

ELUCO ANNUAL REPORT 2020

ELUCO has faced many challenges over the past year but with God's help and guidance we have been able to persevere and overcome! January 2020 saw us meeting as a Board to plan programs, fundraising and the AGM for the upcoming year! Little did we realize that this would all be derailed by a global pandemic.

In January and February Nancy had the freedom to offer programs and workshops to support the needs of the community. With generous funding from the May Court Club of London, she was able to offer breakfast and a weekly hot nutritious lunch to children. Targeted workshops were offered with a generous grant from the United Church Council. In partnership with Middlesex London Health Unit, she was able to provide Harvest Bucks to purchase fruits and vegetables from local farmers. Nutrition workshops were presented to groups of adults and children, working together to try new recipes and learn the art of food preservation. In partnership with the London Public Library Outreach team, caregivers and preschoolers in our Family Storytime program enjoyed books, rhymes, music and themed activities while our older children met after school for Books and Crafts. Using resources from the Child and Youth Mental Health Division of London Health Sciences Centre, we formed a support group for parents with adolescents suffering with complex mental issues. Anger Management workshops were offered to small separate groups of adults and children to help individuals identify symptoms of rising anger and a variety of coping strategies.

With much trepidation we decided to go ahead with our final event prior to the provincial COVID-19 shut down, our Annual Family trip to the Sugar Bush. Our families enjoyed a pancake and sausage lunch and several hours running through the bush gathering sap and revelling in the sunshine and fresh air before returning home to a new reality.

Adaptations to our services were mandated by the lock down and COVID-19 restrictions. Once ELUCO was deemed an essential service the Board worked diligently to approve motions of operation, adhering to government and Middlesex London health Unit guidelines, that would keep Nancy, ELUCO volunteers and the community safe. The May Court Club of London donated grocery gift cards to ensure children did not go hungry. Nancy purchased fresh fruits and vegetables, yogurt, cheese and milk and dropped them off on the porches of the most vulnerable families. May Court members sewed cloth masks which were donated to Marconi families, the ELUCO Food Cupboard and the Welcome Wednesday program. As well as putting together monthly activity packs for the children to do at home, Nancy created cards of Easter Blessings which contained a grocery gift card thanks to a generous donation by the Siloam Outreach Team. The Growing Chefs Ontario offered a virtual cooking class for the children and recipes from the program were included in the activity Packs.

Not all of our families have the privilege of owning computers or having internet access so with office closures Nancy had extra requests to complete and send in various forms for Housing, Housing Access Center, Housing Stability Bank, Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Child Care Subsidy, Legal Aid and lawyers. As well she assisted a number of families by completing their on-line school registrations and then trouble shooting and tutoring on software applications. No longer was it possible

to support and advocate for individuals by attending meetings with them. Instead, Nancy would meet outside with the individual, gather the relevant data then write letters, forward documentation and speak on their behalf to accomplish their needs. One of the positive aspects of this was that she was able to more openly validate struggles and express concerns for those she was trying to help.

The pandemic has affected all of us but for some in the Marconi community the isolation and restrictions have been crippling. The Marconi community has seen a steep rise in Depression and Anxiety, Addictions, Criminal Activity and Violence. Although it presented privacy issues, Nancy was able to provide counselling outside at a distance. She says “As the months passed it reinforced my understanding that the most important aspect of my outreach is being present in the community. Living our faith, listening without judgement, encouraging, comforting, challenging and teaching: these are the gifts that I bestowed and what was reciprocated back to me!”

Thanks to technology Nancy was able to do most of her training on-line. CLEO (Community Legal Education Ontario) offered a number of webinars to inform of changes during the pandemic and extra resources available for families. Through Ontario Non-Profit network she attended a series of financial seminars with strategies for periods of reduced funding. Coursera offered mental Health and Wellness webinars on ways to deal with Anxiety during the pandemic. She studied an Advanced Photography and editing techniques for phones to enable hosting two different levels of workshops. NLSML (Neighbourhood Legal Services Middlesex London) offered their annual training in a series of webinars on Employment, Housing, Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program. ISARC (Interfaith Social Assistance Coalition) also held a Religious Leaders Forum “Advancing a Livable Income: Overcoming Ontario’s Poverty Pandemic” which Nancy participated in. Nancy was invited to give a power point presentation on ELUCO’s work to a zoom breakfast meeting of the South London Rotary Club!

