

# WESTON AREA EMERGENCY SUPPORT 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



*Outdoor setup Summer 2020*

## **OVERVIEW**

The year 2020 will be one we will not forget anytime soon. This report will deal with the year from mid-March through to December 2020, as that is the timeframe for the COVID pandemic, and the time everything changed for WAES and for the world. First, we want to thank everyone who stepped up this year to take on new tasks, donate generously, and support our community every day. We could not have done it without all of you.

In mid March when the country shut down, food banks had to decide what they would do in response.

1. WAES, as a fully volunteer organization, was immediately impacted by the fact that volunteers over 65 were not allowed to continue volunteering. That took about 90% of our volunteers out of circulation. WAES was very lucky because we were able to access local volunteers quickly through word of mouth and social media. This quick response from the community ensured WAES did not have to close, as over 40% of food banks in Toronto had to do.
2. WAES changed its operation from an indoor, shopping model food bank to an outdoor transactional model. We started to make pre-packed food bags. These bags were filled with primarily non-perishable food and came in different sizes to support families based on the family size. We were able to add perishables (like fruits, vegetables, and protein) as the bags were distributed. Over time this process was changed and refined based on public health requirements, and our learnings as the pandemic continued into the fall.



*Apples purchased from Weston Farmers Market - late summer 2020*

3. We quickly learned that we needed to hire a person to manage the food bank. There was so much work to be done, not one volunteer could do it all. We were so very lucky to be able to hire Chris Greenhalgh in May. Chris had been volunteering and so knew the operation. He stepped into this role and it became his passion. There are not enough words to thank him for all he did to ensure WAES continued to operate at a high level of safety for all volunteers and community members, as well as ensuring that we had adequate stock of all the items we needed from food to PPE to shelving, tents, tables traffic cones and more.
4. WAES had to respond to a massive increase in need from the outset of the pandemic. With food banks to the north and west of WAES closed, people started coming to us for food support. We made the decision that we would turn nobody away. In the beginning, the only question we asked was “how many people in the household”. Everybody that came to get help was accommodated. We did not have the time to really talk to people. We just needed to get the food into their hands. Desperation was very evident.
5. WAES also decided to stay open more days of the week, and for longer hours. This required more volunteer support, and we got that from our amazing crews. We were open 60% more days for food distribution, and 30% longer hours. We added shifts to every day to ensure we could do the work needed with a maximum of 6 people in the space.
6. Due to the shutdown of schools and faith organizations our supply of food donations dried up. We needed to buy more food, but the grocery stores were not able to supply us with bulk purchases as they too had supply constraints. We needed to shop at multiple locations to get the volume of food required. This was at a time when we were all being told to stay home. Chris took the risks for us all to ensure we had food on our shelves.
7. The Federal Government announced \$50M in support for food banks in the spring. We wondered how that would translate down to WAES. Food Banks Canada, Feed Ontario and North York Harvest were able to use the funds to buy huge bulk quantities of non-perishable food and send food banks all over Canada pre-packed boxes. WAES was able to use these boxes to distribute in our community, and that freed us up to purchase more perishable foods – like milk, eggs, fruits, vegetables and essentials like toilet paper and other personal care items. These pre-packs ended in September, so we were back to purchasing more items. We became members of MVR Cash and Carry and Chris was able to bulk purchase what we needed. We also continued to get food supplied by Second Harvest and North York Harvest, but that was never enough for fill our needs.



***Emergency pre-packed food boxes made possible through Federal funding.***

8. WAES saw an average of 2,200 visits per month from April to December 2020, up from an average of 676 per month in 2019. We needed to enable an appointment system to ensure that our community was kept safe by limiting the number of people coming to WAES at one time. People make appointments at 15 minute intervals so that there are no long lines of people waiting for food. We made this change in the fall with the help of Margaret Roberts, our long time volunteer, board member and treasurer. Margaret took on the task of booking appointments. This was a big job that required her to be on the phone for long periods of time. Margaret became the voice that the community recognized and looked forward to speaking to. Margaret talked to people weekly, and they felt they had a supportive connection, which for some was a lifeline. Our single seniors came to depend on Margaret.

9. WAES has tried hard to keep people safe, which means we are more transactional than we were in the past. This is not the best way to support people, but it is necessary. Chris, as the person out front of WAES every day we distributed food, became the face of WAES, just as Margaret was the voice. People responded well to Chris, with his shorts (even on the coldest days) and his positive attitude. Chris went out of his way to ensure that people got what they needed when they came to WAES.
10. WAES added a delivery service to shut-in seniors at Eagle Manor. In the spring we received a call from a public health nurse telling us that there were people that really needed food but could not possibly get to WAES due to age or infirmity. We were able to work with Shakespeare in Action and Frontlines to get food to these people each week. Frontlines staff made meals, we put together specialized food boxes and SiA delivered the boxes to each person's door. This has been a lifeline to many.



***Packing Eagle Manor hampers – volunteers safely apart.***

11. All of these changes could not have happened without the support of Central United Church. As time went on WAES required more and more space to be able to carry out our mission. The church said “yes” to our every request. From working in one room, we have now effectively taken over most of the main floor of the church. This has allowed us to have space for people to work safely, for us to store the extra food we need each week, and for us to prepare our pre-packs and special orders. By the fall we were distributing over 8K pounds of food each week from our space!



