

## Annual Report 2020

*“Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it.”  
Proverbs 3:27*

### Welcoming Arms

Welcoming Arms, a registered charity, is a partnership amongst seven local churches providing supportive programs to low-income and marginalized members in our community. Each of the following churches provides financial and volunteer support: Aurora Cornerstone, Aurora United, The Campus Bathurst, The Campus Bayview, Our Lady of Grace, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian and Trinity Anglican Church.

#### Welcoming Arms’ focus includes:

**Vision:** A Christ-centered partnership relieving the burden of poverty in our community.

**Mission:** Welcoming Arms believes in the inherent dignity of all people. Reflecting Christ’s love, we seek to help those in need to experience a fuller participation in society by providing social, economic and spiritual support.

**Strategic Planning:** New objectives are developed every 3-5 years to reflect and build better infrastructure, governance and procedures. The vision, mission and strategic plan reflect the joy and love of our volunteers and clergy. We offer weekly and seasonal programs. Our weekly programs include Bridging the Gap, Welcome Table and Martha’s Table, which operate out of Trinity’s former rectory, Binion’s Hall and St. Andrew’s Parish hall, respectively.

### Weekly Programs

#### Bridging the Gap

Within a safe and informal setting of the rectory, visitors are welcomed and given opportunities to share their concerns and needs. Volunteers offer ears and hearts that listen, provide hope and encouragement. Practical assistance with grocery gift cards, York Region Transit tickets, basic toiletries and referrals to other community agencies and services are offered as well.

In reviewing the activities from July 1, 2019 to March 23, 2020:

- 1,087 Aurora family visits (01/07/19-19/03/20)
- \$43,595.00 in grocery gift cards were distributed (01/07/19-19/03/20)
- 2,829 YRT tickets were distributed (01/07/19-19/03/20)

- WA distributed toiletries, cleaning supplies, diapers and paper goods. These items were donated by individuals, community groups and purchased by Welcoming Arms.
- In liaison with community agencies, provided assistance with medical, dental, housing, utilities, and children's programs.
- Provided Clothes Closet vouchers to those in need (every other month).
- Provided Tim Horton's or grocery gift cards, Clothes Closet vouchers and toiletries to homeless persons.

This program was staffed by 30 volunteers, working in teams from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm on Mondays and Thursdays, and on Wednesdays from 6:30pm to 8:30pm.

### **Activities from March 23, 2020 to June 30, 2020**

Due to the serious nature of the corona virus, the Bridging the Gap office was closed and visits were discontinued. However, recognizing the needs of our visitors, team leaders recommended a telephone assistance service be established. Visitors were invited to call at any time, for any need, and a volunteer would return the call with an offer of assistance. Updated information, especially available through the Town of Aurora, provided our volunteers with suitable sources for immediate help. A plan for re-opening Bridging the Gap, with recognition of safety restrictions is being prepared, hopefully to commence as soon as possible.

Special thanks to Mayor Tom Mrakas for his understanding of those citizens in need by establishing the "Aurora Cares Committee".

## **Seasonal Programs**

### **STAPLES Back to School Program**

In September 2019, Welcoming Arms directed 57 students from 25 families to Staples for gift cards to buy school supplies.

### **Christmas Assistance Program**

Welcoming Arms, St. Vincent de Paul and the Aurora Minor Hockey Association supported 139 families with stockings and grocery gift cards. A total of \$18,325 in gift cards was distributed of which Welcoming Arms provided \$9,150.

### **Christmas Dream Luncheon**

In co-operation with the Royal Canadian Legion and the Salvation Army, Welcoming Arms prepared a wonderful Christmas Day celebration, including a delicious turkey dinner, entertainment and gifts for over 150 Salvation Army and Welcoming Arms visitors.

Donations and additional funding were also gratefully received from individuals, businesses, community organizations, service groups, and fundraising events.

## **Fundraising, Donations and Meetings**

While our main focus is on helping those in need in our community, other activities include:

- Involvement in fundraising events (Pine Tree Potters Guild, Empty Bowls program, Trinity Trivia Night, the Aurora Legion's "Catch the Ace" draw) – July 1, 2019 to March 23, 2020.
- Ongoing meetings/forums with York Region Agencies
- Monthly meetings with team leaders and bi-monthly meetings of the Welcoming Arms Executive Council.
- Continued volunteer recruitment and screening.
- Due to the Corona virus the following sessions have been temporarily postponed: strategic planning, volunteer training and appreciation.
- Welcoming Arms is very grateful for the financial donations received from individuals and community businesses.

