



# **Report to Convocation from the Law Society Foundation On the Lawyers Feed the Hungry Program**

The Law Society Foundation's Toronto Lawyers Feed the Hungry Program ("Program") has been a support for the community for almost 25 years and is considered much more than a food program by its guests. In addition to being a key hunger relief resource in the larger network of social services, the Program operates with values that focus on inclusiveness and kindness that support the building of community and creates a place of belonging and safety for its guests.

Prior to the pandemic, the Toronto Program involved sit-down service four times a week in the Law Society's cafeteria with hot, fresh meals prepared by the Program's cooks and served by its many volunteers. Since the onset of the pandemic, the Program has continued to operate four days a week, without pause, providing meals through take-out service with over 115,000 meals served and 14,000 volunteer hours since March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The meals are packed by a core group of volunteers and distributed to guests at the North doors of Osgoode Hall.

Although attendance is slightly less than pre-pandemic levels, an average of 1000 meals are distributed each week. Program guests represent a broad group of individuals dealing with hunger insecurity, but notably there is a growing number of individuals impacted by job loss and the rising cost of living, a trend Community Food Centre Canada (CFCC) says is likely to increase.

The pandemic not only forced the Program to pivot its operations, but it required the Foundation to immediately reimagine its fund development strategy and revenue streams as the ability to fundraise through its traditional in-person events, which generate approximately 25% of the Toronto Program's revenue, was eliminated by social gathering restrictions. With the inability to continue with sit-down meal service, the Toronto Program's meal sponsorship program also saw a decline in contributions. Not only were the Program's revenue streams notably impacted, the Foundation was also competing with other charities facing the same challenges; expenses relatively unchanged but revenues reduced suddenly. The reality is that some of Canada's most revered non-profit organizations have struggled to survive with one in five Ontario charities closing permanently.

In the absence of events and onsite meal sponsorships, the Toronto Program faced a reduction in revenue of 44% in comparison to the prior year. With the guidance of the Foundation's Board of Trustees, its Fundraising Committee and its Fund Development

Manager, and the generosity of the legal professions and the broader community, the Program has successfully weathered the pandemic thus far. The Fund Development Manager worked to refresh all communications, introduced additional email and social media appeals, engaged the Foundation's established network of individual donors and proactively sourced available grants and new corporate support. As a result, in both 2020 and 2021, the Foundation was able to raise more in contributions than required for Program operations<sup>1</sup>. It avoided the need to access the Toronto Program's fund balance and the Foundation managed to strengthen its financial position, with sufficient funding for several years of operations. This is a stark contrast from 2014, when the Toronto Program had less than a year of funding. With the support of Convocation at the time and a strong commitment from the Foundation's Board of Trustees, the Program has achieved financial sustainability. Other than in-kind support provided by the Law Society through the use of its facilities, including the cafeteria, financial administration services and its Executive Director, Finance and Chief Financial Officer acting as the Foundation's Secretary-Treasurer, all costs of the Toronto Program, including staffing, are funded by the Foundation.

In addition to the Program in Toronto, over the last 25 years, the Program has expanded with operations in nine other centres across the Province – Ottawa, London, Windsor, Barrie, Hamilton, Peel/Halton, Timmins, Waterloo Region and most recently Chatham. Each Program, focused on hunger relief, operates differently based on the needs of the community it serves and are dependent on volunteers from the legal professions who lead and coordinate efforts. Many of these Programs, as they partner with other organizations committed to feeding the hungry, were not able to operate at the same capacity during the pandemic, but are slowly beginning to resume.

December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022 will mark 25 years since that very first meal service at Osgoode Hall. Reflecting on the last several years, the Foundation has evolved and adapted to successfully maintain the Lawyers Feed the Hungry Program while achieving financial sustainability. The Foundation is cognizant that in a competitive philanthropic environment, remaining focused on donor stewardship and financial sustainability is critical to the ongoing operation of the various Programs. Fundraising events are now returning, with the Toronto Program's annual Buggy & Ken Charity Golf Tournament scheduled for June 8, 2022 at Wyndance Golf Club – information available at [Buggy & Ken Charity Golf Tournament 2022](#).

The Foundation is continuing with its additional email and social media appeals and is moving forward with its planned giving program. With many opportunities for donors and the legal community to engage and continued monitoring of changes in the charity landscape, the Foundation is focused on the future and sustainment of the Programs.

---

<sup>1</sup> The cost of operating the Toronto Program is approximately \$500,000 a year based on 2020 and 2021 expenses.