

REFRESH FOODS MEMBER AGENCY: COMPASSION SOCIETY OF HALTON

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Back in 2005, the Executive Director of Food for Life knocked on the door of Mina's house at Nelson Co-Op. He had heard that Mina's program gave people free clothes, and also helped people with their paperwork and connected people with support. He wondered if she was interested in distributing a few loaves of bread on Saturday. The Executive Director offered 50 and I said 'Why not 100?' ... thus the friendship and alliance started.

Subsequently, Food for Life began a weekly outreach program delivery every Saturday at the offices of Nelson Co-Op which continues today.

Mina's initial clothing service has grown in the Compassion Society of Halton. The Compassion Society serves approximately 250 men, women and children per week. They noticed over the past 4 years a rise in the need for food, and became a ReFresh Foods member in 2008. Food is delivered in large quantities where the food quality is excellent and cooperation is part of the culture.

What are the unique features of Compassion Society? They offer three services: free clothing share monthly, free food weekly and referrals to local services to strengthen people and their families. From experience, there is not one agency alone helping a person or family - on average there are 3, often Halton Children's Aid, or a local church, and then a food bank or counseling agency. Everyone works together in alliance and are keenly aware of each agency's expertise and the Compassion Society refers accordingly.

How has Food for Life/Refresh helped Compassion Society achieve their goals? First of all, the fridge and 2 freezers were acquired through Food for Life and their connection with Electrolux at no cost. In 2010, the Compassion Society distributed 77,000 pounds of food; and in 2011, they distributed over 88,500 pounds of food through FFL/Refresh.

To fully appreciate the impact that Compassion Society has on so many lives, two stories provide some perspective:

There was a mom who was in the women's shelter with her 2 boys. She came every week for food and her sons even drew pictures of apples, bread and broccoli! She has gone on to do very well and still pops in with clothing donations. She always mentions that the food helped her so much for about a year as she got on her feet.

Secondly, we had a frail senior who came in several times a week. All the volunteers knew her and would run and heat up a bowl of soup for her, and she would stay and chat for usually half an hour. Very early on, we realized this lady had no support, was mentally frail and needed some kind of assistance. We called in another agency that specialized in senior care and this lady is now in a nursing home.

Food for Life is proud to partner with an organization like the Compassion Society. We look forward to many more years of working together to help those in need in Halton Region.