



Hope in a Bowl

It's usually a cold night in October. Nick thought it would be an early winter, and with the biting cold, he knew he could no longer stay on the streets. He was already shivering from the chill setting in his bones.

He felt the sting of the warm air on his face when he entered the shelter and looked sheepishly around for an inconspicuous corner to sit. He thought himself invisible until a woman approached him with a bowl of soup. No words were exchanged, and there was no expectation to relive his story, just a smile – a warm gesture that spoke volumes.

The bowl was warm on Nick's bare hands. The soup's steamed reminded him of a grandmother's kitchen. Slowly savouring the rich blend of vegetables and real chicken, he couldn't help but tear up, reminded of home and family. This simple meal made him feel hopeful again.

This scene unfolds in shelters and charities nationwide, a testament to the power of giving, sharing and caring. Knowing that Soup Sisters soup plays a role in these moments of warmth and nourishment is humbling.

Winnipeg's Willow Place understands how sustenance can warm the body and spirit. They provide inclusive, no-cost family violence prevention services 24 hours a day of the year.

For 9 years, they have served their clients Soup Sister's soup, first as a recipient from the local soup-making events and then through the Soup Bank. The soup has been a consistent source of comfort for individuals seeking refuge from challenging circumstances. Pam Hadder, Community Coordinator Supervisor, says, "There is still stigma and shame when accessing crisis supports. But people don't lose hope when they share something as easy as soup. It fuels them."

At shelters like Willow Place, the act of serving a warm bowl of soup is more than just a meal—it's the beginning of healing. "there is a vignette that sticks in my mind as a reminder of the importance of a safe place." Pam reminisces, " There was a young woman who came in, and you could tell how she was holding the bowl that she was so hungry. She was actually hugging the bowl. We had a brief exchange with just smiles, but I'll never forget it."

"Some of our clients may not have eaten in a while. Having this soup on hand – it's easy to warm up and serve. More importantly, it's healthy and filling. When soup-making events were halted due to the pandemic, it was great to access the Soup Bank. We could count on these wonderful soups, and that alone had tremendous value."

Now in 2024, the demand for services at Willow Place continues to climb. To alternate between soup-event donations and the Soup Bank's low cost, they can meet their client's needs with nutritious food and stay on budget.

"We need another word for Thank You Soup Sisters!"

Calgary agency Aventa witnesses firsthand how comfort food, like soup, initiates conversations that lead to support and recovery. They provide live-in addiction treatment services serving up to 475 women a year, helping them build resilience so that they may overcome the effects of trauma and addictions.

Their focus is to get clients into treatment, but they know good food plays a role in this process. Healthy women translate to healthy families and healthy communities. Financial Manager Shane Milne explains how important it is for their clients to eat correctly, "When the body is hungry, you can't focus or concentrate. We want to make sure our residents are eating well so they can work on recovery."

"The reasonable price is one thing, but when we can have something pre-made that is this delicious, and we don't have to prep, that's even more valuable. "Especially in the colder months, our ladies enjoy a nice warm bowl of comfort food, and they always say how good it tastes."

"A good bowl of soup is something everyone can relate to. We love what Soup Sisters does for Aventa."

The Mustard Seed's Chief Program Officer, Bill Nixon, echoes the importance of good food. Their focus is caring for individuals experiencing homelessness and poverty, and one of the ways is through their warming centres throughout the city of Calgary. The filling and delicious Soup Sisters soup has been the cornerstone at their Foothills location for the past two years. From November to April, they serve Soup Sisters soup to those struggling to find a warm meal.

"When we first opened the centre, people would complain about the food," says Bill. "Since we started using Soup Sisters soup, there have only been compliments. And it's because of the quality as someone's grandmother made it."

The ease of having their staff heat and serve is not only efficient, but it's also cost-effective. "Every day, 400 meals at this location alone, that is a lot of people relying on us. We couldn't operate the warming centre without Soup Sisters."

Head Chef Gerardo Enriquez agrees, saying, "I can't make it for the price we can buy it at (from the Soup Sisters Soup Bank). The cost to buy all the ingredients, when prices are going up all the time, the time to prepare it adds up."

"It's a good price too. When we can get good quality and tasteful food to people and make it easy to serve, that's a good deal all around."

Soup Sisters has even expanded their deep relationship with the Mustard Seed by feeding the participants of their annual fundraising event, the Coldest Night of the Year. Providing chilli in five cities not only helps them reduce event costs but also is an opportunity for people to taste what is being served to clients at the Mustard Seed.

"It's so appreciated how Soup Sisters is helping us at this important event. Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Medicine Hat and Kamloops will experience the quality and delicious meals our clients receive." Says Bill.

Nick could have been at any of these agencies that prioritize nutritious food. He may not know that Soup Sisters made his meal; he knows someone cared enough to give him a hug in a bowl!

