A special interest section by Mediaplanet

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CEO, Food Banks Canada

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Food banks’ volunteer and staff challenges have disrupted their operations. Many have put out an urgent call to local communities for volunteers.

Making a difference

If you can’t volunteer, you can still help. “We’re appealing to all Canadians to donate financially to help ensure that our neighbours living with food insecurity have enough food to make it through this pandemic,” says Hatch. “We need everyone’s help to get through this together. And no gift is too small or too large.”

Cheers to Volunteers

Paula Speevak
President & CEO, Volunteer Canada

It’s a time to highlight the enormous contributions of Canada’s volunteers. People are formally volunteering through organizations and checking in with family, friends, and neighbours. When you see groceries at a front door, chances are a volunteer delivered them. When you can’t help line, a volunteer is there to listen to you and help you find support. Volunteers are continuing to drive people to doctor’s appointments, bring them hot meals, and help out in shelters.

Volunteers who are isolated at home are also continuing to support others. They’re tutoring, mentoring, and connecting with people online. Volunteers are leading sing-alongs, organizing concerts, and teaching yoga. They’re teaching others to participate in online discussions, worship services, and classes. Businesses are finding new ways to support employees volunteering by directing skills, goods, and services to help communities. During this COVID-19 pandemic, new resources are being developed to help people reduce risks and to make volunteering safer for everyone.

Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, Canada already had much to celebrate with close to 13 million Canadians volunteering more than 2 billion hours each year. Volunteer centres in communities work year-round to connect people with organizations and volunteer resource managers match people’s skills and passions to opportunities.

A noticeable national surge of compassion and innovation shown by volunteers and the non-profit and charitable sector during the COVID-19 outbreak has been truly awe-inspiring and a source of hope for so many.

Supporting vulnerable people and continuing essential services while staying safe and practicing physical distancing has been a challenging tightrope to walk. But across Canada, the challenge is being embraced by volunteers of all ages. Governments, businesses, and community organizations have stretched their resources and adapted their policies to respond. It’s time to applaud every volunteer who has stepped up, stepped cautiously, and, at times, stepped back in response to this pandemic.

National Volunteer Week is a time to highlight the enormous contributions of Canada’s volunteers. People are formally volunteering through organizations and checking in with family, friends, and neighbours. When you see groceries at a front door, chances are a volunteer delivered them. When you can’t help line, a volunteer is there to listen to you and help you find support. Volunteers are continuing to drive people to doctor’s appointments, bring them hot meals, and help out in shelters.

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A COVID-19 pandemic sweeps the world. Canadians from coast to coast are being impacted. Food Banks Canada, a national charity, is seeing that impact firsthand.

“We’re seeing on average a 20 percent increase in food bank use across Canada,” says Chris Hatch, CEO of Food Banks Canada. Food banks are facing a triple threat: increased demand, fewer donations (fisheye many spring food drives were cancelled), and Canadians are grocery shopping less, and disruptions in the food supply chain are preventing grocery stores from making their usual large donations, and challenges with volunteers and staff. “It’s a perfect storm,” says Hatch.

Communities pulling together

The good news is that Canadians are rising to the challenge. “We’re seeing tremendous support from all levels,” says Hatch. This includes support from governments, corporations, various foundations, and celebrities like Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively.

“The biggest one for me is that we’ve had over 25,000 individuals make donations on our website,” says Hatch. “This unprecedented support has been heart-warming.”

The organization still needs more support. “Volunteers are the lifeblood of food banks, and there’s been a major drop off in volunteers during COVID-19,” says Hatch. “A lot of volunteers are saying thankfully they’re self-isolating and staying at home. Others have to stay home with children or think that the risks are too high.”

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When the COVID-19 crisis struck, Canadian tech entrepreneurs and social enterprises alike were not immune to the impacts of the pandemic. HelpSeeker, a social enterprise that works to connect people with services and resources during tough times, saw a tripling of support requests in their app within the first month of February. Looking back at the month of February, HelpSeeker saw a tripling of support requests in their app.