Despite the pandemic but with the assistance of amazing donors Nancy was able to provide Christmas Share for 112 families. An absence of volunteers due to COVID-19 meant gifts weren’t gift wrapped but were distributed in gift bags. Several families were sponsored by an individual or group. Many thanks to Thorndale UCW, Trinity Community Church, Rose Birrell group (Siloam United) and Rowntree United. Richards Memorial donated gifts for children and grocery gift cards. First St Andrews provided a very generous number of grocery gift cards and their church school did a chocolate fundraiser that provided Indigo gift cards. Individual donations were used to purchase Indigo, Winners and Shoppers gift cards. Siloam United and individual donations were used to purchase Walmart gift cards. As well Siloam sponsored their annual Christmas meat drive and donated turkeys, ham and turkey breasts to be included in the gift baskets.

Jansen Christmas Toy Drive hired a company to sanitize and fog new and slightly used toys. Some families were reluctant to participate but we distributed to 23 families, 53 children.

Left with an abundance of spare time (LOL), Nancy put together 75 Christmas activity packs which included a craft, colouring/activity pad, Christmas pencil, chocolate treat and candy cane for children 12 and under so they would have something to do on their holidays!

WELCOME WEDNESDAY

Welcome Wednesday was pleased to welcome Debbie Betchen and her group from Rowntree United to take over the preparation and service of food for the first Wednesday of each month. The hospitality lunches went as normal with an average of 55 per week but all that changed on March 16th. The meals changed to take out served from the vestibule of the church with no one entering the premises. This continued for the rest of 2020. The number of participants dropped to an average of 35 per week. There were absolutely no complaints for the new procedure or the meals that were served. Many thanks to all those individuals that prepared and served food to those who require our support, particularly during a pandemic. (Respectfully submitted by Sharon Ashton)

ELUCO FOOD CUPBOARD

As with all our programs, the Food Cupboard was also impacted by the pandemic. In early March the Friday group closed their door. The Wednesday group continued to provide food. No individuals were allowed in the unit and all groceries to be picked up were placed on a table outside. The Friday group re-opened on June 3, 2020. Health Unit guidelines were followed to ensure that the volunteers and the clients they served were safe. In 2020 324 families were served by the food cupboard. This number translates to 576 adults and 233 children. These numbers are down from 2019 (504 families, 865 adults, 348 children served). Our clients were grateful for the food they received. The Rowntree gardeners were faithful in bringing squash and beans over the summer. Some members dropped off groceries for us. All donations are greatly appreciated. A big thank you to our ELUCO front line workers who made certain that the families in our area had the food they needed! (Respectfully submitted by Judy White)

The Board

Although the board members were not able to meet face to face, financial statements and reports were posted each month. Safety protocols for Nancy and the volunteers were setup and implemented by the Board over the internet. Our AGM was successfully held outside in Springbank Park in early September. Our annual walkathon was held virtually and helped to raise much needed funds for ELUCO's ongoing expenses. Presently, our book keeper has not finished the books for 2020 but it appears our net income will be slightly greater due in part to a drop in expenses even though revenues were down slightly. A complete statement should be available in early February.

As I re-read this report, I am amazed at what Nancy has accomplished this year. Thank you, Nancy for your tireless efforts to bring hope, love and support to our Marconi community! We couldn't have done it without you. Many thanks to our generous donors and supporters, you have provided the resources necessary to enable us to carry out the programs and activities which are a lifeline for our communities.

While 2020 was uniquely challenging for our ELUCO family we can still celebrate the many accomplishments achieved. We can build on these experiences and continue to build on our love and support for the ELUCO community members as we enter 2021. "For what other reason did God put us in this world but to help one another!" (Respectfully submitted by Carol Langford)