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BUSINESS COMMUNITY RALLIES TO FIGHT CHILD HUNGER

FOOD4KIDS PROGRAM ENJOYS PLENTY OF SUPPORT FROM ACROSS THE REGION

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Making sure that no child goes hungry in the region seems like a herculean task, but the strong support from the community — including businesses in Milton and across the region — is helping organizations like Food4Kids Halton fight hunger.

"When they say it takes a vil-



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Graham Paine/Metroland

See SUPPORT, page 12 Food4Kids's Julie Gladu (left) and Gayle Kabbash set up the food sorting table for bagging by volunteers.

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SUPPORT REMAINS STRONG THROUGH P

Continued from page 1

lage to raise a child, it certainly does," said Gayle Kabbash, executive director of Food4Kids Halton, of how community partners have stepped up to the challenge.

The charity organization provides healthy food packages to hundreds of kids in more than 90 schools across Halton every Friday.

To avoid stigmatizing any children that need food assistance, she said, the food items are discreetly tucked into the backpack of students — so that they don't come home to "empty cupboards" on the weekends with very little food in the household.

"Before COVID, we were already experiencing a high demand for our services. We were adding approximately 16 children per month to our program," she said. When the pandemic hit, "our numbers just skyrocketed with so many families needing support."

"We have not turned away any child through this whole pandemic, and that is due to the community coming together," she added, whether it's the volunteers or donors.

Brandon Parkes was among those recognized by Food4Kids for going "above and beyond."

The Milton father of three, who is a consultant at IG Wealth Management, has donated money and time for the past four years by volunteering at the facility to pack food, raising awareness about the persistent hunger problem and holding numerous food drives — the last being on Christmas.

"Every Sunday night for about five or six weeks leading up to Christmas, I would just drive around all night on Sunday and pick up all the bags" for Food4Kids, he said.



Love Local is a series that explores the vital role locally owned businesses play in our communities.

He also opened up his garage for people to safely drop off their donations, essentially turning it into a makeshift distribution and storage centre.

"We got food, we got gift cards, and tons and tons of deliveries from people," he said. "That was just a really nice way to finish off the year."

In Burlington, the organizer of a popular annual event has been raising funds for Food4Kids for years.

E-A-T, which usually runs in September, takes participants on a walking culinary tour to a number of neighbourhood restaurants to sample various dishes. Part of the ticket sales go toward Food4Kids.

Andie Weese, one of the event co-ordinators, said that they have raised more than \$10,000 during its four-year run.

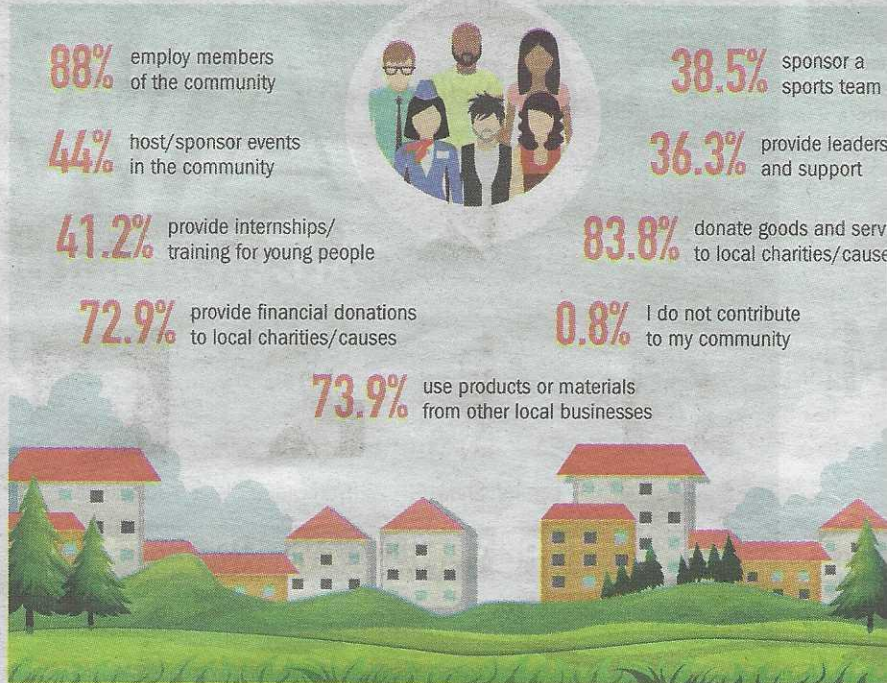
While the event was cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic, talks are ongoing to bring it back this year.

Weese said many local charitable and non-profit organizations are struggling from the impacts of the pandemic.

"There were a lot of missed opportunities in terms of their fundraising," she said, making it even more important to support local charities and to continue to build a positive community.

