

## How a Food4Kids backpack fights hunger in the community

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Hunger. Given the relative affluence of our community, it's not something that many of us think about close to home. While incomes in our city are higher than the Ontario average — some people and families are struggling to make ends meet.

Although I'm grateful hunger is not something that I've personally experienced, I recognize that if you look beneath the surface, going to bed hungry is a reality for many Burlingtonians from low-income backgrounds.

According to our 2014 Vital Signs research, 41 per cent of local renters spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines affordable housing as costing less than 30 per cent of an individual or family's before-tax household income. Families living in a lower-income household have a hard time finding affordable shelter and most newcomers to Canada end up spending almost half of their income on rent.

Every day, parents in our city face the tough choice between paying for a roof overhead and putting food on the table. Here in Burlington, it is estimated that more than 3,400 children under 18 live in a low-income household. The hard reality is, people of all ages in our city go to bed hungry.

Formed just in November 2011, one local charitable organization is working hard to meet this reality head on. Food4Kids Hamilton Halton provides backpacks full of healthy food to at-risk, low-income or disadvantaged elementary school students who have limited or no access to food during weekends.

The launch of Food4Kids was inspired by a local 10-year-old boy who hadn't eaten over a weekend and was found alone on a cold, dark morning, waiting for a breakfast program to open. Food4Kids was founded to meet the needs of children like this young boy who find themselves in a similar situation.

To help feed kids over weekends, Food4Kids provides backpacks filled with healthy food. Volunteers help pack food that's delivered each Friday to schools. During the school year, the program delivers 900 food packages to more than 55 local schools.

A recipient of Burlington Community Foundation (BCF) grants, Food4Kids is also featured in a new video at [www.burlingtonfoundation.org/community-impact-video](http://www.burlingtonfoundation.org/community-impact-video). In this video you can learn more about the organization's great work and hear from executive director Lena Bassford. This year, Food4Kids is using the BCF grant toward funding their summer program. This program was designed to ensure these families have access to healthy food over the summer vacation.

Going to bed hungry is a reality for too many Burlington kids. When a child is hungry, their behaviour, performance at school and ability to concentrate can all be affected. Missing or skipping meals on a regular basis can have a lasting impact on a developing brain.

Vital Signs research helps to identify where grants can make the most impact in our community. You can read more about our grants here: [burlingtonfoundation.org/grant-awards](http://burlingtonfoundation.org/grant-awards) and learn about how you can help Food4Kids keep filling backpacks by visiting [food4kids.ca](http://food4kids.ca). Food4Kids is just one of many not-for-profit organizations doing meaningful work to strengthen our community, one backpack at a time.

Want to get involved? You can donate, volunteer or create a personal or corporate endowment by visiting [burlingtonfoundation.org](http://burlingtonfoundation.org). Contact Laura Pizzacalla at [lpizzacalla@burlingtonfoundation.org](mailto:lpizzacalla@burlingtonfoundation.org) or 905-639-0744 x221.

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