



# 2020 FALL UPDATE



**Kerr Street Mission**  
Oakville's Mission of Hope



# With Every Problem Comes an Opportunity

And let us not grow weary of doing good... So then as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone.

Galatians 6:9-10

I am writing this on week 34 of 2020 – and week 24 of the COVID-19 Pandemic – and there is no end in sight. When we began the year we had no idea about the changes that were in store for us. Thankfully, our staff, volunteers and donors responded with the characteristic compassion and generosity that we have come to know, and as a result we have been able to continue to care for our neighbours in need. It really is quite remarkable!

It has been quite a journey so far. I have to admit that it has taken a toll on our staff – we are tired. There have been so many unknowns and so much uncertainty week to week. We have had to re-design our Food Market, Community Meal and Summer programs; all the while planning for several different scenarios. We have also had to manage new safety protocols, new staff schedules and an influx of new clients and client needs. And with physical distancing and group gathering size restrictions still in place, our fall programming needs to be redesigned. So there really is no time to rest for staff.

Throughout the pandemic I have thought many times about wisdom my Father passed along to me. He would often tell me that *“with every problem comes an opportunity”*. I believe this is true, if we are willing to put in the effort to make something good happen. With that in mind I have challenged our team to not just look at changing programs to meet the COVID protocols but to consider how we can make a greater difference for those we serve.

Change is challenging and always seems to result in a lot of extra work. At the same time, it is exciting to think about how KSM may be able to provide more help to those in need and more help to other providers in Halton who, like KSM, are committed to caring for their community. During the pandemic, meetings and speaking engagements have not been possible. However, I am available to chat, whether it be on a virtual call, or a patio visit. So if there is anything on the pages that follow that you would like to learn more about, or if you would like to get involved and help us make it a reality, then please don't hesitate to e-mail or call. There is nothing I would enjoy more than chatting about our dreams and plans.

Blessings,

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**“** Being homeless, there is no place to go. I have been without my community. I am so thankful for the food and meals that KSM has continued to supply, but until the pandemic, I never realized all the things that KSM provides. I have friends and a community of people that care about me. I miss the staff, the volunteers and the clients that I would share my meals with. Because we really share more than just a meal.  
**”**  
- KSM Client

# Sustainability Update

Thank you for supporting Kerr Street Mission and the community we serve! I am excited to report that the response of the community during the Pandemic has been remarkable. In the weeks following the province's announcement of a 'lockdown', we received donations from 312 new donors. The number of monthly donors increased by 89%. Combined with the emergency COVID funding from Oakville Community Foundation, Feed Ontario/Food Banks Canada, United Way Hamilton and Halton and gifts from many of our regular donors, by the end of May we had received \$300,000 more than at the same time period last year. What a blessing!

Having the additional funds enabled us to continue to offer essential programs and services to the community, by keeping our staff working and by purchasing food and other supplies to better provide for the significant increase in the number of individuals and families that needed help. It also allowed us to pursue creative ways to connect and support participants who were not able to come.

We are thankful to be entering the last four months of the year in a healthy financial position. However it is not without concern. Three significant grants have ended and several funding commitments have changed as a result of the COVID impact. In addition, our Send a Kid to Camp campaign was not as successful as previous years. The surplus from the first five months of the year has, and will help us weather the storm. We are also actively pursuing grants that, if successful, will help us to both continue, and improve programming, so that we can respond to the needs of our community. To learn more about specific needs or how you can help please contact Gary at [gary@kerrstreet.com](mailto:gary@kerrstreet.com) or Heidi at [heidi@kerrstreet.com](mailto:heidi@kerrstreet.com).

## Thank You!

We feel blessed to have such a generous community. We are in awe of the kind-hearted individuals and organizations that have stepped up to help.

Over the last few months so many have provided financial donations, delivered food, made "take-out" meals and offered time to help us serve. It is inspiring! Thank you again for your faithful support and for helping us continue to provide a lifeline for families that are in need.

***Your generosity is what makes it possible for us to be here for them!***



# DID YOU KNOW...

A number of years ago, Ontario introduced its first ever Long Term Poverty Reduction Strategy entitled “Breaking the Cycle of Poverty”. In the strategy the government identified the ‘*indicators*’ listed below, to measure progress:

- Birth Weight
- School Readiness
- Educational Progress
- High School Graduation Rates
- Young Adults Not in Education, Employment or Training
- Depth of Poverty Measure
- Housing Affordability
- Adults Unemployed for More than 6 Months
- Poverty Rates of Vulnerable Groups

At KSM our programming is not just focused on temporary relief for our clients. We are trying to help them improve their current and future wellbeing.

