

Annual Report 2022

"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"
Acts of the Apostles 20:35

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 2023.

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 2022, in a mixture of fashions as this was a year of cautious transition out of Covid 19 protocols. Please see the program reports for the details.

We endeavored again to hire a new Executive Director, but several factors presented roadblocks for us, and we remain without someone at year's end. We will be re-addressing this in 2023 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!

The benefit of this situation is that our finances are in good shape, and we are able to continue serving our visitors appropriately.

Our EC Membership remained the same as last year, with one change: Shelley Lundquist resigned (for personal reasons) in October. We thank her for her contributions.

Weekly Programs

Bridging the Gap

Twice a week, 48 weeks of the year, we receive our Visitors at the Rectory to offer practical help as well as hope and encouragement. We are there to listen with our hearts and ears, building relationships as our Visitors share their triumphs and struggles. We also offer and provide grocery gift cards, vouchers for clothing, basic toiletries and we are always there to share information about other community agencies and services.

An overview of the activities during 2022, Bridging the Gap:

- Had 974 visits from Aurora families.
- We distributed \$60,605 in grocery gift cards.
- We distributed toiletries, cleaning supplies, diapers, and such (mostly donations from participating churches, organizations, and purchases from Welcoming Arms)
- Provided food vouchers or meal cards and toiletries to homeless persons.

We are staffed by approximately 30 volunteers. Our hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 to noon. We deliver vouchers to individuals who are disabled and offer a Wednesday night option to those who cannot come during the day due to their work schedule.

In March 2022, we raised our giving by 10\$ per unit per month to meet with the cost of living due to inflation. Housing continues to be a big issue for our Visitors for many reasons and finding new housing at an affordable rate is extremely difficult.

Our volunteers are very important to us, and we strive to offer training support. This year we covered areas such as de-escalation and we invited a social worker to answer questions pertaining to social assistance. (Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program)

All of us who serve feel blessed as we bless others and follow Jesus' invitation to:

Love one another as I have loved you! John 13:34

Submitted by Gisele Bedard

Welcome Table

The Welcome Table continued to provide nourishing meals to the community in 2022 in a take-out format which was established in 2020 in response to the COVID Pandemic.

We continue to have 4 teams of volunteers who come out once every 4 weeks. Each team has a team lead, chef, sous chef, security, packers, dishwashers, and runners. We are so blessed to have these wonderful volunteers who are so dedicated to this ministry. These volunteers ensure that meals are available for guests every Wednesday, regardless of the weather (rain, snow, heat etc.).

Our MOST dedicated volunteer continues to be Susan Doyle. Susan is at Welcome Table most Wednesdays. We are extremely grateful to Susan for fulfilling the role of Welcome Table Host.

We continue to be challenged with finding chefs. Preparing a dinner for 160 people is a big job. Our chef teams are amazing however we spent most of 2022 with only 2 chef teams. We have been working hard to find 2 more teams. On nights when we have not had chefs, we have had help from Catarina's Kitchen, Food in Motion, and some Lasagna nights. We have always been able to come up with something to serve.

We distributed 7,900 meals in 2022 with an average of 151 meals each week, going as high as 180 on some occasions. Occasionally we run out of meals but keep a few frozen meals available for these situations. Each guest also goes home with some bread that is donated to us from Cobs.

The ABLE Network is an important part of our Welcome Table program. They returned to the Rectory in April 2022 and got back to supporting us by bagging the Cobs bread, setting up the packing table and doing the laundry. We are incredibly grateful for their support.

In September 2022 we surveyed our guests to see if there was interest to have meals back indoors. At that time, people seemed to be more comfortable to continue with the take-out format. Our goal is to get back to the sit-down dinners of pre-COVID so our guests can experience the fellowship that the Welcome Table was designed for.

Respectfully submitted by Barb Allan

Martha's Table

Over the last year, Martha's Table (MT) has been providing lunches for approximately 50 guests each week. About half of our clients have chosen to have lunch in the social hall at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church and the other half have picked up lunch or had it delivered by MT volunteers.

All lunches are made at the Church and consist of homemade soup, sandwiches, and desserts. We are immensely grateful for the core group of volunteers who attend each week to make

lunch. Also, we thank those volunteers that make dessert cakes, cookies and squares that are provided each week.

