

Potatoes have replaced prisoners in loading dock of old Ottawa police station

The smell of hundred of loaves of fresh bread drifts from the bunker-like basement of the old police station on Waller Street.

Once an area for police vans unloading prisoners, one corner of the concrete basement is now filled with bread, cartons of yogurt and roast beef sandwiches.

It's the temporary warehouse for the Food Bank, in operation after seven months of planning.

The Food Bank distributes donated food to 14 agencies providing hot lunches or food packages to the poor. They include St. Brigid's Church soup kitchen, the Salvation Army and Union Mission for Men, Centre 454, and the West End Lunch Program.

The agencies distribute about 77,000 meals a month.

"The Food Bank certainly makes things easier," said Bill Bradley, one of the officials running St. Brigid's soup kitchen, which serves about 400 hot meals and 200 bag lunches a day.

Normally, the soup kitchen has its own source of food, but on days when the cupboards are bare, "the Food Bank helps fill the gap".

So far the bank has distributed about two tons of potatoes donated by a Quebec farmer, 1.5 tons of produce, and hundred of loaves of bread, says co-ordinator Matthew Barbour.

With a central storage and distribution centre, wholesalers and retailers can make large donations in one easy stop.

All the equipment and food has been donated by individuals and companies, as well as about \$900 to help cover the cost of the phone.

United Way of Ottawa-Carleton gave \$5,000 to pay Barbour's salary until the end of October.

Pure Spring donated a Chevy van and a cooler, local bakeries gave surplus bread and several IGA stores donated produce.

The Pope's visit proved an unexpected dividend for the Food Bank. One canteen operator selling hotdogs and hamburgers at the Pope's mass donated 1,200 packages of leftover buns, while Capital Foods gave 3,000 surplus roast beef sandwiches.

The Food Bank is still looking for a walk-in cooler.

Volunteer Francine Green is in constant contact with the agencies, taking orders and working out deliveries.



Barbour says they've had no problem getting rid of all the donated food, although the hot dog buns are sometimes a challenge.

"I'm trying to get the cooks to be a little more imaginative in using hot dog buns for French toast and things."

Ottawa is letting the Food Bank use the old police station until next summer, when the city plans to ask for proposals to develop it.

At that point, the Food Bank will be looking for another place.

The operation is still looking for more volunteers and food.

People who want to donate should phone in advance at 594-3461.

