



North End Women's Centre with fellow community groups at Indigenous Vision for the North End's "Smudge the North End" event. (Supplied photo)

# Giving and getting help in our community

By Trina Rehberg Boyko

**W**e can't always predict that we'll need a helping hand, but we're fortunate to be surrounded by a giving community if we ever do.

Vince Barletta, CEO of Harvest Manitoba, tells of a client-turned-friend who called Harvest after hitting a financial hurdle with the cost of her cancer medication and rising inflation. Having retired from a career where she gave to community organizations, she found herself on the receiving end.

Barletta is seeing more and more people

struggling due to disability, age and, of course, inflation. The supports that were in place in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, like the Canada Emergency

Response Benefit (CERB), are fewer and farther between. This has had a lasting impact on the community, particularly for those on a fixed income.

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— Vince Barletta,  
CEO of Harvest Manitoba

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Inflation has hit Harvest Manitoba, too.

“We run a fleet of commercial vehicles to make deliveries across Manitoba,” Barletta says. “With the price of diesel over \$2 a litre, it's a big pinch in our budget.”

Community organizations like the North End Women's Centre and Newcomers Employment and Education Development Services, or N.E.E.D.S., are also feeling the post-pandemic and inflation stress.

“There's a demand for food, basic needs, shelter,” says Cynthia Drebot, executive director at the North End Women's Centre.

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“We have people coming to us who are homeless, who weren’t homeless before the pandemic.”

Support services are also in demand. These services were available through the pandemic, though on a smaller scale.

At the same time, gender-based violence and substance abuse have increased, Drebot explains, so there’s a need to resume regular support groups along with a need for donations.

“The need has gone up and the donations have gone down,” Drebot says.

This is, in part, because people were donating the money they would have spent on transportation and those pricey lunchtime lattes had they been in the office. As they return to work, the excess income — and the donations — is less.

N.E.E.D.S. is also hands-on in the community, assisting newcomers as they get settled.

“We work with people from Day 1 when they arrive in Canada,” says Meagan Botelho, service delivery team manager for N.E.E.D.S. “There’s a learning curve to understanding the systems we have in place.”



Vince Barletta, CEO of Harvest Manitoba. (Supplied photo)

Things we might take for granted, like the ability to read and understand report cards or a bus schedule, aren’t so easy when you’re trying to find your footing in a new country.

Then there’s the issue of schooling itself, as refugees arriving in Canada often experience a gap — along with an extra gap if they arrived during a period of remote learning.

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(Supplied photo)



(Supplied photo)





Raine, North End Women's Centre's Buffalo Gal drum group coordinator leading participants in traditional drumming in the garden. (Supplied photo)



Mayor Brian Bowman stops by North End Women's Centre with his holiday hamper donation towards the drop-in's emergency distribution. (Supplied photo)

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“Obviously, we want children and youth to be connected to their school and larger communities, so that piece was lost through the pandemic,” says Botelho.

**GIVE HELP**

Monetary donations are appreciated, though food and supplies are needed, too. Check out Harvest Manitoba's website for a list of the Top 10 most-needed foods. Hygiene and menstrual products, baby formula, diapers and items that offer protection from the elements are in demand at grassroots organizations like the North End Women's Centre.

Volunteering is another way to help. At N.E.E.D.S., volunteers are the driving force that help newcomers make those important connections.

Harvest Manitoba experiences a volunteer shortage during the summer months, making it a perfect opportunity to give back as an individual, family or even a work or sports team.

Bottom line — your time matters. “There is value in donating your time and not just your money,” says Dawn Bourbonnais, manager of communications and outreach at Volunteer Manitoba. “Volunteering is a personal commitment that you're making to your community to make a difference.”

**GET HELP**

Call 211 for free, confidential help reaching community and social services. There's no shame in needing help — giving and receiving is what community is all about.



(Supplied photo)