



A Holiday Celebration (with all the trimmings)



For many of us, holiday planning starts in early November, as we look forward to spending time with loved ones, savouring delicious meals and creating lasting memories together.

But what if your friends are few or you're estranged from your family? What if you're unhoused or precariously housed? Or the room you call home doesn't have a kitchen?

How would you experience the joy of the holidays?

At our Mustard Seed location, staff and participants work together to create a compassionate community of caring and generosity all year long.

But honouring each participant and reminding them that they are seen, heard and valued, is especially important during the holidays.

And thanks to the support of wonderful people like you, who share our vision of creating a world where every life is respected, participants experienced the joy of the holidays with a traditional holiday lunch, heartfelt cards, gifts and more.

On December 18th, approximately 150 participants sat down together to enjoy a special holiday meal prepared by our food program team. Turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes and gravy, glazed carrots . . . it was, according to Jordi, delicious!

Jordi, who lives in the neighbourhood, has been coming to Fontbonne since March. He enjoys the activities, especially playing board games with staff – Connect 4, a game of strategy, is his favourite.

Socializing counts, too.

"It's a welcoming place," says Jordi. "I've made friends here and we check in on each other."

And the staff are great. Even when I've had a bad day, they talk to me and always make me feel better."

Back to lunch. What was for dessert?

"Chocolate chip and oatmeal raisin cookies," he says. "I had to have one of each – you can't play favourites, can you?" ■



Every day, we witness the challenges our participants face – the rising cost of living, food insecurity, and housing instability. Together, we can uplift those who need it most. Visit our website to make a gift today: www.fontbonneministries.ca/donate

Giving the Gift of Hope

Celebrating the Season Together



Santa and his team of holiday elves present the cheque that will make such a difference to our community.



Jennifer Lay and her dad Jack make music together.

The Riverside Antler Breakfast, Riverside Business Improvement Area's filled-with-fun annual holiday celebration, raises much-needed funds to support community programs – and this year, our Food Program at our Mustard Seed location was chosen.

One hundred guests enjoyed a scrumptious buffet breakfast prepared by the talented food program team at Mustard Seed, and almost \$21,000 was raised via sponsorships, tickets and the silent auction table. Wow! We are so grateful!

No question – the 13th annual Riverside Antler Breakfast was a party!

The Ralph Thornton Community Centre was sparkling with holiday cheer and hopping with bonhomie.

A karaoke style singalong with Santa invited guests to belt out Jingle Bell Rock, this year's anthem. Jack Lay, Riverside BIA Executive Director Jennifer Lay's dad, played holiday tunes on his accordion – and everyone got into the sing-along-spirit.

Santa also invited guests to put their trivia skills to the test – the last question was a tricky one, though. Will we have a White Christmas? Well . . . the correct answer, of course, is nobody knows!

A Silent Auction offering beautiful pottery from our Pottery Studio, art, gift baskets and gift certificates donated by local businesses and the community, gave guests a chance to holiday shop – and support our community's most vulnerable.

Community guests Heather and her friend Darlene, who live in Fontbonne Place, enjoyed their first Riverside Antler Breakfast – and loved every minute.

"Everyone made us feel so welcome when we walked in," Heather says, "including offering us Antler headbands!"

Heather didn't try karaoke – "they would have shut the place down!" – but did hum to the singalong.

"It was so high energy," she says. "The tables were beautifully decorated, simple but elegant.

"I'm not good with crowds, and I use a walker, but the tables weren't crowded together. And even though I didn't know anyone at our table we knew everyone's name in no time.

"It was just so joyous. I came away feeling lighter – and in the holiday spirit."



Fontbonne Ministries' talented team serve breakfast.

Darlene, left, and Heather, right, in the holiday spirit.

“This Breakfast was our most successful ever,” says Jennifer. “The community really came together as it always does – we had more sponsors, sold more tickets and had more silent auction gifts – because we believe in being a positive force in our community.

“The Mustard Seed food program at Fontbonne do work that no one else is doing – everyone is welcome. They are true community partners.”

We all enjoyed a morning filled with laughter, camaraderie and the spirit of giving, and we are so thankful for the outpouring of support from local businesses and neighbours who made this event a resounding success.

Your support made a difference in the lives of so many. ■



Thanks to generous people like you, participants at Fontbonne will continue to enjoy healthy, nutritious meals and the social interaction that contributes to a sense of community and belonging.

“I grew up experiencing food insecurity,” says Jason Friesen, Managing Partner at Outline Financial, the Riverside Antler Breakfast’s lead sponsor. “I know what that’s like. Now, I’m in the very fortunate position to support those in need – and I must. Regardless of who they are, what their story is, or how they got to where they are, they are human beings.”

Jon Paulson and Cheryl Mickolwin (right), J & C Real Estate Group, and one of this year’s Reindeer Sponsors, have been volunteering at The Antler Breakfast since 2018.



“We love this community,” says Jon, “and supporting people in need is a community effort. Food security matters. When I was growing up, my family sometimes had a hard time putting food on the table. I know what that’s like.”

Jon is also a talented videographer and you can watch his video highlights of the Riverside Antler Breakfast by scanning this QR code!



