

Group running food bank for poor needs funds

A group trying to collect and distribute groceries for the poor has its warehouse but no money to run it.

"We only have \$218 in the bank right now," says Matthew Barbour, the paid staffer of Provisions Ottawa, a group trying to set up a food bank in the city.

The group was formed by about 17 agencies operating soup kitchens and distributing groceries to the poor, including St. Brigid's soup kitchen in Lowertown and the West End Community Lunch program at Foster Farm Community Centre on Ramsey Crescent.

The agencies distribute about 2,500 free meals a day to the needy.

Ottawa Council agreed to let the group use part of the former police station on Waller Street as a warehouse until next July when the city plans to redevelop the building.

But Barbour says they can't move in until they get money for such things as a telephone, insurance, shelves and a cooler.

But he's convinced the food industry and public will be generous with donations of food, money and equipment.

Once the food bank is established, it will accept donations from manufacturers, wholesalers, farmers, grocery stores and the public, then distribute the food to churches and community groups that operate soup kitchens or provide groceries to the poor.

The agencies now solicit food individually. A central warehouse would allow food businesses to donate large quantities of food to be distributed where it's most needed.

As well, people making donations of money or food can be sure it will be passed on to a legitimate group, Ald. Rolf Hasenack says.

The food bank will need about \$68,400 for the first six months of operation. A \$5,000 grant from the United Way is paying Barbour's salary until November.

Already one wholesaler, who wants to remain anonymous, has agreed to make donations of surplus food, said Barbour.

"If we get one major food chain interested, we'll be well on the way."

In Edmonton, a food bank has been successful, handling about 5,000 pounds of food a day, he said. There, grocery stores have drop boxes where customers donate food.

While the Ottawa group can't take food donations until it has the warehouse set up, money and equipment can be donated by phoning the Ottawa-Carleton Social Planning Council.

