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Food needs prompt move

On The House move is essential as the Strandon venue has reached capacity

CHARITY

Will Johnston

Growing demand in New Plymouth has led a food-rescue charity to expand its distribution centre.

On The House will move its Thursday free store from Holy Trinity Church in Strandon to Northpoint Baptist Church in Bell Block next month.

Terry Hancock, general manager of On The House, said he had been looking for a new premises for a while and the move was essential as the Strandon venue reached capacity.

"The new location provides more space, a better experience for volunteers and privacy for visitors," he said.

"We've put a lot of energy into removing that cloak of shame, we hope people who may have seen it as a barrier before will feel comfortable coming here."

Last year, the organisation redistributed 244,770kg of surplus food, the equivalent of 540,000 meals, which flowed through its four free stores, 12 regional food banks and more than 50 community organisations.

In November, Stratford's free store opened to expand On The House's services into central and South Taranaki, while partnerships with the YMCA's Te Whare o Tapatahi night shelter provided regular meals for rough sleepers.

Stratford, Moturoa and New Plymouth stores regularly saw more than 160 households per evening.

Stratford set a record last month, serving 181 households in a single session, while over-65 sessions saw a record 87 pensioners in one night.

"Obviously, it's a concern that people are struggling and do need food and the costs are going up," Hancock said.

"We hear a lot of stories about how people are doing it tough. Some of them are needing ongoing support, it's not a one-off thing that they need support every week."

When Bell Block's free store opens on March 19 at the church's Mangati Rd site, demand is expected to increase.

Northpoint Baptist Church pastor Clayton Riddle said while there were food



Northpoint Baptist Church pastor Clayton Riddle and On The House general manager Terry Hancock have teamed up and will open a food store in Bell Block next month.

PHOTOS: VANESSA LAURIE/TARANAKI DAILY NEWS

banks in New Plymouth and Waitara, there was nothing in Bell Block to support families who needed food.

"We recognise in Bell Block there's a gap around food security," he said.

"Over a 12 month period, there's probably going to be 6000 to 10,000 food parcels that go out through our building here through the partnership."

As demand for food rises, On The House was poised to rescue more surplus food, but its current facilities were stretched.

Hancock said that with suppliers ready to provide extra food, without expanded cold storage, improved sorting space, a refrigerated truck and volunteers, much of

it would not be able to be collected.

"Right now, there's more good food available than we have the capacity to handle. "We've raised most of what we need, but we need community support to finish the job and make sure more food reaches families safely."

Hancock said after Stratford's Woolworth's donated five tonnes of chilled and frozen food following a power cut on Saturday, he had to call on community groups to help store it.

A Woolworths spokesperson said the food was at risk of being sent to landfill.

"On The House was able to quickly deploy and save the food for distribution."



Hancock says with demand rising, its current facilities are stretched.