

Annual Report 2021

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10

Welcoming Arms, a registered charity, is a partnership between 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 Bayview, The Campus Bathurst, Our Lady of Grace, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian, and Trinity Anglican Church.

We offer weekly and seasonal programs. Our weekly programs include: Bridging the Gap, Welcome Table and Martha’s Table. These programs normally operate out of Trinity’s former rectory, Trinity Anglican Church, and St. Andrew’s Parish Hall. Our seasonal programs include: The Giving Garden (in conjunction with The Able Network), Tax Prep Program, and Christmas programs.

Donations and additional funding were also gratefully received from: individuals, businesses, community organizations and service groups, the Regional Municipality of York, and the Mayor’s Golf Tournament.

Welcoming Arms’ focus includes:

- **Vision** – A 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, policies and procedures. Our Strategic Plan was extended for a year, and will be reviewed in 2022.

The Vision, Mission and Strategic Planning reflect the compassion, joy and love of Welcoming Arms’ volunteers and clergy.

Management/ Executive Council

All of our programs continued to support our community throughout 2021, in the same fashion as in 2020; takeout meal programs and outdoor, by appointment, Bridging the Gap support.

We endeavored (twice) to hire a new Executive Director, but several factors presented roadblocks to us, and we remain without someone at year end. We will be re-addressing this in 2022 and are hopeful to have someone in place by the end of the year. We continue to operate with contributions from the EC members and Team Leads, thank you all for your input/contributions!

Weekly Programs

Bridging the Gap

Within a safe and informal setting, we offer our visitors opportunities to share their triumphs and issues. We offer ears and hearts that listen and provide hope and encouragement. We also offer practical help by providing grocery gift cards, basic toiletries and referrals to other community agencies and services.

In reviewing the activities during 2021, Bridging the Gap:

- Had 849 visits from Aurora families.
- Distributed \$46,060 in grocery gift cards.
- Distributed toiletries, cleaning supplies, diapers, and paper goods (donations from participating churches, individuals, community groups and purchases by Welcoming Arms).
- Provided, in liaison with community agencies, assistance with medical, dental, tutorial, housing, utilities and children's programs.
- Provided Tim Horton's gift cards and toiletries to homeless persons.

This program is usually staffed by 30 volunteers. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, the number of BTG volunteers required to cover the scheduled visits was reduced. All interviews to determine eligibility and individual needs were done over the phone. The hours of working during COVID-19 restrictions were from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Wednesdays, the distribution matched Welcome Table hours.

The software, "Breeze", has been introduced to some BTG, Team Leaders to be used to access BTG Visitor information. Margot Secord spearheaded this initiative. All active BTG Visitor information has been added to the data base. The goal is to have all BTG volunteers educated on using this e-format by the end of 2021.

Our volunteers believe this organization truly reflects Matthew's message: *"I assure you whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do it unto me". Matthew 25:40*

CAP (Christians Against Poverty)

We continue to offer this debt counselling program to those who need it.

Welcome Table

The Welcome Table continued to provide nourishing meals to the community in 2021 despite the on-going Pandemic. We were able to provide our takeout meal, every Wednesday of the year without fail. Not much changed in 2021.

This program would not be able to continue without a small, mighty, and dedicated group of volunteers. We continue to have 4 teams that come out once every 4 weeks. These teams used to have 20+ volunteers on them but now have a core group of about 8 people who come out to work at the takeout dinner. For volunteers who are not comfortable coming on a Wednesday evening, they can do some baking for us and drop it off.

It should be noted that our MOST dedicated volunteer is Susan Doyle. Susan (one of the founders of Welcoming Arms) is at Welcome Table every Wednesday. She is the familiar face that our guests see each week. Susan tries to learn peoples name and their life situation and gives our guests that important reminder that Welcoming Arms cares for them. We are extremely grateful to Susan for fulfilling the role of Welcome Table Host.

Our biggest challenge continues to be finding chefs. Only two of our 4 teams have a permanent chef. We are always open to suggestions or referrals of people who may be interested in this very important role.

The rise in food prices has affected the cost of our meals but more importantly, it has affected the ability of our guests to feed themselves and their families. We are seeing more people coming out on Wednesdays, with the average number of meals distributed 150. We have seen the number of meals go as high as 175 and some evenings, we run out of food. Most of our guests are known to us but each night, there are new faces that are using WT for the first time.

We currently do not have any plans to going back to a sit-down dinner. We know that many of our guests are wishing we could provide more fellowship opportunities for them. This will all have to wait until it safe to do so. We are also restricted by the rules of the Anglican Diocese of Toronto who is not allowing buffet style eating at this time.

Respectfully submitted by Barb Allan

Martha's Table

In 2021, Martha's Table continued with a modified service consisting of bagged lunches and containers of soup each week delivered at the door of St. Andrew's Church from January to June and September to December. We prepared 48 - 52 lunches per week. Over the last year, our clients had a choice of meat lunches or vegetarian and vegan options.

We are grateful for volunteers who provided us with weekly baking consisting of squares and cookies. We are also very grateful to our wonderful volunteers who prepared the soups and meals and handed them out at the door.

The first Thursday after the Victoria Day long weekend this year (2022), we are going to begin a sit down service in the social hall with our clients receiving their choice of bagged lunches at the door and volunteers preparing and serving soup and drinks inside. The ABLE network will once again be assisting by setting up tables and chairs for our guests and spacing will be modified to provide a reasonable separation at each table. We hope that this gradual return to pre-pandemic routines will be welcome by our clients who have missed the social aspects of our lunch program.

