

Bridges to Hope 2023 Annual Report to our Supporting Congregations

Once again the Staff, Volunteers and Board of Directors would like to express our sincere thanks for the ongoing support of Bridges to Hope by our founding and supporting congregations. The importance of our core mission, *to reduce the effects of poverty on individuals and families through access to essential food, and other programs that help empower our clients*, has unfortunately grown within 2023.

Operations: For the most part, 2023 has seen us operating under post-pandemic conditions, with volunteer levels at pre-Covid levels and clients re-entering the waiting area. Our dedicated volunteers are performing yeoman service again in the pantry as well as the kitchen, and over the year we have added some additional volunteers and increased our food preparation activities.

Staff: Our new staff structure has carried through 2023, with Jody Williams as our Executive Director, Lesley Burgess as our Operations Manager, Raylene Roche as Intake Coordinator, and Emily Noel as Food Support Worker. We have a wonderful core team. We had an addition to the team mid-year, with Federal grant money providing one year funding for a dedicated Fund Development Coordinator. Sashika Dilshan has proven to be a great asset in building public and corporate awareness of our organization and its' mission.

Demand: 2023 saw continued increases in the number of clients coming to Bridges to Hope. We believe that this is primarily as a result of rises in the cost of living from inflation, but we are also seeing increased numbers of new Canadians and international students. We provided support to over 13,100 people in 2023, including 3448 children and 2214 Seniors. This is almost a 20% bump in the number of clients over 2022. The Wednesday evening openings that we commenced in 2022 are ongoing, no surprise in light of present socio-economic conditions.

We continue to be open and supportive of all, regardless of religion, race, status or location.

Programs: Again in 2023, Bridges to Hope managed to offer valuable and essential programs and services to our clients. In addition to normal food support services, we had our Bags to School program in late summer, which distributed 468 Back Packs full of quality curriculum based, age appropriate, school supplies to students of all grades. We distributed Smart Snack Kits with healthy after-school snacks for school age children, and through our annual Christmas program, funded by Rotary, we distributed \$75 gift cards for groceries from Colemans to 315 of our client families, supporting 662 individuals.

Support: Bridges to Hope remains very grateful for support from our founding churches, during universally challenging times. We remain an Outreach Ministry of the United Church of Canada, with financial assistance from First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council of the United Church,

as well as the Presbyterian Synod of the Atlantic Provinces. And of course, donations and volunteerism from congregational members remain crucial to our ongoing mission.

Individual and corporate donations remain a critical part of our funding, in addition to grants and funding from community service groups. It is remarkable how much the caring people of our province have supported our mission, even as their own costs of living increase. In 2023 Bridges to Hope continued to add to our Sustainers Circle core of monthly donors, which provides a level of core funding through the year.

It is important to note that congregational supporters who join the Sustainers Circle as regular monthly donors can have their donations reported as part of your Church's annual support of Bridges to Hope. Please contact Jody Williams (j.williams@bridgestohope.ca) to arrange.

Food drives continued in 2023, with a gradual post-Covid increase. We had a major fundraiser in the form of our Songwriter's Circle event in March with Music NL, at Gower St. United Church, as well as numerous other events in support of Bridges to Hope. We are blessed with a talented and dedicated community underpinning us all.

The Future: Bridges to Hope has continued to advance the milestones in our 3 to 5 year strategic planning exercise conducted in 2022. We strive to build upon and enhance our core mission offerings, while adding new services and elements. We are building collaborative relationships with similarly-minded groups.

Submitted by:

Ewan Cumming

Board Chair, Member from St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church