



History of the Caring and Sharing Exchange

Christmas Exchange

The Ottawa Welfare Bureau (OWB), created in 1914, set up a Confidential Index, later called the Social Services Exchange, to coordinate relief to families affected by the First World War. In 1915 this included a master list for Christmas aid, described by the OWB as “a Christmas Exchange for the use of all charitable organizations and individuals in the city.” The purpose of the Christmas Exchange was to coordinate distribution of food and gifts by churches and other community groups, through crosschecking names on their respective lists and notifying them of duplications.

Today, our Christmas Exchange Program is larger than ever, helping almost 30,000 Ottawa individuals in need to enjoy a festive holiday meal, where otherwise it would not be possible. Assistance is provided through either a food hamper or a redeemable gift voucher.

The cross-checking of names is now our Coordination Service, where we continue to work with hundreds of local organizations to ensure there is no duplication of service.

The Coordination Service

In 1915, 62 letters were sent to churches, service clubs and societies asking them for a list of families they propose to help during the Christmas season. In response 552 families’ names were received, of which 138 prove to be duplicates. This proved the value of the Coordination Service, which continues today.

Today we continue to work with hundreds of local organizations to ensure there is no duplication of service. This service saves the community over \$100,000 per year that can be reinvested to help even more people.

Becoming an Independent Charity

In the 1930’s the City of Ottawa began to provide social assistance, so there was no longer a need for the Ottawa Welfare Bureau. The Christmas Exchange together with the Social Service Exchange, was transferred to the fledgling Ottawa Council of Social Agencies, which is known today as the Social Planning Council. During the last 1969’s and early 1970’s it became increasingly clear that the Social Planning Council could not continue to carry the administrative burden of the annual campaign so on September 19, 1974 the Christmas Exchange was incorporated as an independent charity.

Sharing in Student Success

In 2011, rather than leaving a gap in the community, the Christmas Exchange adopted a program to assist children with school supplies from another organization that could no longer sustain it. Originally, assistance was provided in the form of a redeemable gift voucher. Today, we provide children from families in need with a backpack full of all the school supplies required for their grade level (as outlined through the Boards of Education) so they begin school in September ready to learn and on an equal footing with their peers.

Name Change

Finding it difficult to raise funds for school assistance under the name 'Christmas Exchange', the organization was re-branded as the Caring and Sharing Exchange, under which we run the Christmas Exchange Program, Sharing in Student Success, and the Coordination Service.