Community partnership ensures Valley students receive meal program

Comox Valley, B.C. – While the COVID-19 restrictions may have halted in-class instruction and the continuation of programs offered within neighbourhood schools, feeding vulnerable children has not been suspended.

Comox Valley Schools has partnered with Lush Valley Food Action to ensure those students who rely on their school to provide a meal will still have access to fresh wholesome nutrition.

“Throughout this crisis we have maintained our commitment towards the priorities around mental and physical well-being of our students, as well as continuing our school meal programs,” explained Tom Demeo, Superintendent of Schools. “We are extremely fortunate to have partnered with a well-established organization experienced in food distribution and food security within our very own community.”

More than 800 students throughout the district benefit from a meal program during the school year. Programs include breakfast clubs, a lunch program and snacks throughout the day.

Before the Minister of Education’s announcement of the suspension of in-class instruction, meals and snacks were typically prepared in the school with the help of Parent Advisory Councils, support staff, education assistants, and volunteers with funding provided by CommunityLINK (Learning Includes Nutrition and Knowledge) and other grants available for schools to access.

With the closure of schools to students, the handling of food and hamper preparation must be done offsite to ensure safety protocols and standards are met amid the strict measures in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lush Valley Food Action is providing warehouse space and will oversee FoodSafe protocols to ensure hampers can be properly prepared. Hampers will provide each student and family enrolled in the food program with a week’s worth of breakfasts, lunches and extra snacks.

"It has been wonderful working with SD71,” expressed Maurita Prato, Executive Director of Lush Valley Food Action. “This partnership makes so much sense. We are happy to be serving students and families across the region. And love how they are eager to support the program with bus drivers and volunteers.”

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Funding for meals will be provided in part by the District’s CommunityLINK resources. As well, the District will maintain an active role in the meal program by taking on preparation and distribution responsibilities.

District education assistants are stepping up and volunteering to be hamper packers. A call went out April 16 and within 10 minutes, more than a dozen staff responded willing to help. First Student, the District’s contracted busing service, offered to distribute hampers throughout the community.

Currently, close to 200 families have registered for the Good Food Box healthy hamper program. More applications are anticipated as word gets out into the community about this valuable resource available.

“The numbers grow incrementally daily with more and more families in need,” shared Esther Shatz, Director of Student Service for Comox Valley Schools. “To meet the need, we will increase the number of buses provided by First Student from two to four.”

For urgent needs, school continue to use their funding to purchase grocery cards to help families gain immediate access to food while still offering a hamper program.

Each Good Food Box consists of two bags of groceries including perishable and non-perishable foods, fresh vegetables, eggs, milk, cheese, dry goods such as rice and/or pasta, oats, and canned goods such as pasta sauce and beans. Approximately 25 lbs of food in each delivery.

To register for the Good Food Box hamper program, a family household member is required to complete a form available online at https://lushvalley.org/need-food/. Those without internet access can call Lush Valley’s Emergency Food Share Helpline at 250-207-HELP (4357).

The Food Share Helpline is open Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4 to 8 p.m. If calling outside of these hours, callers are asked to leave a message with a name and phone number and a volunteer will be in touch when the call centre opens.

School district families can also contact their child’s school principal via phone or email for assistance and support registering for the program.

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For more information, email foodshare@lushvalley.org

For information about the food program and other community support, visit the Comox Valley Schools Resource Guide at https://bit.ly/SD71_COVID19ResourceGuide

Media Contact

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