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Students help feed the hungry

Local secondary schools step in to help cook Elizabeth Fry Society's Christmas dinner

By Theresa McManus, The Record December 24, 2010



Tracy Lem prepares peas for the Elizabeth Fry Society's Christmas dinner.

Photograph by: Theresa McManus, THE RECORD

The Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver hosted a Christmas dinner for 700 people last week with a little help from its friends.

Shawn Bayes, the society's executive director, said the society has been holding the Christmas dinner for 20 years.

"We operate two homeless shelters for women and children and one for women. We have one in New West - it is pretty much 100 per cent full. We also have a drop-in centre," she said. "Between our shelter and the drop-in, those are the women we work with over the course of the year."

About 700 people registered for the Dec. 16 Christmas party, which was held at the Sapperton Pensioners Hall.

"We fed 600 people," Bayes said. "We had about 100 kids that were under the age of 18 months."

People ate their dinner downstairs and then went upstairs where kids could see Santa. The society gave out 400 children's gifts (including new school supplies and toys) and 400 children's stockings.

"This is their Christmas," she said. "They open their stockings, but they take their wrapped gifts home."

Blossoming chefs in the culinary arts program at New Westminster Secondary School helped out by preparing mass quantities of vegetables for the dinner. Mashed potatoes, peas, carrots, beans, broccoli and brussels spouts were cooked at the school's cafeteria and transported to the dinner.

"I love cooking," said Ryan Schmidt, a Grade 11 student at NWSS. "It makes it even better when you are helping people who aren't as fortunate."

Students at Riverside Secondary in Port Coquitlam cooked turkeys, gravy and stuffing for the dinner.

"Between the two schools, they cooked all the food," Bayes said. "We just had to reheat it."

Bayes said the society normally has someone who cooks the meal, but that fell through. They considered who might be in a position to help and decided to contact the schools.

"The food was good," she said. "The clients were very appreciative."

Bayes is grateful for the community's assistance in making the annual dinner a success.

"We had a lot of support," she noted. "We must have had upwards of 20 volunteers who helped. We have volunteers for weeks wrapping Christmas gifts, shopping."

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