

Oct. 21, 2009

I Hope Everyone Who Reads this Will Speak Out

The following is a series of letters to the editor in the Barrie Examiner. I can not tell you the outrage I felt when I read the first letter from Rachel Payett had me steamed pretty good. You see Rachel needed the help of the Barrie Food Bank for the first and I hope the last time during Thanksgiving. I could comment before but will hold my tongue until you read all three letters that make up the trilogy, so here they are with my comments to follow.

Food bank failed to deliver

Recently, I had the unfortunate experience of visiting the Barrie Food Bank. When I left my home that morning, I was greatly humbled by my need to access the service provided by the Barrie Food Bank.

A friend had mentioned the food bank and urged me to go and seek assistance. I did, after much hesitation. I normally do not need this service.

However, I enrolled at York University in September and have had to cover my own expenses for school supplies and travel to Toronto while I wait for my OSAP funding.

This extra expense and regular household expenses, and my daughter's school expenses, have proved too much financially and I realized with Thanksgiving just around the corner, a little extra help would be much appreciated.

Which brings me to the reason of my letter. During my intake at the food bank, I was informed I made too much money and would be denied approval for assistance.

I began to explain my situation and was abruptly told that it was, 'Too bad, you're not approved.'

I left feeling as if perhaps something more should have or could have been done. I then proceeded to ask to speak to a director or someone who would at least take the time to listen to me.

The lady who did my intake overheard me talking to the receptionist, then pulled her aside and proceeded to have a whispered conversation. The receptionist then re-informed me I was denied and there as no one else I could speak to. I then asked how I could appeal a decision, or contact a member of the board of directors to voice my concern at the treatment I received. Subsequently, the woman, who did my intake came out of her office told me to leave in a raised voice.

I think it is also important to note she did this in a crowded waiting room. Not wanting to cause a scene, I said thank you and left.

On the food bank's website, the organization states, 'Our mission is: To provide temporary food relief to individuals and families of our community who are in need, and to serve as a resource to encourage and guide them along the road to self sufficiency. In our treatment of those who come to us for assistance, we strive to demonstrate compassion and respect for their dignity, and to serve as a source of encouragement.'

My question is how was this achieved in my treatment that day? Where was the compassion and respect for my dignity or that of my daughter's?

How was my emergency situation attended to?

I was yelled at and dismissed; I was humiliated and degraded in a room full of people. There was no compassion or understanding of my situation or even a willingness to try and understand it.

This is unbelievable as it was Thanksgiving weekend and my family would have no food to celebrate.

I have never before accessed the food bank's services, and believe it will be a long time before I work up the courage to ask for any help again.

In closing, I am sorry to have to say this organization failed to deliver on its mission statement, and in writing this letter, hope that there are others out there that do not have to suffer the humiliation of this sort of treatment.

I am also forwarding a copy to Barrie MP Patrick Brown and Barrie MPP Aileen Carroll, in the hopes that this will not happen to another person.

Rachel Payette Barrie

Saying no isn't easy for Barrie Food Bank

Since Rachel Payette was declined assistance, I can understand how she feels from her perspective that the Barrie Food Bank failed to deliver.

Out of respect for the privacy of Ms. Payette, I cannot comment further on her personal affairs and the reasons she was refused.

However, I would like to explain the policies of the Barrie Food Bank.

We are not government funded in any way and our supporters want to be sure that we are assisting those in greatest need.

We review the income and expenses of the applicant in a confidential interview, and assistance is provided to everyone who has a genuine need, not necessarily everyone who asks.

Most people who come to a food bank desperately need our help, but there are those rare occasions when we have to say no because the income of the individual is adequate and there is no verifiable emergency.

From personal experience, I can testify that saying no never gets easier, and it is one of the hardest parts of our job.

It would be far easier to accommodate everyone regardless of income and thus avoid this kind of controversy, especially in a public forum like the newspaper.

In my opinion, we are only doing our job in focusing our services on those who are in greatest need, and we are indeed delivering on our mission in as responsible a manner as we can.

