

“Guelph’s shining star”

One of the city’s best-kept secrets, Shelldale Better Beginnings, Better Futures, celebrates its 25th anniversary – as it struggles for program funding

As you drop some coins into the donation jar at the cashier, or sign off on yet another sponsorship form, you’ve probably wondered just how effective your charitable dollars really are. What if you knew that virtually every single penny of your donation was ending up on the front lines, serving Guelph’s most vulnerable children and families? What if you knew that your charitable investment was giving local families a hand up, rather than a “handout”? At Shelldale Better Beginnings, Better Futures, each donation really counts. For 25 years, this incredible non-profit has been striving to break the chain of poverty, delivering the most critical needs to make children and families stronger. Now, it needs our support more than ever.

25-year-old non-profit Shelldale Better Beginnings, Better Futures (short-form: BBBF) is relying more and more on donations from the community. The need for family support services in Guelph—and the cost of delivering these services—is growing larger and larger, while government funding is not. Now, the organization is finding itself struggling financially, and, as with any non-profit that is not receiving adequate funds, it has had no choice but to decrease programming.

The first service to be cut was a youth cross-age peer mentoring program that paired children in grades 4-6 with mentors from grades 7 and 8. The program’s benefits were vast, covering everything from improved academic performance to better parental relationships. It is sorely missed by the neighbourhood’s youth, but the money was simply not there to continue to facilitate it.

“The mentoring program was a support to our young students who require guidance and support in their lives,” said Steve Viveiros, Principal at Willow Road Public School. “The students could look up to their mentors and know that they were available to support and guide them through the challenges of being a young person. Both mentor and mentee students felt a sense of accomplishment and belonging through this program.”

BBBF has decided to turn to us – the people who live in this city, who are directly benefited by the incredible work of its programs—for the support it needs before time runs out.

Other much-needed children’s community programs are in jeopardy

Putting smiles on the faces of hungry children

Five days a week, BBBF has its morning Breakfast Club, where it serves dozens of free, hot breakfasts to children whose families struggle to put nutritious food on the table. Not only does this program take the pressure off parents to stretch their already-stretched dollars towards providing a healthy breakfast, it also ensures that no child in the community goes hungry—ever.

Summer camp for 200 children!

Each summer, BBBF attracts over 200 children to attend a week-long summer camp with nutritious snacks, fun activities, and off-site trips. Though the camp costs \$125 per child, families are only charged a \$10 registration fee. This camp ensures local children have a safe place to play, and opportunities to be social, to be active, and to get fresh air. Without it, many of them would spend the majority of their summer indoors.

A better beginning = a better future

BBBF has helped nearly 600 pre-schoolers learn essential skills needed to start their school journey, through programs that encourage development of confidence, creativity, competence, and more. Without this advantage, many of these children would not receive adequate stimulation and learning activities needed to keep up in their first school years and beyond. These programs lay the foundation that is vital for success in school. Additionally, the organization helps parents learn parenting skills, meet their family’s basic needs, and access other services in the community. It recognizes that supporting parents is not only empowering, but also an effective long-term strategy that helps to build strong children who are able to break the cycle of poverty.

All of the desperately-needed initiatives mentioned above—and much, much more—are currently at risk, meaning hundreds of Guelph’s children, youth and teens are at risk.

A charity that invests your donation directly in the community

Serving the area between Silvercreek Parkway, Paisley Road, Edinburgh Road and Speedvale Avenue for 25 years and counting, BBBF’s staff and 200+ volunteers have made powerful waves in the city’s most vulnerable community, offering social supports and programs that enrich the quality of life for more than 750 local children and their families.

With a mandate of “building a better world through building a better community,” BBBF provides these preventative and support programs year-long. Community members, as BBBF calls its program participants, comprise every demographic from newborns to seniors, and, accordingly, its programs cater to many differing needs in the community. Its programs have staff and volunteers who speak various languages, especially significant as the neighbourhood has the highest immigrant population in the city, at nearly 28%, and is also expecting a significant influx of Syrian refugee families in the coming months.