“When the COVID-19 pandemic halted as is the case with domestic violence, abuse, and mental health, while the ability to list supports and resources increased demand, but what’s encouraging has been the community stepping up. Just over 240 COVID-19 services have been listed in Manitoba on HelpSeeker’s directory over 240 new COVID-19 services have been listed in Manitoba on HelpSeeker’s directory to date, bringing the national total to 1,600. “It’s encouraging to see the innovative ways to connect people with resources and supports during the COVID-19 pandemic. This technology is needed to ensure people can quickly access information and resources,” says the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs and MP for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital.

“Since the launch of the HelpSeeker app in April, we’ve seen a jump in people looking for COVID-19 related needs specifically, female experiencing abuse, services for women and girls experiencing abuse, services for men and boys experiencing abuse, and services for LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing abuse,” said Dr. Alina Turner, CEO & Co-Founder, HelpSeeker.

HelpSeeker is in a unique position to partner with the scientific community, food-service, civil servants, and those working in emergency services, behind the scenes — along with the scientific community, food-service, civil servants, and those working in emergency services, behind the scenes — along with mainstream media outlets working to promote awareness of and donations to the incredible, innovative work taking place in our community,” Dr. Turner added. "This is another example of the incredible, innovative work taking place in our community, and we’re thankful to our partners at UPS Canada, the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs and MP for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, and the incredible, innovative work taking place in our community, and we’re thankful to our partners at UPS Canada, the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs and MP for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, and the incredible, innovative work taking place in our community, and we’re thankful to our partners at UPS Canada, the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs and MP for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, and the incredible, innovative work taking place in our community, and we’re thankful to our partners at UPS Canada, the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs and MP for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, and the incredible, innovative work taking place in our community, and we’re thankful to our partners at UPS Canada, the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs and MP for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, and the incredible, innovative work taking place in our community, and we’re thankful to our partners at UPS Canada, the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs and MP for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, and the incredible, innovative work taking place in our community, and we’re thankful to our partners at UPS Canada, the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs and MP for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, for Saint Bonifie
Helping Canadians with Immediate Online Mental Health Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic

From hand sanitizer to masks and beyond, Canadian companies are stepping up to help lead the charge against the physical effects of COVID-19. No less important is the need for innovative solutions to address the spreading wave of mental health issues facing people across the country.

Wellness Together Canada is Canada’s first online platform offering immediate mental health support for all Canadians, at no cost to individuals. Powered by Greenspace Health, the portal offers a range of different services, including wellness self-assessment, and technology-driven approaches to mental health support — three of Canada’s leading mental health service providers. For this unprecedented demand, there has never been a more important time to bring a scientific and technology-driven approach to mental health services,” says Jeremy Weisz, CEO of Greenspace Health. “This portal is designed to offer a full range of mental health support to people of all ages in every part of Canada. It’s a resource ready to help support Canadians and their mental health.

To help improve the resiliency of Canadian veterans, health professionals at the McGill Comprehensive Health Improvement Program (CHIP) have launched a free web-based health promotion program (Homebound Resiliency Mission) designed for Canadian veterans and their families. Participants learn how to exercise safely, use mindfulness techniques to eat healthier, and reduce their stress levels while competing with boredom and anxiety.

As mental health services nationwide have been experiencing unprecedented demand, there has never been a more important time to bring a scientific and technology-driven approach to mental health services,” says Jeremy Weisz, CEO of Greenspace Health. “This portal is designed to offer a full range of mental health support to people of all ages in every part of Canada. It’s a resource ready to help support Canadians and their mental health.

Dr. Steven Grover
Director, McGill Comprehensive Health Improvement Program (CHIP)

Personal information will be de-identified for research analyses and individual data won’t be shared with any third party. Registration for the Homebound Resiliency Mission opens on April 30 and the program will begin on May 6.

For more information, visit missionvav.com.
For more media interviews about this program contact steven.grover@mcgill.ca.

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