

ST. LUKE'S OUTREACH PROGRAM

You need only meet the volunteers at the Food for Life Outreach Program at St. Luke's Anglican Church in Burlington to realize the success of this program isn't about the food – it's about the people.

When the program was launched in July 2010, the number of clients was originally very low. However, thanks to an article in the Burlington Post, the numbers skyrocketed and have been steady ever since. They serve mostly individuals – single mothers, single younger and older men – and play a key role in helping those in need in the downtown Burlington core. Reverend Sheila Plant has seen first-hand the benefits: increased self-esteem, positive changes in personality and more open communication with others. Clearly, the impact on the clients' lives is greater than simply better access to food.

One of the perceived challenges in any outreach program is the ability to find dedicated volunteers to make it work. The team at St. Luke's experienced the opposite – for while they started to schedule volunteers to show up for shifts to help hand out food, soon they realized they didn't need to because volunteers would just show up whether it was their shift or not! A nice 'problem' to have.

The community feeling at the St. Luke's program is apparent as soon as you enter the hall – there are always beverages ready, hot soup on the stove which clients can serve themselves, and a group of volunteers that foster a sense of welcome. Karen Bonham, the Outreach Program Manager for Food for Life, uses St. Luke's as a "model for success".

In the summer of 2011, the St. Luke's team celebrated their first full year in operation with a birthday cake and handed out their own Food for Life volunteer t-shirts. These amazing and dedicated volunteers are helping make a huge difference – through the food they share and the friendships they build.