## Birth Weight

We partner with Halton Region Public Health to offer a Nutrition program for expecting moms and moms with young children. Having the program at KSM has provided the added benefit of increasing access to healthy foods through our KSM Food Market and Choose Fresh programs. It has also enabled KSM staff and volunteers to develop relationships and a greater community of support for the families involved.

In August, Public Health decided that face-to-face sessions would still be too great a risk, and they will not be running the regular sessions at KSM. We will be reaching out to the participants in the next few weeks to ensure they have access to the healthy foods they need, and to discuss any additional support they require. We are hoping the Nutritional programs can return to face-to-face sessions at KSM in January.



## Depth of Poverty and Housing Affordability

KSM has been committed to providing food and hygiene products to those in need from the day the organization was founded. In the last few years we have made significant strides in improving the quality, quantity and availability of the food we provide. During COVID, we have seen a significant increase in the number of people depending on our Food Market, Choose Fresh program and meal program. We have also seen tremendous generosity of our community. During the past 5+ months, we have received more donations than in previous years, which has enabled us to provide for all of those who have come seeking help. We have also had offers of large shipments, and we struggled to accept them because we just didn't have the capacity to store it all. This is an issue we know we need to tackle as the number of people depending on our market increases.



The increased need, the increased supply and the understanding that needs are likely to grow has helped us engage other agencies in a discussion about how to collaborate more effectively by sharing resources, leveraging buying power so that we can improve the access to healthy foods to our clients. We are excited about the opportunity to partner with these organizations which will allow us to support more people and those that are serving them. Giving individuals and families that are struggling to make ends meet access to healthy foods and hygiene products consistently is critical for their health and wellbeing. It also helps to reduce their monthly expenses which frees up money that can be used on other basic necessities like shelter, clothing and health care.

## Educational Progress

The staff of KSM's After School program (K-Grade 5) were challenged several years ago to “find ways to engage the children in fun learning activities, to help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school, and to identify potential issues that may hold them back”. Many children from low-income homes start school behind others and are never able to catch up. In the months during COVID, our staff remained focused on that challenge. They prepared ‘at-home’ learning activities and had regular ‘virtual’ classes to try and keep the children engaged in learning.

COVID-19 guidelines will not allow us to have a full complement of children (30) attend the program in September, and all indications are that many parents are not comfortable sending their kids to school or after school programs. We have been in regular discussion with the parents and the local school to determine the best way KSM can support the kids and their families. By modifying our program and activities we can continue to stay connected and make a difference while complying to the physical distancing and safety protocols.

As a part of the KSM Youth Drop-In program (Grade 6+) we have established a homework club. By continually encouraging youth and providing additional support and incentives, we try to help them have greater success in school.

This fall we will be offering a daily drop-in program. Our youth centre and gym give us the flexibility and space to provide a variety of activities, opportunities and support. Again, we are having regular discussion with the youth, their parents and other organizations to determine how best we can support the youth in our community. We believe that the need to provide safe and healthy options and support for youth to enjoy is essential, and even more so during these unprecedented times. We also believe that additional support options for high school students that struggle to focus or get work done at home or online is essential. So we are opening our youth centre so students can come on the days they are not scheduled to be at the school. They can come and work in a safe and supervised place. We will be looking to add additional resources (volunteer and/or staff) to support the students, if and when needed.



## High School Graduation Rates and Young Adults not in Education, Training, or Employment



Kerr Street Mission has been the home of Gary Allan High Schools STEP program for the past 3 years. Since relocating to our facility, student's daily attendance has increased significantly as has the enrollment in the program. The STEP program has been developed for students that have struggled within the regular high school structure and are at-risk of not graduating. It is an integrated program that combines career and life education with individualized instruction for compulsory courses in a small class setting. As part of the program, students are encouraged to participate in work (co-op) opportunities that are integrated into the academic program. KSM staff have been working to create more co-op opportunities for this coming year as students have expressed their interest to have their co-op at KSM, and are comfortable with the environment and staff. We are excited about being more involved in this way.

At this time there are many decisions that still need to be made by the school board regarding the logistics of the program in this new COVID reality. Thankfully KSM is able to provide a safe environment for the co-op opportunities regardless of restrictions of class size and attendance.