Submitted by Denyse Slack

Seasonal Programs

Income Tax Preparation

During the month of April, two volunteers who are comfortable with preparing tax returns, volunteered their time so we could provide free Income Tax return preparation to our visitors. This was done following COVID-19 protocols using a contactless process. Most governmental social service programs are based on information from tax returns, so it is critical for our visitors to file their returns, on time, every year. We are now setup to provide income tax preparation throughout the year on an appointment basis to meet the increasing need of our community.

Community Garden

In the spring, in collaboration with the ABLE Network, Welcoming Arms plants a vegetable garden to be able to offer fresh produce to Welcoming Arms visitors/volunteers and ABLE program participants and staff. The produce from this garden helps immensely in supplementing the meals of our visitors as well as our meal programs.

Christmas Dream Dinner

This year we moved our location to The Royal Canadian Legion, where volunteers prepared turkey dinners with all of the fixings. Generous donations from the York Region Shoebox project, the Salvation Army, the Linus Project, Neighborhood Network, Rotary Club of Aurora, and Welcoming Arms allowed for gifts to be distributed as well. Along with about 260 low income, community residents, approximately 61 BTG visitors were served a delicious turkey dinner. The special dinner was provided by WA working collaboratively with the Salvation Army as in the past years. Special thanks to the Mayor's Golf Charity for helping to fund this event!

Welcoming Arms/Society of St. Vincent de Paul (Christmas Assistance)

The Christmas Assistance Program for Welcoming Arms (Bridging the Gap) and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP) continued to be altered in 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions. Meetings were held in October/November among the participating groups to discuss/plan the format that would deliver a program that would keep volunteers and visitors safe. The Aurora Minor Hockey Association stepped up again in 2021 with an extremely successful fund-raising venture.

Welcoming Arms, in cooperation with the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Aurora Minor Hockey Association provided Christmas assistance to many Welcoming Arms visitors (families

and individuals). One hundred and one (101) individuals/families were registered. This represented 133 adults (18 and over) and 59 children for a total of 192 individuals.

Gift packages consisted of No Frills/PC grocery gift cards and toiletries (on request). Also, boxes of chocolates and Christmas dinners were provided by Swiss Chalet and Combo Meal cards were provided by Harvey's (both locations located on Henderson Drive).

Submitted by Elaine Komaromi and Susan Doyle

Fundraising and donations

The impacts of the pandemic stretched on for another year; with concomitant increased impacts on not only to our operations, but more important – on our Guests. From food costs, to housing costs, to gasoline costs – everything has risen over the past year. We have seen a significant growth in numbers of visitors to our various programming. Most notably our Wednesday night dinners – Welcome Table – has gone from an average of 100/110 meals per week to over 150 every week. The need is real and growing in our community.

And the need for sustainable funding for our programming is critical.

From a fundraising perspective, in 2021 we were once again the fortunate recipients of generous funding from a variety of sources – Magna Hoedown, Mayor's golf tournament, Pine Tree Potters Guild "Empty Bowls, Aurora Minor Hockey Association, our partner institutions and last, but not least, the donors both individual and corporate that provide the backbone of our funding year after year. The support from our parishes and respective parishioners is tremendously appreciated!

We have been the beneficiaries of continued in kind support from so many local businesses - Bijoy, Catarina's kitchen, the Armoury, Food in Motion to name just a few – who have provided either meals, food or supplies to support the weekly meal programs and ensured their viability and the Town of Aurora for continued use of the small sheds that enable safer curb side meal delivery.

We have also been successful in each of the grant applications we have submitted – Second Harvest and most recently, the Mazon Foundation in the amount of over \$5000. We will continue to explore other grant options in the coming year and reapply to organizations which have previously proven successful.

While larger events were slowly reintroduced in 2021, they were for the most part, either still remote options or cancelled entirely. Therefore, fund raising comprised of primarily direct appeals via social media, word of mouth and leveraging past donor or sponsors for continued support.

The fundraising committee met in the summer and fall of 2021 to discuss our current status and plans moving forward for 2022 - 2023. The operationalization of the original fundraising plan – reviewed and approved by the Executive Council – was stalled by the impacts of the pandemic

and then stalled again with the pause on hiring of an Executive Director and uncertainty in roles and responsibilities.

Though any donation is welcome, there is a need to secure sustainable funding. Thus, the focus of the work of the fundraising committee in 2022 will be to revamp our fundraising plan with a focus on corporate giving and, most important, sustainable funding. We will build on the work of 2021 and action the "No one left behind" initiative. This appeal to local businesses – small and large – is projected to create a repository of 50 to 100 companies with a pitch of \$500 - \$5000 each with a 3-year commitment and a goal of securing guaranteed donations of at least \$50,000 per year, for 3 years with the balance of our fundraising requirements from events and direct appeals to past and new donors.

Submitted by Alison Collins-Mrakas

Welcoming Arms is located at 44 Metcalfe Street. Our organization is normally staffed by over 200 dedicated volunteers (we currently have 85 active volunteers), the majority coming from the seven churches that support Welcoming Arms.

We welcome your continued interest and involvement in this vital community organization.



Doug Steele
Welcoming Arms
Chair, Executive Council