

## **Nine Decades of Giving A History of the Christmas Exchange**

### ***In the beginning...***

**1915 - 1925** The Christmas Exchange begins life as a master list to coordinate distribution of food and gifts by charitable organizations at Christmas time. As part of the Social Service Exchange, the purpose of Christmas Exchange was to avoid duplication of service and to ensure that all those in need received the help they deserved.

**1925 - 1935** Use of the Christmas Exchange increases as the Great Depression affects more families. When an unsolicited donation of \$5 arrives in 1930, the Christmas Exchange at first resists this new role of fundraiser. The Social Service Exchange and the Christmas Exchange become part of the new Council of Social Agencies in 1934.

**1935 - 1945** Financial contributions continue to come in during the Depression years and the war years that follow. By the end of the war, gift certificates are being distributed rather than food baskets.

**1945 - 1955** Although Family Allowances and Old Age Pensions are now in place, referrals to the Christmas Exchange continue to increase. The Social Service Exchange and the Christmas Exchange are now part of the re-named Ottawa Welfare Council.

**1955 - 1965** The Christmas Exchange begins to focus on helping the working poor as well as those on social assistance. The Social Service Exchange closes, but the Christmas Exchange continues as a Committee of the Ottawa Welfare Council (later re-named the Social Planning Council). In 1961, a Toy Centre is opened with the help of the Kinsmen Club of Ottawa whose members do repairs on used toys.

### ***A new beginning***

**1965 - 1975** Increasing use of the Christmas Exchange puts too much pressure on the staff and volunteers of the Social Planning Council as well as on the Toy Centre. The Social Planning Council decides that a new independent agency should be set up and that the Toy Centre should be closed.

The first office of the new Christmas Exchange of Ottawa-Carleton is set up in time for Christmas 1973, with a Board of representatives from donor churches and community agencies, and a mandate to avoid duplication of Christmas giving and to help the working poor. Help is given primarily through cheques based on family size, though larger families may receive a food hamper prepared by the West Ottawa Lions Club. Social assistance recipients will receive a Christmas bonus from the municipality. The five largest banks agree to collect donations. The Christmas Exchange is incorporated on September 9, 1974.

**1975 - 1985** The annual Christmas broadcasts sponsored by CFMO and the Citizen raise large amounts of money. This support allows the Christmas Exchange to continue to provide direct help to many families of the working poor, as well as helping to avoid duplication in Christmas giving. The Salvation Army takes on the challenge of providing toys, and Trust Companies and Caisse Populaires join the banks in collecting donations.

**1985 - 1995** Record amounts of money are raised and distributed through the Christmas Exchange. Due to a change in station format, the last CFMO broadcast was held in 1989. In 1994, municipal bonuses to families on social assistance are discontinued and the Board of the

Christmas Exchange decides to change to a year-round operation. In 1990, the Christmas Exchange begins to use computers to process referrals.

**1995 - 2005** In 1999, Christmas Exchange becomes the beneficiary of the Christmas Cheer Breakfast and Broadcast, sponsored by CFRA, the Ottawa Citizen and the Westin Ottawa. Successful Christmas Exchange campaigns are led by well known local personalities serving as Honorary Chairs, and at the end of the decade, the staff and volunteers prepare to celebrate 90 years of helping the Ottawa community at Christmas time.

**2006 – Present** In 2007 CFRA Radio and the Westin Hotel that ran both the Christmas Cheer Broadcast and Breakfast started proceedings to form the Christmas Cheer Foundation, and added the Ottawa Food Bank as a beneficiary of the two events. By 2009 the Christmas Cheer Foundation was fully incorporated and The Ottawa Senators Foundation joined the group of recipient charities, with Christmas Exchange than receiving less than 25% of the proceeds from the events.

To help compensate for the lost income resulting from no longer receiving 100% of the Christmas Cheer proceeds, the Caring and Sharing Charity Auction was started in 2008 by partnering with the Huntington Society.

In 2006 a partnership was formed with the Salvation Army Toy Centre whereby the Exchange provided co-ordination services for the Toy Centre (Toy Mountain) program. This allowed the Toy Centre registration process to expand from one point of in-take to 114 without a cost increase, making the process easier for the clients, as well as Toy Centre staff. The total cost savings realized by the elimination of duplicates for both food and toys was now over \$700,000 per year. In 2010 the co-ordination services were expanded further when a partnership was formed with Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa (CAYFO) on the Tools 4 School Program.