Dennis Willer Executive director Barrie Food Bank

Dear Mr. Willer

(Re: Saying no isn't easy for Barrie Food Bank, in the Oct. 17 edition of the Examiner)

An open letter to Dennis Willer, executive director of the Barrie Food Bank
Mr. Willer, I'm sure you don't have a clue about how Rachel Payette felt after

being denied food at the Barrie Food Bank.

We know how you are funded.

According to your 2008 tax return (available on the government's Canada Revenue Agency website), the Barrie Food Bank's total revenue was \$299,233 which included \$11,845 in interest/investment income.

That means the cash value of donations equals \$287,388. You spent \$53,000 for part-time labor /employees and \$172,000 on salaries, wages and benefits. You have a balance of \$371,698 on deposit.

I don't see a specific line where you actually purchased any food.

You did, however, spend \$45,857 on office supplies and expenses and \$15,823 on donated/purchased supplies and assets.

Is that the food part?

Who made you chief accountant for the needy? You wouldn't even give Ms. Payette a jar of peanut butter.

Thank goodness for organizations like the Grocery Assistance Program (GAP), an alternate food bank where the hungry can actually go and make a withdrawal. I only hope that those supporting you will finally get it.

(Editor's note: A Canada Revenue Agency financial statement document for the Barrie Food Bank, obtained by the Examiner, shows it spent \$15,181 on food for the year ending March 31, 2008. This is the most recent information available.)

If anybody reading the above letters don't get pissed off at the way Rachel was treated you simply could not have a heart. Here is a woman who placed her trust and self dignity in the hands of at least 3 people who claim to have compassion and was let down miserably. I can only imagine that Rachel is not an exception and this indignity has been played on many others by these same people many times.

Sure there are scam artists who try to put one over on the Food Bank and other organizations. But to treat Rachel and her immediate need in the way described is unforgivable. Mean spirited comes to mind. Congratulations to Michael Procher for standing up to Willer and Speaking Out and Speaking up for every Rachel in Barrie. Good for Rachel for Speaking Out and standing up for herself and her self dignity.

Now to the meat and potato's. Here is an organization that asks for donations in the name of the poor and needy only to pay themselves with more than half of what comes in. I am sick and tired of these charlatans claiming to have only the concern for those in need and then lining their own pockets. Out of \$287,388 donations people were paid \$225,000 for distributing or not as in Rachel's case food to the needy. Only \$15,181 was actually used to buy food. Folks something is wrong with this picture and it is not Rachel who is the Scam Artist. Here is the link to the Revenue Canada Site for this organization Revenue Canada Link

Once I get a hold of something it gets me looking at things closer to home. So I decided to have a look at our very own Sharing Place to see how it's performance would stand up. Not very well I am sad to say. My understanding is that there is only one paid employee who just happens to be our very own Don Evans. If I am reading the return correctly it seems that Mr. Malarkey Evans is

pulling down a cool \$51,000 for a job until he won it was done by volunteers. So Don seems to have 2 part time jobs one as councillor and the other at the Sharing Place, which brings in a nice round \$74,000 annually for a guy who I believe also collects his pensions. While some are turned away at the Sharing Place 25% of revenues slides smoothly into Mr. Evan's pocket if indeed he is the only paid employee. If his pay is less then I am sure I will be corrected. But it certainly is what it says on line 4880 of their return. Then there is also on line 5010 an expenditure of \$19,800 for Management and administration expenses. So just how much are the poor getting from the \$199,000 raised in 2008????? For me this is nothing more than a bunch of Malarkey. Here is the link to Revenue Canada Link Sharing Place Quite frankly it is time that the public got an insight to the dark underbelly of where these organizations spend our donations and who gets what. It's too bad that it takes someone in need who had the gonads to Speak Out like Rachel did only because she said Enough was Enough. We should all say Enough is Enough starting today.

jim tolnai

We Still Need a Forensic Audit
We Still Need a Judicial Inquiry
We Need to Impeach Mayor Ron Stevens