

Demand for Meals-on-Wheels has tripled during COVID for RFCS

Frontenac News | Jeff Green | Mar 10, 2021



Left to right: Natalie Reynolds, Anne Howes and Laura Wood prepare Meals-On-Wheels for Rural Frontenac Community Services

Providing Community Services to Seniors has been a challenge for Catherine Tysick, who is the Manager of Adult Services for Rural Frontenac Community Services (RFCS).

She helps organize a basket of services that are aimed at engaging the senior population, in small Central and North Frontenac hamlets, engaged in community life and supporting people as they age at home.

Over the last year, the programs that she oversees have had to adapt to a radically different environment. Among the programs that have been altered are the food programs.

The popular Diners program, which normally includes a meal, information and entertainment once a month at 5 locations across the two townships, hasn't happened, but the complimentary Meals-on-Wheels program has taken up the slack in a big way.

"Meals-on-Wheels has always been an important program for us. We have had volunteer drivers bringing food, and keeping us connected with some of our clients, for many, many years, forming friendships and bonds and checking up on them each week as they deliver meals," she said. "This year there hasn't been the same interaction, with food being dropped off on front porches and masking, but we have seen a large increase in the number of meals we are delivering."

The Meals-on-Wheels program has added a third day to keep up with the demand and has had to recruit more drivers, to drive further distances across the large region.

"For example, in February of 2020 we delivered 273 meals, and in February of 2021 we delivered 810 meals, that's triple the amount," she said.

Drivers also travelled 2.5 times as many kilometres, from 2,000 in February 2020, to 5,000 in February of 2021.

Using some grant money, RFCS has been able to upgrade the commercial kitchen facility that they operate in the Child Centre in Sharbot Lake, where they run a daycare centre. The kitchen serves the daycare as well as the Meals-on-Wheels Program.

"We have renovated and made the kitchen bigger over time, and we have a new commercial stove, fridges and freezers, so we can drop off hot meals for people, as well as frozen meals they can heat up later."

The enhanced capacity of the program has made a difference for seniors, and their families, who have not been able to visit because of the pandemic.

One of those families are the Cox, Cota, Sergeant family in North and Central Frontenac.

"When COVID hit, we as a family decided to try meals-on-wheels for our mom, Wyn Sergeant. We felt it best to keep her isolated, as she is high risk and we certainly wanted to keep her as safe as possible from COVID.

What we didn't realize was that each meal delivery ensured an almost daily contact with our mother. She would be up and looking forward to her delicious meal, on most days, more than she could eat in one sitting. Along with the delivery, and probably what she enjoyed the most, was the socially distant visit outside, off her deck, with the individual bringing her food. They were all so friendly and concerned about how mom was doing that particular day. They would even let her know to be careful on the steps if they were slippery. For family, this was invaluable to us. My mom would like to thank everyone involved in making this program available, she absolutely loved the food, and the delivery staff that went above and beyond.

We highly recommend this service for all the reasons mentioned above. It's also economically priced, said Jenny Cox and Kathy Cota about the service Wyn Sergeant has received."

Another child of a senior, Lisa, expressed her appreciation for how the program has helped her father.

“Living so far from my father proves to be challenging in many ways and during the pandemic those challenges have been amplified. I am extremely grateful for the Meals-on-Wheels program and the kindness of my father's friends and neighbours. Knowing that he can have a warm, nutritious meal delivered to him, a few times a week, is a comfort. As isolation is a concern, I am relieved that there are people checking in on him. My dad was thrilled to receive messages from school children with his meal. This also made me very happy - having children connecting with seniors like my father provides opportunities for caring, growing and learning. I appreciate being able to rely on the community to help in ways that I cannot.

Another recipient, John Walters, is a widow living in Ompah. He moved to Canada from the UK in 1967, “seeking a better life, which I found”. He worked as an electrician in Toronto and retired to Ompah 12 years ago.

“I started going to the Diners club and was offered Meals-on-Wheels, which was great. Now I am taking more Meals-on-Wheels, which is fantastic. It makes it so much easier for me to do all the general household work I have to do, living alone, when I can take a break from cooking some of my own meals. It buys me time, which is great for me. It makes things, what's the expression in Canada, copacetic.”

Meals-on-Wheels has had to recruit more drivers, for the increases in demand, and are always looking for new drivers.

Bob and Rhonda Young have retired in Sharbot Lake, and they started as Meals-on-Wheels drivers in August.

“We are the new kids on the block,” said Bob.

“We really enjoy driving. Normally we do the route around Sharbot Lake, but we have subbed in for the route up towards Plevna, and the one to Bob's Lake and Piccadilly. The best part is the chance to visit a little bit, at a distance and with a mask on, with the people we deliver to. They are very grateful for the service,” said Rhonda.

They added that the food smells so good they always go home after driving and have a good lunch.

For further information about Meals-on-Wheels in Central and North Frontenac, call 613-279-3151.

Southern Frontenac Community Services in Sydenham provides Meals-on-Wheels in South Frontenac, to reach them, call 613-376-6477.

In Addington Highlands and the western part of North Frontenac, call Land O'Lakes Community Services 613-336-8934.