

## **HISTORY OF THE ELUCO GETHSEMANE ELUCO FOOD CUPBOARD**

The East London United Church Outreach (ELUCO) began in 1983 as a brainchild of Gethsemane United Church Minister Mary Weir. She wanted the churches in East London, namely: Rowntree, Richards, Siloam, and Gethsemane to work together. Her vision was more of a pulpit exchange, youth get-togethers, etc. Donna Denham, a city worker, was invited to speak to them about the needs of the community. She advised them about the needs of low income, single families, who needed an advocate to deal with problems with landlords, assessing information for their needs etc. She worked with the ELUCO Board for a few months.

After Donna left, the Board decided to hire two workers – one for Cheyenne (Oakville) area and later one for the Cascade (Marconi) area. Susan Eagle was hired for Cheyenne area of north east London. After Susan was hired, it was decided that they needed an Emergency Food Cupboard and that location would be Gethsemane. They built a small cupboard at the back of the church hall in the basement.

The food cupboard began in the fall of 1987 serving the area of Dundas to Adelaide, Adelaide to Fanshawe Park Road, Fanshawe Park Road to Clarke Road, Clarke Road to Dundas. Two families were helped. In 1988 we had 19; 1989 - 18; 1990 - 60; 1991 – 165; and in 1992 – 175. Each year the numbers increased and in 2011 656 families were served.

In the beginning, it was Susan, the minister, and the secretary of Gethsemane and two other people who came out to help with distribution. All food donated was from members of Gethsemane.

In 1992, Helen Pickard was hired as the part time secretary of the church and took on the extra task of looking after the food cupboard. In those days they depended on donations from Arva, Calvary, Putnam, Siloam, Robinson, Rowntree and Gethsemane United Churches. Later we started getting donations from St Albans Anglican and St Lawrence Presbyterian Churches, Evelyn Harrison, St Anne's and Hillcrest Schools, as well as small groups and individuals. We were also receiving cash donations, mostly from Arva. As we got busier Helen asked for volunteers from our congregation – it was hit and miss at first.

In 1996, Helen retired as secretary and Marion Clarke was hired. Helen stayed on as Co-ordinator of the food cupboard and Marion handled the phone calls. They became a team!! The number of recipients was growing too and they had to get volunteers to commit to helping on a regular basis. With cash coming in as well, Marion and Helen shopped for groceries. They even bought Christmas baskets for about 12 families for a few years. After about three or four years, Peggy and Bill Rivard from Siloam volunteered to do the shopping for them. We were spending between 300 and 500 dollars each time. The shelves were well stocked. In 2012, approximately \$1,000.00 a month is being spent on groceries in addition to those items donated.

On June 30th 2009, Gethsemane closed. Helen and Marion were not sure what was going to do about the food cupboard. Siloam volunteers decided they would man the cupboard

for the summer. The cupboard was closed for September and October and reopened again in November 2009. Gladys Beaton and her volunteers took over the Wednesday group and Helen came back on Fridays. Currently, it is open on Wednesdays and Fridays from 9:30 to 12 noon. The ELUCO Food Cupboard has very dedicated volunteers who not only distribute food to the needy but shop as well.

Volunteers at the beginning were: Dorothy Nichols and Betty (Shea) Whitfield. Volunteers during Helen and Marions time were: Audrey Thede; Gwen Boles, Joan Sterling; Glenna Madsen; Rosetta Larder, Jean Holland; Jean Johnston; Elva Michel; Betty (Shea) Whitfield; Jean Beavers; Peggy and Bill Rivard (Shoppers). Volunteers since 2009: Gladys Beaton; Mary Ella Pettigrew; Anne Donkervoort; Lori Ingray; Jo-Ann Gramlich; Marg Palmer, Judy White; Gladys Douglas;; Ruth Kanu; Marion Clarke; Jane and Dave Hilton (shoppers).

**THANK S TO ALL VOLUNTEERS for their help for the last 26 years. .**

The Food Cupboard moved to Rowntree Memorial July 19, 2012, and will be there until the affordable housing project ``Gethsemane Gardens`` is completed. The London Affordable Housing Foundation, has promised to provide a free 50 year lease in the new building to house the ELUCO Food Cupboard and to provide space for a community worker .

Helen has dedicated 20 years to the Food Cupboard and feel blessed to have had this opportunity. Marion Clarke has been Helen`s best friend and helper for 16 years and ELUCO has much to thank them for. The last three years Helen and Marion have been in charge of the Friday group only and no longer have to worry about the shopping. They just come to work and they say ``Thank God``!

They see people who have recently lost their jobs, who have donated before and now need our help. They also see people who for health reasons cannot work and need to supplement their income with some food from us. There are also the working poor, single parents, grandparents looking after their grandchildren, single men and women and the list goes on. They have got to know many of them. They are nice people who are down on their luck.

Helen and Marion will hopefully continue volunteering as long as they can.