

## Perinatal Programming through Better Beginnings Now (BBNow)

“So many new Canadians are healthy when they arrive in Canada. Problems with obesity, especially in children, seem to increase with time spent in Canada” says Ildiko Csermely, coordinator at member agency, Better Beginnings Now (BBNow). BBNow’s Early Start to Living Smart program tries to give families the tools to raise healthy children, even if families struggle with economic poverty.

Through Early Start to Living Smart new Canadians participate in a twelve week hands on training class focusing on food and fitness. In the first six weeks, groups learn to cook and prepare foods using food bank staples such as creamed soups or canned beans. “We actually sit and open the cans together. For so many of our clients, canned food is unfamiliar. All of the participants know how to cook, and most cook really well. Our program helps to introduce new foods and new recipes with low cost foods” says Ildiko. The recipes are usually very simple and nutritious. Oatmeal and fruit muffins seem to be a perennial hit.

Women come to the program because they are having a difficult time finding healthy food that their children will eat. One common complaint says Ildiko is “my kids don’t eat. I want to make food that they will enjoy”. These same moms are often surprised when their kids then eat and like the food samples that are made available through the workshops. “It’s wonderful to watch the parents watch their children eat new food. They come back the next week and share what they prepared, what worked and what didn’t.”

Through Early Start to Living Smart, participants come together weekly and prepare one meal to take home for the family and they also receive one meal’s worth of supplies to prepare once at home. Forty to fifty families move through the program annually.

And the benefits of the program extend beyond what gets cooked up in the kitchen.

“I am constantly amazed at how resourceful and helpful our participants are. If someone takes cans of spinach one week, and realizes she has been

unable to use the spinach, often the spinach gets returned so that another client can make use of it. The moms also organize the pantry amongst themselves based on need. If it is known that one family is going through a difficult time, the other participants organize the food and resources in such a way as to benefit that woman. The spirit of community and concern is so overwhelmingly strong amongst the families.”

Better Beginnings Now, also operates the Family Home Visiting Program and a prenatal nutrition program through Healthy Babies, Healthy Children. Home visitors deliver most of the food that is distributed through BBNow. Culturally matched home visitors work with new mothers and families to assess a new mother’s parenting needs and challenges. Mothers or families that need food supplies have an emergency three-day hamper delivered to the home along with a referral to a neighbourhood food bank. Home visitors then work with the clients to share tips on how to shop inexpensively and how to stretch your food dollar.

The prenatal nutrition program provides a supplementary hamper and a \$10 food voucher to expectant moms. A dietician from Toronto Public Health uses the items in the food hamper to make healthy meals and snacks. The outcomes of this project mirror those of Early Start to Living Smart.

All of Better Beginnings Now programs work to reduce the number of people living in poverty and isolation and, in particular, the goal is to raise healthier babies and healthier children. Healthier children do better in school; they tend to get better grades and have more energy, and this can work to end the cycle of poverty that so often keeps people hungry.

Better Beginnings is now classified as a Perinatal program. Perinatal Programs provide groceries to pre- or postnatal program participants. This may include a hamper program as well as community kitchen programs. The goal of the Perinatal program is to support both mother and child during pregnancy and early years.

## Investors Group Event



*Investors Group provides leadership giving to the Food Bank. In addition to supporting the 2008 Website Enhancement Program, on March 12th Investors Group opened up its office space at Yonge and Eglinton to run an on-site Food Drive and Employee Giving Day for the Food Bank. Development Director, Gloria Baldwin gratefully receives a cheque from Investors Group for \$5,477. Thank you!*

# Exciting Partnerships & Programs

## Making Connections

Our 2008 Making Connections program is having another fantastic year! Over 5000 lbs of produce have been donated so far. Many of you have gone out of your way to make fresh food donations at our various fresh food drives across Toronto, including Green Barns Farmers Market and Whittamore's Farm. Together with The Stop, we have been able to accumulate thousands of pounds of produce to help support hungry people.

A big thank you goes out to the farmers involved: they include Ted Thorpe, Whittamore's Farm, Reesor Farm, Brooks' Farm, Stoddart Farms and all else who helped donate produce to support the Making Connections Program. And thank you to Zipcar for providing the transportation to and from farmer's markets.

All of this wonderful fresh produce is distributed to our clients through member agencies and it is also the basis for educational cooking workshops.

The Making Connections Programs supports local produce, local farmers and feeds hungry people in northern Toronto.



## Step up to the Plate!

### Run, Walk or Wheel to End Hunger with the North York Harvest Food Bank at the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon, September 28 2008.

The North York Harvest Food Bank is an official charity of the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon (STWM). Make your Waterfront Marathon, Half Marathon or 5k more meaningful by going the distance for us. Run or walk in honour of a loved one or to simply give something

back to your community. No matter which distance you participate in, your fundraising makes a difference!

To join the North York Harvest Food Bank Team, contact Mary Del Bianco at [mary@northyorkharvestfoodbank.com](mailto:mary@northyorkharvestfoodbank.com) or by telephone at 416 635 7771.

Help us step to the plate. On September 28th please walk, run or wheel to feed those in need and work to reduce hunger.

## Donation Nation

Donation Nation initiatives are no longer restricted to the school year - this summer, local sports clubs and teams participated in a Score for Hunger game day food drive. Our Pack to School program is back in action. Back packs are filled with goodies (lunch bags, snacks, school supplies and sport balls) to help children living in lower income homes start the school year off right. With the cancellation of Back to School and winter benefits for low income families, these supplies are more important than ever. We packed and distributed 200 bags to students by the start of school this September.

As always, during the school year – September to June – we encourage classes to get involved in Donation Nation food drive initiatives. We can now provide teachers and students from preschool to high school with more resources than ever to encourage in-class discussion and learning. Ask us about our Food School Curriculum.

We continue to be inspired every day by our city's youngest philanthropists and are always happy to support big ideas in any way we can. This past spring, we worked with the grade four classes at Havergal Junior School as they completed a Canstruction project four months in the making.

The project was enormous, encompassing virtually all aspects of the grade four curriculum, including math, history, art and social sciences. Upon completion, the finished project resulted in not only memorable learning opportunity but contributed over 200 hours of volunteer work and over 1,500 lbs in food donations to North York Harvest Food Bank. If you think your class might be interested in tackling a Canstruction project, let us know – Havergal has generously shared tips and learnings to help make other similar projects big successes as well.

## Fall Food Drive

**When:** September 29th to October 17th

**What:** Non-perishable foods

### Much needed items

- ✓ canned fruit and vegetables
- ✓ canned fish and meat
- ✓ canned or dried beans
- ✓ baby food and formula
- ✓ cooking oil
- ✓ canned stew and hearty soup

Please drop off donations at the following Loblaws locations

6228 Yonge St. Centre Point Mall (Yonge /Steeles Ave.E)

51 Gerry Fitzgerald (Dufferin/Steeles Ave. E)

5095 Yonge St, Empress Walk (Yonge St./Empress)

3501 Yonge St. (Yonge St./Yonge Blvd.)

2877 Bayview (Bayview/Sheppard)

## Fall Food Drive

To give a financial donation...

**Call** 416-635-7771

and ask for financial donations

**Give on-line** by going to [www.northyorkharvestfoodbank.com](http://www.northyorkharvestfoodbank.com)

**Mail a cheque** to

North York Harvest Food Bank  
640 Lawrence Avenue West  
Toronto, Ontario M6A 1B1

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640 Lawrence Avenue West  
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Tel.: (416) 635-7771

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