

Home — and hungry — for the holidays

If you have school-aged children or grandchildren, there's no need to tell you about the excitement they feel at this time of year. School concerts, tournaments, recitals, class trips and special events at school combine to ensure that everyone under the age of 12 — and quite a few over it — is keyed up and ready to head home for the summer.

But that summer won't be as idyllic for some kids as for others. For families struggling to make ends meet, the school year is a blessing. Why? The nutritious breakfast and snack programs provided at more than 12 elementary, junior and secondary schools throughout Kawartha Lakes.

Thanks to those programs, and the dedicated volunteers who run them, thousands of students had a great start to the day, with bagels, milk, pancakes, eggs, pure fruit juice, yogurt, granola bars, fresh fruit and more during the 2009-2010 school year.

But when summer comes, those programs disappear, and families once again face the costs of providing breakfast and snacks at home. Many of those families will turn to food banks supported by Kawartha Lakes Food Source for help, although many of them won't. And that can be a problem, since the shelves at the Food Source are emptier in the summer than at any other time of the year. The dented cans and rewrapped boxes known as reclamation food are much harder to come by in the summer; indeed, the Food Source's supply has started to dwindle earlier than ever before. Our generous donors leave on holiday, meaning no workplace food drives, and obviously no special school initiatives either.

So summer can be a struggle for the Food Source, our member agencies and, most importantly, the hungry people we serve. Most needed are precisely the kinds of things you'd picture kids eating for lunch — canned pasta, tuna, macaroni and cheese dinner, canned fruit and peanut butter.

If you're having an anniversary or birthday party this summer, we hope you'll consider asking guests to bring food donations to the Food Source in lieu of gifts. Perhaps your cottage association or sports group might have a small food drive. You'd be amazed at how far the Food Source and its agencies can stretch those donations!

If your garden is thriving, maybe you could donate some vegetables, which are always a hit with food bank clients who often cannot afford fresh produce.

Enjoy your summer — it's a wonderful time to appreciate all that Kawartha Lakes has to offer. As you pick strawberries and admire fields of ripening barley, take a moment to think of those less fortunate, especially the children who didn't choose to have empty tummies.

Nancy Payne is president of Kawartha Lakes Food Source. If you're interested in donating to KLFS or becoming a volunteer, call 324-0707.