## **Program Changes**

- Bonnie Thamm-Evans, Executive Director, resigned on March 27, 2020.
- Executive Council Treasurer, Peter Barr resigned. Denyse Slack temporarily resumed the role of Treasurer.
- YRT ticket distribution became unavailable due to the PRESTO card process. Tickets were distributed until supply was depleted.
- Limited Bridging the Gap assistance began on April 20, 2020 and appointments (via phone) established.
- Tax clinics were set up, one-on-one and completed remotely by a volunteer within the extended CRA deadline.
- All meetings were held via ZOOM.
- Elaine Komaromi's term as Executive Council Chair concluded on June 4, 2020. Many thanks to Elaine for her excellent leadership and positive contributions to Welcoming Arms.
- Doug Steele was elected as Executive Council Chair on June 4, 2020. Welcome Doug!
- Keri Holmes continues as Welcoming Arms Administrative Assistant. Thank you, Keri, for your very capable guidance and assistance.

## Welcome Table

This is actually two reports: Welcome Table Pre-March (before COVID) and Welcome Table after the advent of COVID. What has remained the same is the devotion, energy and commitment of our volunteers. What also remains the same are the number of guests we serve each week, 85-105.

Prior to COVID Welcome Table continued weekly with four teams of chef, sous chef, dishwashers, servers, security and Friends who prepared and served hot nourishing meals in a safe, comfortable environment in Binion's Hall at Trinity. Each week Phil Bitbender's team of bread volunteers pick up surplus bread from Cobb's Newmarket for distribution to our guests. When COVID first hit and Trinity stopped all in church programs, Welcome Table stopped as well. However, the need in the community remained. Mayor Tom Mrakas involved Trinity's Bev Wood and Barb Allan in a committee to find resources to continue to support the community. Plans began to start Welcome Table. The same but different.

In May Welcome Table began to serve meals again. The Town put up electronic signs announcing we were going to open once again. The meals are cooked by local restaurants (Bijoy's, Catharina's Kitchen, Topper's Pizza, Food in Motion, Magna Kitchens, McDonald's, The Aurora Legion). The Town of Aurora donated two tents that are placed outside Trinity in the parking lot. Mayor Mrakas and his wife Alison pick up the meals each week for delivery to Trinity. Apples have been provided at cost by Brook's Farms in Mount Albert. The meals and bread are packed up in the narthex and given out by Welcome Table volunteers outside. Rain or shine. Instead of the 18-20 volunteers who usually helped each week, we now manage with six so we can be socially distanced. Since the meals are cooked off site, this can be done. Guests arrive on foot, bike or by car. Those with cars often pick up meals for friends and neighbours. Jill Tate has sourced take out containers for us, and we have streamlined our packaging of meals each week.

At the end of August, we held a barbeque for our guests with a summer meal of hamburgers, potato salad and fresh peaches. By mid-September we were given permission by the Wardens of Trinity Anglican Church, to start cooking in Trinity's kitchen with only two to three persons (masked) in the kitchen. Meal packaging and distribution remains the same. Welcome Table volunteers are flexible and have adjusted to the changing situation. All volunteers wear masks, social distance from guests and other volunteers and problem solve each week. We all look forward to being able to return to sit down meals where we can spend time with our guests and talk to them once again. In the meantime, we smile behind our masks, try to chat with guests while they pick up their food, and offer any encouragement we can.

Welcoming Arms received grants for Welcome Table from Trinity Anglican Church, as well as Powell Construction and many concerned residents of Aurora. We could not have our annual fundraiser Trivia Night this year, so these donations have been most welcome and needed. Welcoming Arms received several large donations from local residents who have watched what we do each week and have come by with financial support.

We have lost two cooking teams. Jack and a Ruth Doris retired in July as did Jeff Torno. Jack, Ruth and Jeff were long time volunteers and they are missed! So we are looking for two chefs or cooks to step into their shoes. By late summer, ABLE Network's Community Garden had vegetables available for our guests. So in addition to a hot meal, fruit, juice, bread and dessert, guests often leave with a bag of cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers picked hours before! So, we continue different, but the same. We are grateful for the continuing and amazing community support.

*Submitted by Joy Marshall and Barb Allan on behalf of Welcome Table*

## **Martha's Table**

Martha's Table is a drop-in community lunch program that offers hot soup, sandwiches, fresh fruit and desert. A welcoming place, the program operates every Thursday from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm. At St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. With Anne Neuman and Tom Connor, co-team leaders and 30 volunteers, over 50 people are fed. Congratulations to Tom who received the honour of Aurora's 2020 Citizen of the Year. A short cancellation of the program occurred as a result of the pandemic. Fortunately, the service was resumed as a take-out lunch distributed in the Trinity church parking lot until June 25, 2020.

Welcoming Arms volunteers welcome your interest and involvement in this vital community organization. For further information on becoming a volunteer or to contribute to our fundraising efforts please refer to our website [www.welcomingarms.ca](http://www.welcomingarms.ca).

*"By love serve one another." – Galatians 5:13*

*Respectfully Submitted by:  
Elaine Komaromi  
Chair, Welcoming Arms*

*And the late Beverley Wood  
Past Chair, Welcoming Arms*

*July 2020*