“Our programs have been proven to improve skill sets and prepare children and families for their school and work lives,” said Lorri Sauvé, BBBF’s Program Director.

“A recent 12-month evaluation showed that the confidence of children in our after-school programs increased by 63%, and competence increased by 82.5%. We are helping to nurture children who will want to stay in school and be ready for the workplace. We know that if they stay in school and graduate, they are more likely to have future success.”

“We know unequivocally from research that a child’s early experience sets their trajectory for health and success into adulthood,” said Rita Sethi, Director of Community Health and Wellness and Chief Nursing Officer at Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. “Shelldale Better Beginnings Better Futures provides those experiences [for children] on a daily basis.”

A preventative support model that enriches lives

The BBBF program has been in Guelph since 1991, and is one of eight Better Beginnings models implemented in socio-economically marginalized communities in Ontario. The model was originally designed to prevent children from experiencing poor developmental outcomes, which then require costly health, education and social services, and the study originally focused on children from birth to age four, and their parents, in the BBBF programs.

The community has since expanded the target age range of its prevention programs to include youth and teens. This preventative strategy has been proven successful through a ten-year longitudinal study—and



These are just some of the programs and services BBBF offers to its community members for little or no cost:

- Peer Parent family home visitors for new mothers (in various languages)
- Baby Day drop-in program for infants & parents
- Drop-in programs for children from birth to 4 years
- Kindergarten readiness programs for preschoolers
- Breakfast club every weekday
- Youth soccer club in partnership with Guelph Police Services
- Youth cooking classes
- Girls-only art groups
- After-school child, youth & teen programs
- After-school Helpers program
- March Break & summer camps
- Teen leadership, sports & recreation programs
- Various workshops offered for teens and parents
- Special events, including annual Teen Turkey Dinner & off-site trips
- Parenting support
- System navigation and community referrals
- Community Garden



through the words of BBBF's community members themselves.

"BBBF is Guelph's shining star," said community member Amrita in a nomination of BBBF for Guelph's Oaktree Project.

"I was amazed when I . . . discovered that every child can be fed to start the day off right and have a brain fuelled for the school day, parents can have guidance and support to help with their challenges, children have after-school activities, women can come together to share and learn in a safe environment . . . families from all different nations come together to grow produce at the community garden plots. Truly, I have never seen anything like this."

"If it wasn't for [BBBF], I wouldn't be who I am today," said Andy, another community member. "They've taught me so much about life and social skills."

Guelph's Chief of Police Jeff DeRuyter is a major supporter of the Better Beginnings preventative model.

"Organizations like BBBF set a positive example for the entire city," he said. "Some of my most inspiring and meaningful interactions have come from volunteering with the community members, and being around the children and teens at their programs. We get the chance to give these children positive role models and show them that we are here to help them and protect them. We value these relationships we form in the community."

Recently, two youths at BBBF, new immigrants from Nepal, were selected to speak to Guelph Police Services' new recruits about their culture and their experience coming to Canada.

"Not only was that a confidence-builder for the two youths, it was an eye-opener for our recruits," added DeRuyter. "They got a very personal viewpoint on the immigration experience. There are definitely benefits on both sides."

Supporting Guelph's children every step of the way

BBBF provides wrap-around supports through every stage of childhood. Because many new (or expecting) parents may not have the confidence or language skills to seek out its assistance, BBBF actively sends peer parent family home visitors into the community to meet these parents and help them access both the program and services offered by BBBF, and other vital social services that the family may not otherwise access.

"Through our peer parent family visitor program, our neighbourhood's families learn that we are offering supports for their child as they grow – all the way through to the age where they are ready to seek employment," said Sauvé. "Our peer parents accompany the new/expecting families to Baby Day drop-in, and from there, the programs extend to toddler drop-in, kindergarten readiness, after-school programs, and teen drop-in and leadership programs. At every age, the child has somewhere to go to learn, develop new skills, make friends, and find support for life's challenges. I'm proud to say we have teens that have been in the programs since birth, and now they are applying to college."

Seamless supports to additional resources

As BBBF is housed in the Shelldale Centre Community Hub, it can literally walk its community members down the hall to access Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public

Health, Family & Children's Services, Canadian Mental Health Association, Guelph Community Health Centre, Playsense, Upper Grand District School Board, and Immigrant Services. BBBF has fostered significant relationships with these services, eliminating the barriers for its community members to access these important resources.

"Family & Children's Services, as a proud partner of BBBF, continues to focus on family well-being," said Sheila Markle, Executive Director of Family & Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County. "We are proud of what we have accomplished together over the past 25 years in providing services and support to children and families in the neighbourhood."

A challenge to the people of Guelph

As BBBF continues to do good work in the community—too busy over the past 25 years to stop and toot its own horn—one of its corporate supporters, the Guelph-based Skyline Group of Companies, feels it is time to put some much-deserved spotlight on the organization.

"For decades, BBBF has been working in the background to keep families in this community healthy and happy," said Jason Ashdown, Co-Founder of the Skyline Group of Companies, and a member of the Board for BBBF. "We first saw the value of this organization fifteen years ago. Many of the tenants and staff in our buildings were making use of their amazing services, and we knew we had to support them."

"It's time to show the public just how impactful BBBF is. We're lucky to have worked with this group for so many years, and we see first-hand how much they benefit Guelph. We want to challenge the Guelph community to come together and donate to this deserving organization. The philanthropy of Guelph's public, and its businesses, can help to ensure that BBBF is around for another 25 years."

It will be "all hands on deck" for BBBF in the coming months, as it is presented with the challenge of providing the same desperately-needed resources for many of the refugee families expected in Guelph.

"The imminent arrival of the refugees is another excellent reason to support BBBF right now," Ashdown added.

"These families are coming to Guelph, and will rely on the safety net of resources, programming and support that BBBF delivers every day. Imagine arriving in a strange new country, alone, with very little money. Imagine struggling with a new language while trying to apply for a driver's licence, trying to enrol your children in school, or trying to find a job. BBBF gives these citizens a fighting chance to land on their feet—sooner rather than later."

"If you feel like you 'missed the boat' on the most effective way to contribute to the refugee cause, or if you want to help families (and especially children) in need in our own community, then BBBF should be your charity of choice."

Donating is as simple as visiting the BBBF website at bbbfguelph.ca.

In the past year, BBBF has:

- Served more than 8,000 breakfasts to nearly 100 children, through Breakfast Club (served 5 days a week!)
- Facilitated workshops and seminars for 279 parents
- Helped 125 teens and 120 youth through after-school and teen programs
- Offered summer camp for 236 youth
- Facilitated preschool children's programs for 589 children
- Completed 182 visits (511 hours) with 50 families through Peer Parents Program
- Distributed 125 backpacks
- Trained its staff to become HIGH FIVE accredited (a certification that ensures Ontario recreation programs support healthy child development)
- Recruited and retained staff who are members of the Poverty Task Force, Wellbeing Initiative, Guelph Wellington Employment Training Committee, Local Immigration Partnership, and Growing Great Kids
- Had staff as guest speakers at the University of Guelph, University of Waterloo, and Conestoga College
- Contributed a grand total of 16,419 hours of volunteerism to the Guelph community

Quick facts about the community BBBF serves:

- 50% higher concentration of single-parent families than the Guelph average
- Highest percentage of families below the low-income cut-off, at 16%
- 23% concentration of families with annual income totaling less than \$30K
- 23% concentration of people aged 25-64 who have not completed high school
- Highest immigrant population in Guelph, at 27.5%

- Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Report Cards on the Well-Being of Children