In the spring we faced the difficult decision of whether or not we would run our Summer Programming. We decided that the Kerr Street Summer Program was important, not only to our families that we serve, but also to our summer staff. A great deal of time and effort went into planning a modified camp structure and programming that would keep the children and youth engaged while complying with the health and safety protocols. We are happy to report that our campers, Leaders in Training (LIT) and staff had a truly memorable camp experience full of arts and crafts, outdoor sports, fun activities, and meaningful relationships.

The KSM LIT program, which was introduced 3 summers ago, offers an opportunity for youth in the community to develop leadership skills under the guidance of our staff mentors. Having a smaller number of participants because of the COVID restrictions allowed us to pour more time and energy into our LITs which resulted in immense growth and development as they pushed themselves outside of their comfort zones. Opportunities for students to volunteer during the pandemic are limited, so we were happy to offer students a chance to earn volunteer hours, and give them more individualized attention in their development as leaders. These young leaders, from a variety of backgrounds, have been inspired to help bridge the poverty gap in Oakville, and some have already used their experience to impact their communities in their own unique way.

Our KSM Youth Camp was moved to a secondary location because of gathering size restrictions. We felt it was important to give young people in our community the opportunity to socialize with peers in a fun and safe environment. Considering the challenging circumstances presented by the pandemic, a change of pace and scenery is exactly what so many of our youth needed. Camp was a welcome relief from difficult home situations where many of them had extra responsibilities that prevented them from just being kids. While it had been a discouraging season full of loss and change for so many, being at camp with familiar faces had been a source of happiness and comfort for the youth. It was great to see them participating in lots of fun activities, deepening friendships, laughing and playing together without thinking about the struggles of the past few months.

**“** *During Quarantine KSM delivered food to people in need. I found this really inspirational and nice, because even with all the things going on, they thought of the community and how they could help. I think this is what everybody has to do to make the world a nicer place to live in.*

**”**

- LIT Participant



# NEIGHBOUR CARE NETWORK

*update*

Last year, as part of the NCN efforts we helped over 315 individuals and engaged 15 new churches to support and walk alongside our clients. We have also been working hard to establish a network of volunteers and resources to help support our community and bring compassion and hope for a better future.

Since the pandemic hit, the need for help has increased dramatically with many new individuals and families reaching out for support. We have been blessed that we have been able to provide an ear to listen, resources to help and compassion for all as we navigate this new normal with them. Here are some heart warming stories to share.

Chrystal came to KSM during the pandemic looking for support. When she walked through our doors – she wasn't sure what she needed. After an open and honest discussion, it was deemed that some changes to her living conditions were an important step for her to make to improve her situation. She had some family support in London Ontario – so the NCN team made it possible for a visit to her mother in London. After her visit, she was empowered to take charge and make some life changes. With the help of the NCN church community, Halton Housing and NCN – they were able to secure a new apartment in London, close to family in short order. We are happy to report that thanks to a great team of volunteers from the Meeting House, and NCN staff, they were able to move and help Chrystal settle into her new life.

“

*I would like to take this time to thank you for all the help, guidance and generosity you have given me. You made me feel like I was a person worth helping. When I was in doubt, you provided hope and options and encouragement. God works in marvelous ways and he had a plan for me.*

- Chrystal

“

*Thank you for everything that you have done for me. I would especially like to thank you for all the help when Jeff passed away. I thank you and the region for the financial help, as it gave me time to both grieve and time to figure what was the best course of action for myself. To everyone at KSM I will always have a place in my heart for all of you. For the kindness that you all showed me, Jeff and Conner. God bless you all.*

- Albert

Albert was a long term client of KSM and along with his roommate Jeff and Jeff's young son, used the services of KSM on a regular basis for food support, community meals and Christmas Wonders. COVID-19 forced Albert and Jeff to rely more heavily on our services. Tragically, a few months ago, Jeff died suddenly and all who knew him were heartbroken. Outside of the immense grief of losing his dear friend, Albert was facing financial challenges with his living expenses since he had to carry the load on his own. NCN came to Albert's aid and they worked to develop a plan to support him dealing with his grief and plans for the future. Through the support of KSM and NCN, Albert felt supported and empowered to move ahead with his life despite these tragic circumstances. Albert was able to relocate to St. Catherines and move in with a friend who needed support. Despite a tragic circumstance, NCN came together with the community and was able to walk along the difficult road that was facing Albert and bring about some much needed support for someone dealing with a lot.



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Charitable Reg. No. 897106845RR0001