

A month or more ago, after offering to prepare this message focusing on our Food Bank & Resource Centre, one of the first things I happened to read was Christopher White's Question Box column in November's Broadview Magazine titled "A Challenge and a Gift". The question was from a church that was having problems with clients of its food bank disrupting their worship services.

The question struck me as particularly relevant to this presentation – not because anything like that is happening here, but because Christopher's reply contained a response from his associate Sandra Severs that said "Treat them as the most precious thing that has entered your sanctuary, and in them see the face of Christ. (pause)

I believe the Summerland Food Bank was created in this spirit by the United Church Women of this church in 1984 – this year marks 40 years of continuous service to those in need in our community. These first pictures are only a few of the dozens of people who helped start and build it. This is Merle and Bill O'Shaughnessy. Merle kept a journal at that time that Sharon still treasures. The earliest entry in her journal that mentions the Food Bank is dated February 24, 1984, and reads "Friday morning I went to the Food Bank Meeting. About ten people out, looking for guidance".

Olive Winter was the first secretary,

Bob and Helen Chalmers were tireless workers through the years.

This group is preparing for Christmas in 1986: Doug Banham, Ruth Lancaster, Merle O'Shaughnessy (again), Jean Loney and Derek Wotherspoon. The text under the picture noted that more than 50 hampers were to be delivered that year – already up significantly from the 7 families that we understand were helped when it was formed.

And so, fast forward to today. I'm sure many of you have not visited the Food Bank & Resource Centre that lies literally beneath your feet in the basement of this Church. So, let's start with a virtual tour:

Reception Area slide

This is Jennifer Avery, she and Hal Roberts are two social workers who job-share to provide full-time coverage of our help desk 5 days each week – We depend on their compassion and expertise greatly. If both are away for any reason, then the help desk is staffed by volunteers. Working the help desk is extremely demanding, but also endlessly interesting – given the variety of people and situations we are presented with.

Computer Workstation slide

In the reception area are three public computer workstations, funded by the Community Foundation of the South Okanagan, Similkameen. These workstations have the latest Microsoft Suite of Office Software and are heavily used by our clients for internet research, email, document scanning, resume preparation and occasional online job-skills training.

Office Picture slide

Adjacent to the reception area are two small offices – this one set up as a counselling room:

Office Picture Slide 2

and this one as a business office.

We provide these offices free of charge to any social service agency that will come to Summerland to meet with our clients. In addition to the office space, we also provide them with internet access and business services such as Fax, photocopying, printing and appointment-booking. We currently have 14 agencies using these offices providing services like Mental Health. Child and Family Counselling, Legal Assistance, help applying for government services and many others. None of these services were available in Summerland prior to 2013 when the Resource Centre was added.

Kitchen Slide

We have a small kitchen where we can repackage food items like margarine, sugar, coffee, and rice, wash vegetables and fruit, and where some of our clients can cook a hot meal.

Laundry slide

Here is our laundry unit – free of charge for our clients' use.

Washroom slide

And here is our accessible washroom with a shower. The washroom and laundry facilities were built with funding from the Summerland Rotary Club, and the Summerland Health Care Auxiliary. Summerland Kinsmen provided the original washing machine and dryer unit.

Elevator slide

Back in our reception area we have a wheelchair lift – partly financed by our church and partly by a grant from the Federal Government's Enabling Accessibility Fund.

Walk-in Cooler slide

Entering the food preparation area of the food bank, on your left side is our walk-in cooler funded again by the Community Foundation. The cooler is usually stocked with dairy products, fresh fruit and vegetables – some grown, some donated and some purchased.

Pickup Area slide

The food pick-up area includes shelves of miscellaneous items that clients can pick from – items that are close to or past their best before dates and other donated items like sardines and curry that we wouldn't put into prepacked hampers. We follow Food Bank Canada guidelines which allow us to distribute food up to one year past its best-before date but not past any expiry date.

Our pick-up area also contains some pet supplies, toiletries, other sundries, and our box storage area.

Hamper & Fridge slide.

Next to our pickup area are our upright refrigerators and freezers (financed again by the Community Foundation) and three older donated chest freezers.

Refrigerator slide

Our ready-use refrigerator contains eggs and margarine, our upright freezer contains meat and frozen packaged meals.

Chest Freezer Slide

One chest freezer usually contains bread and bakery products and the other two a random mix of whatever doesn't fit elsewhere.

Warehouse slides (2)

And finally, this is our non-perishable warehouse area. All food that comes in is weighed, sorted by type and date and placed on shelves ready to be used for weekly food hampers. Some items are retained for distribution at Christmas.

Seed to Feed

This slide shows our Seed to Feed program garden. It was started three years ago and provides a measure of food security to the Food Bank and, by transfer, to the community of Summerland. We achieve this by growing our own fresh vegetables. We rent two very large plots from the Alliance Church Community Gardens and hire a master gardener through the growing season to manage it with volunteer and casual employee labour. Partial funding for Seed to Feed is provided by the Community Foundation. During the growing season, from March 1 to October 31, the program supplies us with a wide variety of fresh vegetables.

Greenhouse Slide

This is our commercial greenhouse.

Vegetable Table

And this is an example of what our Food Bank clients see at the height of the growing season.

Food Sharing Stand

Our food sharing stand, is open every Tuesday afternoon in season. Community members can come by to donate food, pick up food, or both. Cash donations are optional. The food sharing stand was created by Linda Van Alphen.

Closing Statement for this tour.

