

Campus Food Bank experiences influx in student client numbers

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The cost of living and tuition aren't the only numbers on the rise at universities, as the University of Alberta's Campus Food Bank continues to experience a consistent rise in their number of clients.

Although a small margin of yearly increase is an expected occurrence, the Food Bank's executive director, Lauren Price, has quickly picked up on an out-of-the-ordinary trend in the numbers.

"I noticed already starting in May, when I started in this position, that there was considerably more clients each month registering, as well as just more clients requesting food hampers from us. It wasn't a huge increase, but it was a consistent increase through the summer months," Price explained.

Things didn't end there either, and when the semester started up in full swing, the Food Bank experienced a huge influx in student visitors.

"September hit and we had 27 new clients versus three [from last year] and in October we had 29. So it was a really big difference, and November looks just as busy. We've already registered, I think, 15 new clients in just as many days," Price said.

She went on to say that this year has shown a rise in the number of international students and graduate students using their services. While the obvious factors behind the increase point to rising tuition and cost of living, Price feels there's more going on for international students.

"The economies abroad are not faring so well, and it seems like a lot of international students, since they can't get the same loans we get, really depend on their family as their main source of income," she noted.

As far as local students increasing their use, Price gets the impression that financial aid hasn't been able to meet the needs of students.

"They're coming to us saying that their student loans simply aren't enough," she said.

In light of the recent influx, Students' Union President Janelle Morin also remains adamant that affordability is at the root of the issue.

"As soon as education becomes unaffordable, you see problems like an increase in need for the Campus Food Bank," she stated.

"How can we expect students to devote time to their studies when they



SUPPLY AND DEMAND Lauren Price displays the recent food bank donations.

can't even scrape together money for food? I think it's important to understand that unless students' basic needs are taken care of, it's impossible for them to do what they need to do as students," Morin added.

While the Food Bank isn't able to actually log the number of students per year who require their services, they estimate that last year they distributed enough food hampers to feed 1700 people.

In order to accommodate the increase in clients, Price explained that this year's initiatives have a greater weight placed on them.

"We really did push the trick-or-treat event and we ended up raising more food than we've ever raised before. And that will stock our shelves for a few months at least," she said.

When those supplies will start to run out, which Price estimates will be around December, she's confident about help and support from the University community.

"Already different faculties and departments and offices on campus

have contacted me about donating at Christmas time which is excellent, because that way, whatever supply is going to be diminished by the Halloween food drive is going to be replaced by a lot of smaller food drives on campus," she explained.

Although the rise in clients has been unexpected, Price is also able to see the positives in the response that the Food Bank has received. She noted that in the past, initiatives which promote the various forms of student financial aid have also been coupled with a push to raise awareness about what the Food Bank does on campus.

"In a way, I think it's a good thing that we're seeing an increase, [even though], obviously, it's not an ideal situation. But I feel like our past awareness pushes have really tried to tell students that they don't need to be destitute and it isn't something they should be ashamed about. It isn't the same as an inner city food bank—we're just helping students on their way to success."