

## What Is Chalmers Community Services Centre, who runs it, what do they do, and why do they deserve to receive your donation?

Chalmers Community Services Centre is a Guelph based organization providing a safe community space for all, in their two locations in the city – a portable at the back of 3 Willows Church, and space in the 10C building at 41 MacDonell Street.

Run by 90 fabulous volunteers, CCSC is there for anyone who needs them to be!

(Pre COVID-19) Guests can:

- come in and have a hot drink and get out of the cold
- be around people to socialise because they're lonely
- know they can get a grocery bag of food if they need it
- choose some new clothing or get a piece mended

Whatever their need, as they walk through the door they are greeted with a friendly smile from a dedicated volunteer who's focus is to provide **Dignity and Respect** for that guest.

### What makes Chalmers Community Services Centre unique? *It's in their name!*

The *community* element of CCSC is what makes them truly unique. This is not an “us” and “them” environment, but one where guests become volunteers sometimes, where we chat with one another as equals, and get to know one another. This becomes a cara-a-cara (face-to-face) experience.

### Other uniqueness:

- **No means testing for a start** – in a world where large numbers of people find themselves in a non-secure situation and who may feel shame, anxiety and embarrassment, Chalmers removes a huge barrier by not requiring proof of their situation ... all they ask for is a first and last name. For many insecure people, the thought of having to fill out a form is just too much for them to cope with. CCSC knows this, so when individuals or families walk through their door, it's because they need help, and CCSC are there to make that help as accessible as possible.
- **Free sewing service** - they offer a sewing service for mending & alterations – there's no other program in the city offering this...*and some great conversations are had around their sewing machine!*
- **They focus on fresh produce for the grocery baskets** – apples, oranges, carrots, potatoes & onions – important food items in our diet, but usually too expensive for food- insecure guests to afford. (*CCSC consults with a dietician to determine the most nutritious quality and quantity of 2-3 day's worth of food.*)

CCSC has a variety of programs: food pantry, clothing & household items, dental days (*guests receive a new toothbrush, toothpaste and floss every quarter*), not to mention their popular Christmas Gift Bag Campaign, which provides personal hygiene products for each guest, along with warm socks and gloves.

Their Café held on a Monday and Tuesday provides drinks & snacks, and a safe, non-judgmental space for guests to get together, chat, and make friends, which helps reduce social isolation and builds **community**, and is also invaluable for our new Canadians.

However, we all know too well that the pandemic has brought challenges, which has had a direct impact on interactions with the guests and a detrimental effect on the organization and the reduced services they can offer – *their sewing service is on-hold, and the café and clothing too* - but their priority still remains to provide enough food to give out to the increased number of insecure people, whilst abiding by Government safety precautions designed to protect both the guests and volunteers.

Today's challenges include:

- Face-to-face supports are dwindling
- Safe places for people to go are not available
- Job insecurity and threat of eviction means that people are having to make even more difficult choices
- Food insecurity is definitely on the rise (there are some statistics here: <https://www.foodsafety.ca/blog/food-insecurity-rise-canada>)

CCSC is seeing an increased number of guests who never had to use their services before, and in 2020 they served 11,914 guests!

**It costs \$15.50 for a grocery basket for one person, and they have approx. 300 visits per week, and that number is rising.**

2019 figures show they gave out 15,032 grocery baskets. At \$15.50 per basket that came to over \$230,000, yet their budget for food that year was only \$85,000. This meant that grocery baskets were short by approx. \$10 per person. 2019 also saw CCSC serve more children than adults for the very first time.

**How does CCSC manage to keep going?** It's an ongoing struggle in addition to the pandemic challenges, and funds are desperately needed. They apply for grants for operation costs, receive United Way contributions, fundraise to pay their rent, and rely heavily on Community donations for both food, personal hygiene products, and diapers.

I'm a volunteer. I help every Wednesday evening handing out groceries to guests. COVID-19 restrictions prevent more than two or three guests at a time from entering the building, so they line up outside in the bitter cold while other volunteers stand outside with them and keep them chatting (*and distanced!*) until it's their turn to be served. Guests choose their food, we bag it for them, and they leave with what they need for a few meals. Though we all have our faces half-hidden by protective masks, we know we share smiles and no matter what side of the table you're standing on, we're glad we're there and it's why I come back every week.

A donation from *100 Women Who Care* could potentially provide at least **645 FULL grocery baskets**, which is almost a month's worth of full baskets for **EVERY** person coming through the door. With more people than ever before needing a little extra help, it's the reason why I'm asking you to consider **Chalmers Community Services Centre** for your donation this month.

*Thank you.*