-old said she discovered her neighbours include former students and their families. Joining the Butterfly Lane committee has helped Janosy get to know neighbours and share her environmental awareness.

The committee is “bubbling with ideas” for next year, Janosy said. “We’re looking at repainting fences and garage doors that have been tagged, getting rid of weeds and planting flowers along both sides of the lane.”

“The response from people has been amazing,” said Keats. At the start, “the idea was to create a corridor of beauty along the train tracks,” she said. With outreach into the wider community, and the participation of hundreds of people, the Depot is serving as a catalyst to do much more.

Big Thanks!

To the volunteers and friends of the local congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who through the Mormon Helping Hands program, joined forces to support the Depot! Over 150 volunteers participated in a door-to-door food drive in LaSalle, collecting 3500 food items and \$500 in cash. The Depot also serves families in parts of LaSalle.



Please write and send cheques to:
 NDG FOOD DEPOT 2121 Oxford, H4A 2X7, Montreal, QC
 Or Donate On-line at www.depotndg.org
admin@depotndg.org (514) 483-4680

Our Programs at a Glance

- *Emergency Food Baskets*
- *Information & Referral*
- *Good Food Box*
- *Boomer Café*
- *Cooking Programs*
- *Skill Share & Pre-employability projects*
- *Cinema Depot*
- *Zero Food Waste Network*



Summer Good Food Box Mini-Markets

This summer we hosted 26 mini-markets in front of the Food Depot.

It was a great way to make fresh produce more accessible as well as encourage people to participate in the Good Food Box program. The markets were a way for us to promote our work in the community and strike up conversations about how we as a community can address issues of poverty.

620 Kg of locally grown produce was donated this summer thanks to:

- **Action Communiterre collective garden network**
- **Benny Farm garden**
- **Loyola city farm school**
- **People’s Potato garden**
- **Quinn Farm**
- **Zephyr Farm**

Ralph’s Story

For a while I was struggling with my diet but was not comfortable walking into a food bank. Somehow it was a harsh acknowledgement of where I was at in my life. I was going into debt and eating more and more Kraft dinner to avoid this indignity. A friend of mine told me about the NDG Food Depot and after trying it out a few times I didn’t feel so uncomfortable.

When I would go in for food I noticed people socializing, kids playing, volunteers giving out food samples and recipes. Even though I still saw some people who were beaten down and displaying a hoarding mentality I felt there was a different quality to the place.

I began to meet more people and started talking to the staff about poverty. These conversations helped me to accept my position without shame. I slowly felt like I could get more involved and I could have some choice of the food items I needed. It was not contemptuous charity, which I had experienced in the past. I felt that the people at the Depot accepted my uniqueness.

As I socialized with more people, I would begin to see them in the neighbourhood. I have lived in NDG for 21 years and for the first time I feel like I am part of a community. The Depot as a group are recognizing the importance of an inclusive community as opposed to hiding the shame of poverty in the basement and I really appreciate this form of activism.