***New sorting area – gradually taking over the first floor of the church!***

## **SUPPORTS:**

WAES has also been the recipient of incredible financial support from our community and beyond. Donations through CanadaHelps and by cheque have given us the capacity to purchase the infrastructure, staff, food and supplies we needed to operate. As our costs increased so did our donations. Costs increased by 75% and our donations increased by 100% versus 2019. This allows us to continue into 2021 doing the best we can to support our community.

WAES received increased financial support from the following organizations: Weston Lions; York Lions (from proceeds raised at the Delta Downsview Bingo 1868 Wilson Avenue North York, ON M9M 1A5); Rotary Club – Parkdale, High Park, Humber; Knights of Columbus 3945 (from proceeds raised at the Delta Downsview Bingo 1868 Wilson Avenue North York, ON M9M 1A5); Hylcan Foundation; Salaam Foundation (formerly The Muslim Women of York Region); CMS Hockey; Weston BIA; Weston Village Residents Assoc; ANAF.

We received new support from these organizations: CastlePoint Numa; Federal Government through North York Harvest; Fat Bastard Burritos (Weston Rd location); Mechanical Inc.; Kindred Foundation; Columbia Drain and Concrete; “260 Club”; The Shepherd Group; JFS Restaurant Equipment.

Faith Organizations, schools and local businesses supported WAES with funds and food: Central United church; Weston Park Baptist church; Weston Presbyterian church; St. Mary & St. Martha Anglican church; St. John the Evangelist Catholic church; St. Philips Anglican church; Buttonwood Pastoral Services; Rexdale Alliance; Beulah church; St. Gregory’s Catholic Women’s League; St. John the Evangelist Catholic Women’s League; Weston CI; Weston Memo; Pelmo Park; Silverthorn; Weston Superstore; RBC Weston; P&M’s; Weston King Neighbourhood Centre; Weston Frontlines; Michael Verrelli and Brigitte Contento (faithful Tuesday volunteers) ran several outdoor food drives, and a fall door-to door food drive for WAES bringing in trunk loads of needed food.

We received ongoing support through our MP’s office. At least once per month the staff checked in to see if there was anything they could do to support WAES. They sent donors of both food and funds our way – as well as spending time volunteering.



*MP Hussien and staff come to help in the fall*

## **FIRSTS:**

1. WAES gets its first website. Supported by Taye Maddison we created a simple website for the organization. You can find it at [www.waes.ca](http://www.waes.ca).

2. Shawn Watts from Weston Park Baptist church ran a GoFundMe campaign to raise funds for WAES in December. It raised over \$11k. This fundraiser was to replace the huge annual door to door food drive that WPB has run for WAES for over 30 years.
3. Federal Government grant of \$5K that was funneled through North York Harvest.
4. Salaam Foundation committed to donating either 100 halal chicken or 100 kg of ground beef twice per month starting in December 2020 and continuing for at least 6 months into 2021. This is after they have supported WAES for two years with chicken donations and food supplies purchased through Costco.



***Chickens from the Muslim Women of York Region (now Salaam Foundation) filled our freezers***

5. Toronto Miracle ran a citywide door to door food drive in December. Several people in York South Weston signed on to pick up food at homes in our area and bring the food to WAES. This resulted in over 1,800 items donated and some new supporters and volunteers.
6. North York Harvest distributed Loblaw gift cards in November. Each card was worth \$25, and WAES received 800 cards to give to our community members. For over a month every person that had an appointment received a gift card. This was a big bonus for all those who received these cards.



***A mountain of pre-packed food bags, ready for distribution in December. Our special reindeer, Chris Greenhalgh.***

## **Volunteers:**

WAES has been blessed with a whole new crew of volunteers that stepped in when COVID hit. Our long term, dedicated volunteers had to reluctantly step away due to COVID protocols and age restrictions. In the beginning only 4 of our original volunteers had been able to carry on. We now have over 45 new volunteers that work each week to unload, sort, date check, pack and distribute food for our community. We couldn't do this without them. Many have been volunteering every week since late March when this all began. THANK YOU.



*Volunteer working alone to pack apples for distribution*

As 2020 drew to a close Chris Greenhalgh found a new job, and reluctantly left WAES as an employee (but has continued to help us as a volunteer when he can). We were able to hire Amanda Bal as our new Interim Food Bank manager. She started in mid-January 2021. We look forward to all her support in this new, and hopefully brighter, year.

## ***FINAL NOTE:***

Poverty is the root cause of the food insecurity that leads to food bank use. Inadequate social assistance and disability benefits negatively impact individuals in our community and across our country. COVID has laid bare the inadequacy of our social support systems. Remember to talk to your local politicians and tell them you want supports that will help raise people up so they can feed themselves and their families. Supports like affordable housing, universal childcare, living wage, accessible education, and training programs. Then maybe one day we can close our food bank. Until that day, thank you to everybody for supporting WAES.

Diana Stapleton,

Chair, W.A.E.S.

Established in 1986

1 King St, Central United Church

416-247-3737

[www.waes.ca](http://www.waes.ca)

Charitable Organization #119295202RR0001