Any Summerland resident in need is welcome at the Food Bank & Resource Centre. We attempt to provide unconditional help as best we can. There is no means test – if someone asks for help then they will receive help to the best of our ability to provide it. All our services are offered free of charge,

(Pause)

Food Bank Use Slide

So, to some numbers. This graph shows our food bank clients who received food. The left three bars are from 2021, blue for number of adults, orange for number of children and grey for number of households. The middle three bars are for 2022 and the right three bars are for 2023. The numbers of people fed in 2023 were 384 adults and 184 children in 265 households or families. The significant trend here is the large jump in 2022 as COVID benefits dropped off and food prices started to rise.

Income Slide

These are our budgeted income sources in 2024. Donations from Summerland residents, businesses, churches, and institutions make up almost 2/3 of our income (shown in blue). We live in a generous community. Orange is a community gaming grant – our only (and competitive) source of Provincial government support, A grant in aid from the District of Summerland (in grey), A seed to feed grant from the community foundation (in yellow), a grant from this church matched by a ProVision grant (in light blue) and various donations from Food Banks BC (in green). The total size of this pie is \$310,000.

Expense slide

Here is how our expenses are apportioned. The size of this pie is also \$310,000 – we invariably spend what we budget.

Our Food Bank is just over one half our expenses (in blue). Our Resource Centre expenses (in orange) our seed to feed program (also really a part of our food bank in grey) and this year our projected moving expenses (in yellow).

Our expenses would be much higher but for our 60 to 70 volunteers who contribute 2,000 hours of work each year – and of course the support of this church through donation of its facilities.

Partnership Slide

But now to the future.

Most of you will know that the church and food bank are working with Turning Points Collaborative in Vernon on a plan to build 60 units of affordable housing on the church lot and the food bank lot next door.

Building Slide 1

Here are the first architects renderings of the proposed building, currently in its design phase. You are almost the first people in Summerland to see these pictures which were released on Friday to Summerland's Advisory Planning Commission. The project is not yet fully approved and so the design is subject to change depending on many upcoming reviews. This is the view from Henry Avenue.

Building slide 2

Moving slightly to the left here is the view across our side alley.

Building Slide 3

And moving down the alley, this is the view from the back corner. Notice the attractive trees and garden on the second floor. There is a similar but smaller area at the far end of building.

Food Bank Plan Slide

And this is an initial layout of the Food Bank's space in the building which is on the ground floor at the corner of Henry (at the bottom) and our side alley (at the left). Food is offloaded at the loading dock, then prepared for distribution in the warehouse. Food Bank clients will enter at the main door, check in at reception and move to the food distribution area to meet their food coming from the warehouse with miscellaneous items available in the distribution area itself.

In the centre area are three shared offices (one more than we have now) a laundry, two washrooms and two shower stalls, a small kitchen area and a drop-in or dining area.

Fundraising Slide

And this is our building fundraising challenge. The size of this pie is \$1.6 Million. We already have accumulated land and investments worth \$1 Million represented in blue. The orange segment is the remaining \$600,000 that we must raise in the next two years to complete the space to our specifications. This year we will be approaching our regular donors, community groups and the general public (and yes, you) for financial help.

Pamela Slide

And I want to close with a story. There are a thousand stories, but I use this one because it affected me deeply and illustrates so well the reason why the Food Bank & Resource Centre exists. I call it Pamela's story:

Pamela (not her real name) is reserved in talking about her childhood and teenage years but hints at a difficult and abusive childhood. We also don't know much about her current life, but her addiction has caused her and her in-recovery partner to access the food and counselling services of the Summerland Food Bank & Resource Centre many times over 10 months.

Pamela is heartbreakingly pretty – an attribute that, combined with her history and drug use, have undoubtedly made her particularly vulnerable to exploitation of many kinds.

Pamela and her partner are struggling every day to make ends meet while attempting, with our help, to secure disability benefits for the partner and keep Pamela in addiction recovery. Today, Pamela and her partner arrived at the resource centre in mid-argument due to a relapse, but she left almost immediately. Her partner, fearing that she would do harm to herself, used the Resource Centre phone to call her mental health counsellor. The counsellor, after listening to the details, also transferred the partner to the local RCMP to help track her down.

Later that day, Pamela and her counsellor (who had spent most of her day combing the streets and parks to find her) arrived at the Resource Centre to seek several things:

A shower (a service that the Resource Centre provides);

Some fresh clothes (which our local thrift store provides free of charge if the Resource Centre requests it and which the counsellor picked up for her);

A hot meal (from the food bank shelves using our kitchen); and

A place to stay the night (the counsellor had found a shelter bed for the following night). This we were unable to arrange because Summerland has no shelter bed facilities. After much discussion and research, it was decided that the Resource centre and the Counselling agency would share the cost of a motel room for one night. However, following further discussion with the counsellor, she and Pamela decided on another option that was not revealed to us.

We hope that our support of Pamela and her partner has some long-lasting positive effects on her young life. The frustration of dealing with exploitation and addiction leave all of us who deal with her in a state of wishing we could do so much more.

I was personally running the help desk that day. As I looked at that beautiful girl, her hair still wet from the shower, standing next to her counsellor in her hastily assembled outfit, I was thinking that the potential waste of this girl's life is almost unbearable to consider. I tried hard to say something, but the emotion was too great to overcome, and I had to turn away in tears.

“Treat them as the most precious thing - and in them see the face of Christ”

The Summerland Food Bank & Resource Centre Society's mission is “to provide a one-stop resource centre for people in need in Summerland” No matter how far we have come, situations like Pamela's remind us of how far we have still to go to fully meet that goal. We pray for the day when we can provide shelter and nurture in addition to a friendly ear, a shower, laundry, some counselling, and food.

May it be come to pass in our time. Amen.