

Outflow Ministry Works at Street Level

By Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

It is refreshing to learn of sincere, hard-working community members who are willing to share their time and talents to reach out to others who some might cross the street to avoid. If you ever had an uncomfortable feeling when about to encounter a "street person", you can only imagine how it feels to be on the receiving end. But now the receiving end is much more positive with the opening and first anniversary of a new street ministry called "Outflow". As their flyer states, "Remember... The #1 thing missing in ministry to the homeless, the poor and oppressed is someone willing to build a relationship."

The signage marked "Outflow" is quite evident on the Waterloo Street storefront of their Saint John location near Union, which is a drop-in, 4-weekday evenings from 7 to 9 pm. The amazing part of this good news story is that generous volunteers man and provide food and drink for the operation with very little advertising or solicitation. It just seems to appear. If you've had a supper, meeting or event with leftover refreshments, look no further, there is an outlet for them, where donations are welcome. In fact there are two ways to support Outflow.

The second opportunity is Outflow's Sunday evening dinner which is offered in Grace (formerly St. John and St. Stephen) Presbyterian Church on Hazen Ave. The church has kindly provided the gym and kitchen space, so rent is saved for other Outflow expenses. A meal, fellowship and optional service, which follows dinner, takes place every Sunday evening at 5:30. Outflow volunteers are never quite sure how they will feed the usual 150-200 or so who appear for Sunday dinner but somehow the food arrives from many sources and is shared with those who might otherwise go without.

Other churches and organizations are very generous with their time and providing the basics but few are open in this time frame. In fact, a number of new meal programs are sprouting up around our community giving rise to a concerted effort to tally and take stock of them to assess the needs and those who are so generously reaching out. For example, Trinity Church, Germain Street Baptist, St. Mary's and St. Bartholomew's Ecumenical Saturday Supper Ministry in East Saint John to name just a few lesser known examples of community meal programs.

Jayme Hall and Philip Appleby ran into each other back in February 2008 and discovered they both had the same dream and that they really can come true. They had met some years before at college. After realizing their visions to help others were similar they posed the question, "How can we feed the hungry? Where do we start? First of all a name, our desire was to have the love of God flow out to the people. And so Outflow was born! " They discovered that many other people had the same aspirations and together volunteers from near and far and every denomination joined them to serve a warm meal every Sunday evening.

Outflow is now a registered charity with the Canada Revenue Agency and has a board of 5, who each volunteer for a night. It is headed by Jayme Hall and includes Philip's wife Melanie, a young mother, Outflow's treasurer, who volunteers every Tuesday evening on Waterloo Street. Initially she says the small group was "scared to death the food and funds would not materialize" but they did, even with rent to pay monthly. "I can't cook for seventy" she says but she does her best and the rest flows in. "I get back more than I put in" she adds, noting that she meets people she would never otherwise have the opportunity to. "If I got into trouble on the street fifty people would come" she states, confident of their friendship and bond. Although both founders come from a background of religious training, it isn't "pushed". Those who wish to stay for a message and music may.

Ruth Rayburn-Arseneault is impressed with the young couple and all the volunteers and donors who magically appear just when need most. She is an outgoing individual who warmly greets all arriving at Grace Church for the Sunday suppers and makes them feel welcome. She believes lifting them up with a helping hand and basics as simple as a comfortable bed and feeling of personal safety can turn lives around. Information: 849-7792



Outflow Ministry operates at two Saint John locations to serve the needs of those down on their luck and living on the edge. Philip Appleby is one of the group's founders and is pictured outside their Waterloo Street drop-in location.

Photo by Peter Walsh-Telegraph-Journal



Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation.

Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880. To view other Community Profiles go to www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca