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## HUB PROVIDES MIGRANT WORKERS WITH MUCH NEEDED ITEMS

SATBIR SINGH  
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Doors to a community hub for migrant workers had not yet opened, but residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake had begun pulling into the parking lot at Cornerstone Community Church 20 minutes prior, patiently waiting to submit their donations.

Julia Buxton-Cox unlocked the door to the portable located in the church parking lot and the number of people providing donations was nonstop.

The hub was created to provide migrant workers in the community with free clothes and other household items donated by the community. It is open

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**IMPACTING YOUR  
COMMUNITY**

Inside the community hub set up for migrant workers to access clothes and household items. In this photo are Julia Buxton-Cox (left) and, from the Caribbean Workers Outreach Project, Donna Brown.

Satbir Singh/Metroland

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# 'THIS COMMUNITY HAS A HUGE HEART'

Continued from front

Thursdays from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. for both migrant workers to come by and for residents to make donations.

"This community has a huge heart," Buxton-Cox said.

The word about the hub spread through the Buy Nothing NOTL Facebook group, of which Buxton-Cox is the administrator. There are about 16 volunteers who help sort through the donated items and assist the workers when they arrive, and the NOTL Library has also jumped on board providing a space outside the portable for free WiFi and other resources.

Buxton-Cox said that, for a long time, migrant workers have "been the forgotten community, overlooked and marginalized."

"I think it's time we have a place here in town that was dedicated to them."

To make the hub possible, a group with the unofficial name of Niagara Community Partners was formed. Buxton-Cox is joined in the group by pastor Michelle Mercer from Gateway Community Church, Donna Brown of Caribbean Workers Outreach Project and Jane Andres with Niagara Worker's Welcome.

All four share a similar mindset of supporting migrant workers, but Brown said prior to COVID-19, while all these resource groups were available, they operated in vacuums.

"We weren't sharing resources, we weren't working together," Brown said. But now in an established partnership, Brown was happy to see the community step up.

"The community is so supportive," Brown said.

NOTL residents Beverley Ryan and Patrick Wilson dropped by to make their donation, and called the initiative "really important."

"There's a general feeling that the workers who come in from out of the country are a significant contributor to our economy," Wilson said.

And those migrant workers are feeling the love.

"It is good to know that you



Satbir Singh/Metroland

Clockwise from left: Niagara-on-the-Lake Library staff were set up outside the community hub to provide migrant workers with additional resources such as free WiFi. In this photo are library staff Mariana van Berkum and Max Roberts Ramos; Farm worker Andrew Smith (left) came to the community hub for some clothing. Along with Smith is Jane Andres from Niagara Worker's Welcome; Outside the community hub that has been created to provide migrant workers with a space to access clothing and other household needs; Donna Brown and volunteer Beatrice Campbell work together as boxes of donations are submitted.

guys here appreciate us coming here to work and you give back to us," said Andrew Smith, who has been coming to NOTL for many years now to work on a local farm.

Smith added that being able to have access to these items helps workers hold on to money that is required for more important things, such as, particularly for him, sending his children to college.

While this hub came together through a federal COVID-19

grant for farm workers, Buxton-Cox said the portable will be off the church property later this year so additional funding is required, and they hope to establish a permanent home somewhere in town.

For now, the space is exactly what has been needed, Buxton-Cox said. They have even gone as far as to renovate it a bit, put up country flags of the workers and photos of the workers.

"I really want the community to come out on Thursdays — not

only to see this place and what they've helped create, but to meet the workers," Buxton-Cox said.

The Thursday four-hour slot was chosen because it's when many workers come into Virgil to do their groceries and banking, and at the same time it aligns with the Bikes for Farm Workers program.

For people looking to donate, major needs include frying pans and large cooking pots, microwaves, kettles, toasters, men's

jeans or work pants sizes 32 to 38 and men's button down long-sleeve shirts. In the coming weeks, winterwear will be needed.

If interested in volunteering, contact Buxton-Cox at 905-483-9717 or [jbuxtoncox@bell.net](mailto:jbuxtoncox@bell.net).

**STORY BEHIND THE STORY:** A new community hub for migrant workers has opened in town. Reporter Satbir Singh checked in on the impact the initiative is having.