The program runs from September to the end of June each year.

Submitted by Denyse Slack

Seasonal Programs

Income Tax Preparation

During the month of April, 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, once again, 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 set up to provide income tax preparation throughout the year on an appointment basis to meet the increasing need of our community.

Christmas Dream Dinner

This year we moved our distribution location to Trinity Anglican Church but due to the size of the meal, kept the cooking portion at 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 210 low income, community residents, approximately 60 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, welcome to their new Pastor Fred Reid! Special thanks to Rosa and family from the Royal Rose Gallery for transporting the food from the Legion to the Church, and to the Nichols Family from trinity Church for their incredible support!

There were many unclaimed meals, but our team had a contingency plan, all leftover meals were taken to Belinda's Place where they were used for their Christmas Dinner.

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

Sign-up for Christmas Assistance for Bridging the Gap (BTG) visitors to Welcoming Arms took place every Tuesday and Thursday morning during the month of November 2022. Visitors chose from five dates between December 1st to 15th for pick-up of their packages (food vouchers, meal cards for either Swiss Chalet or Harvey's and a box of chocolates). A number of visitors were assigned delivery of their packages by members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP) during the first 10 days of December.

109 individuals/families registered. This represented 158 adults (18 and over) and 64 children for a total of 222 individuals.

This year the dollar value for the gift cards was \$125 for singles, \$175 for two member families, \$225 for three member families and \$275 for four or more family members.

Welcoming Arms supported 84 families (117 adults/51 children) and \$13,615 in gift cards; the Society of St. Vincent de Paul supported 25 families (41 adults/13 children) with \$4,375 in gift cards, for a total of \$17,990.

The Aurora Minor Hockey Association raised approximately \$10,500 to support the BTG Christmas Giving and other Welcoming Arms programs.

Welcoming Arms received a number of cards of thanks and, on many occasions, tears of joy accompanied these thanks.

Submitted by Susan Lanthier-Doyle; Co-Coordinator of the Christmas Assistance Program

Fundraising and donations

While the pandemic finally ended, at least from an immediate public health management perspective, it is clear that the impacts of the pandemic are significant, far reaching and, frankly, will likely long term. We will need to plan to deal with the aftermath for years to come. It is clear that we continue to see escalating costs for all aspects of day to day life as well as organizational operations. But most significant of which are the continued and increased impacts of rising costs and constrained services on our Guests. We continue to see growth in numbers of visitors to our various programming. Most notably our Wednesday night dinners – Welcome Table – has now settled at an average of 160 plus guests per week. The need is real and growing in our community.

The long term impacts of the public health crisis have made clear that the need for sustainable funding for our programming is the key priority moving forward.

From a fundraising perspective, in 2022 we were once again the fortunate recipients of generous funding from a variety of sources – Magna Hoedown, Pine Tree Potters Guild “Empty Bowls”, Aurora Minor Hockey Association, and extraordinary gift from The Hewy Hockey Classic (a local men’s memorial fundraiser), 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, 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.

While we have a track record of success when applying for grants; for example this year we were once again the recipient of \$2500 from the Mazon Foundation, however, we have been notably less successful in identifying potential granting opportunities.

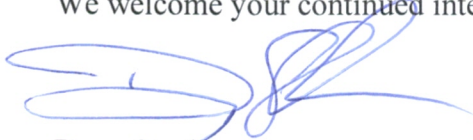
Fundraising events – large or small - for non- profits, including our own, continue to struggle. We are not alone in the position of finding it difficult to generate funding income through “special events”. While we are working to reinstate the previously successful “trivia night” event, long term we do not envision having multiple fundraising events going forward. Thus, in addition to grant applications, fund raising was comprised of primarily direct appeals via social media, word of mouth and leveraging past donor or sponsors for continued support.

The operationalization of the original fundraising plan – reviewed and approved by the Executive Council – continued to be stalled by the impacts of the pandemic and the continued difficulty in 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 2023 will be to operationalize the approved fundraising plan with a focus on grant applications, corporate giving and, donor recognition.

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 six churches that support Welcoming Arms.

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



Doug Steele
Welcoming Arms
Chair, Executive Council