Lunch is Served

A Food Security Grant from ShareLife Means We Can Serve More Than 10,000 Additional Meals in 2025

Many individuals in our South Riverdale community face food insecurity every day. That's why the hot, nutritious meals we serve are a priority.

This year, we were the grateful recipients of a Food Security Grant from ShareLife, the annual charitable appeal of the Archdiocese of Toronto, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto and a generous anonymous donor.

The \$14,000 grant will allow us to serve 10,666 **additional** meals in 2025.

"Getting food is a huge issue," explains Arthur Peters, Executive Director, ShareLife.

"More and more people have turned to food banks, including working people.

"Our Food Security Grants reflect our mission to live the gospel by providing for those in need."



Two of our talented food program team serve Christmas lunch.

The Hearts that Made the Holidays Bright

Steve and Anne Carey, monthly Fontbonne donors, have been committed supporters of our Mustard Seed location since we opened our doors 24 years ago, from dropping off gift bags to making sandwiches to bringing personal essentials.

For the past two years, they and their friends (right) have brought in-kind gifts such as hygiene products and warm socks to the drop-in, and then spent the morning writing Christmas greetings for the older, single women who live at Fontbonne Place, and for the Mustard Seed participants, many of whom consider the drop in "home".

What do you say to people whose Christmas is unlikely to be merry? What wish reflects the spirit of this special time of year?

You remind them that they are strong, resilient and remembered.

"We each write our own message, from the heart, but the sentiment is the same: Your life has meaning," says the couple. ■



Steve and Anne Carey and friends arrive with socks for a morning spent writing holiday greetings.

Community Corner

Honouring the Generosity of Our Local Heroes

The pandemic led Christina Marra, Executive Vice-President of Roma Fence in Bolton, Ontario, to Mustard Seed and she has been supporting us ever since.

“I wanted to support women and children’s shelters,” she explains. “But during Covid no one was taking donations. A charity I called in Toronto told me to try Fontbonne Ministries. They gratefully accepted my pickup truckload of donated clothing – and I have been donating ever since.

“We organize clothing drives for the clothing boutique – I donate because I believe that giving something of mine connects me to the person who will wear it after me – and for the last two years we have also given \$25 gift cards to Fontbonne’s housing program.

“We are so blessed, and if everyone passed along a blessing for every blessing they received, imagine the world we would live in.” ■



Christina and her team of Mustard Seed supporters.



Christina Marra



The staff and students at St. Joseph College School were busy in the weeks leading up to Christmas collecting socks – all colours of socks – to bring to Mustard Seed because they know that at this time of year, especially, socks are a much-appreciated gift.

Sock drives are a school tradition going back 10 years when alumnus Dr. Sylvia Marcos launched Socks 4 Souls, a charity committed to providing unhoused people with warm socks.

“Staff and students got on board to support Sylvia,” says Monica Godin, Department Head Religion and Languages/Chaplaincy team leader at the school. “We continue to support Socks 4 Souls, and a number of other charity drives facilitated by the Chaplaincy team.”

Why?

“There is a call,” explains Anreeya, a Grade 12 student, co-president of the Chaplaincy Team and a drive organizer. “And when there is a call, there is a will. I feel honoured to continue the legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph to help people in need.” ■



From left to right: Anreeya, Justine, Keira, Tula, Sophia and Maria.

Community Corner

Neighbours and Businesses Make a Difference

Jennifer Lay, Executive Director, Riverside BIA, joined Dani, a talented student from Rosedale Heights School of the Arts and three students from St. Augustine's Seminary of Toronto to transform our Mustard Seed location into a magical winter wonderland.

They painted windows with enchanting snowflakes and gingerbread people, and dressed the courtyard with ornaments, bows and sparkling lights, a festive welcome to everyone who came by. We are so thankful for the joy they brought to our community! ■



For years now, Emma Young (left) and her family at David & Kate Young Bosley Real Estate, have been bringing the women at Mustard Seed a classic Christmas gift – warm pajamas.

Emma's mum shops sales throughout the year, and the family reaches out to friends and clients to contribute.

“Elizabeth Barry, a friend, started The Christmas Pajama Project 16 years ago,” says Emma. “She grew up in a family of 10, and everyone got a gift of PJs or a nightgown.

It's a nostalgic gift, I guess, and my family is all about tradition.” ■



Volunteers at The Shoebox Project know that vulnerable women, many of them homeless or marginally housed, are often forgotten during the holiday season. This year, 100 personally crafted shoe boxes filled with everyday items and small luxuries, and a message of support arrived before our holiday party, a simple act of kindness that reminds women using our services that they are recognized and remembered. ■



Join us in making a difference! To find out how you can help our community, contact: Wendy Bray at wbray@fontbonneministries.ca to learn more.



Fontbonne Ministries

Corporate

791 Queen Street East
Toronto, ON M4M 1H6
Tel: 416-465-2889 | Fax: 416-465-6744

info@fontbonneministries.ca
www.fontbonneministries.ca

Connect With Us!



@FontbonneMinistries



@fontbonne-ministries



@FontbonneMinistries

Charitable Registration No. 86408 4090 RR0001