With Food4Kids not being able to do one of its biggest fundraising events, Peter Moorhead, Oakville resident and local Tim Hortons franchisee, came through by raising about \$51,000 for the organiza-

How Small Business Owners Support Communities



Source: CFIB, 2019 National Retail Sector Survey of 1,663 small retail business owners across the country from Nov. 11 to 25, 2019.

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Source: Kawartha Chamber of Commerce

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tion last year through the Smile Cookie program — a nationwide campaign by Tim Hortons where all the proceeds from the cookie sales go toward local charities.

"Everybody has the image of Oakville as a more affluent area, but there's still a need in our community," he said.

"Seeing how much they were doing and still not be-

ing able to meet the need of the community from a food security standpoint really motivated me to work with them for the couple of years."

Realtor James Starling, another longtime donor in Oakville, said he's worried about the lasting effects of food insecurity could have on children.

That's why he tries to support as many kids as possible every year.

"We only get our chance once," he said.

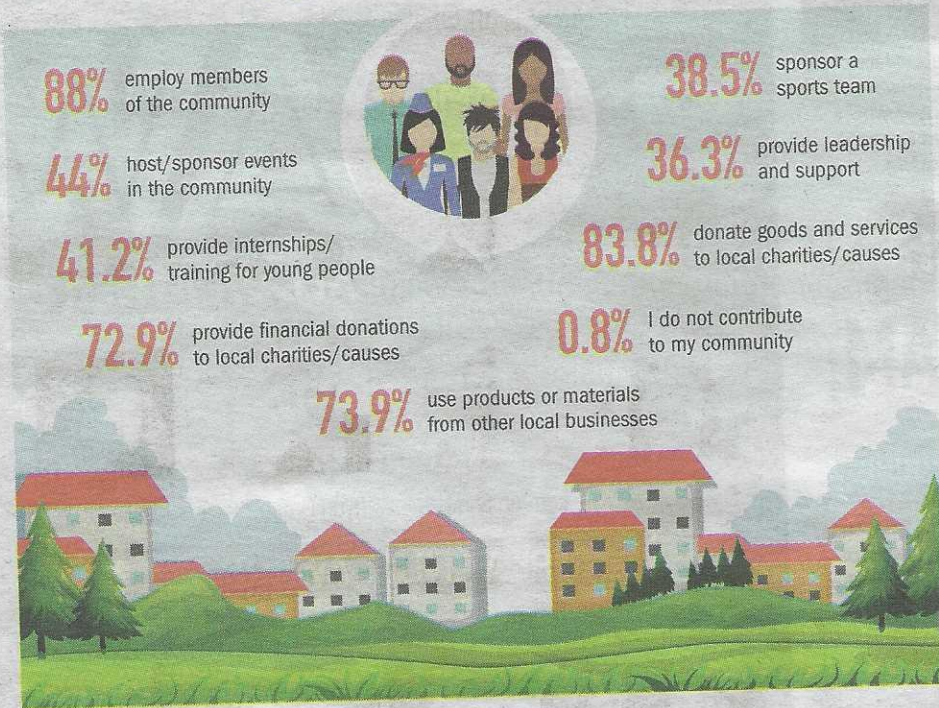
On the importance of giving back he said, "If you put others first, you'll never be second."

This was echoed by Doug Lounsbury, a volunteer with the Kiwanis Club of Georgetown, which is participating in the Georgetown Craft Festival with other local service clubs in support of Food4Kids and other charities.

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SCAN FOR MORE

SMALL BUSINESSES 'LIFEBLOOD' OF LOCAL ECONOMY

Studies show money spent at locally-owned businesses recirculate throughout the community, offering a lasting benefit to its residents.



DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES A MEASURE OF COMMUNITY'S VIBRANCY

When Main Street businesses thrive, that success extends to all areas of a town's economy, and ultimately helps local groups and organizations.



SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

Countless small businesses across Ontario have closed up shop during the pandemic, and the future looks bleak as COVID restrictions continue.



Source: Kawartha Chamber of Commerce

Metroland graphic

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This was echoed by Doug Lounsbury, a volunteer with the Kiwanis Club of Georgetown, which runs the Georgetown Craft Beer Festival with other local service clubs in support of Food4Kids and other charities.

The pandemic has been

very difficult for many families, he said.

"Hearing the number of kids in Georgetown and Acton that needed the (food) assistance was astounding," said the insurance business owner.

"Our sense of community ... is what's going to get us through this," he said, whether it's looking after the neighbour down the street or local businesses making sure that the community cause has volunteers and funding.

"There are so many people in this community that do such wonderful things," he said.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With food insecurity continuing to be a problem in Halton, we explored one organization's efforts to eradicate child hunger, and the collective support it has received from local businesses.