

June 5, 2023

Happy June days to you!

It's that time of year when the kids and teens are done with school (so are the teachers) and anticipating a great summer break to shake off all the debris in their lives from the past school year!

For some youth, summer is a very positive time for recreation, holidays, and the time to hang out with family and friends. Unfortunately, I am seeing and hearing of far too much chaos, conflict, and turmoil in more families this year since COVID-19 started... as summer isn't capturing their heart's expectations. In talking to teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools, the message is this: we have never seen so much stress, anxiety, anger, defiance, and pain in our students. Dysfunctional families are on the rise, as well their children and teens. Sadly, the counsellors and youth workers are maxed to the limit as well. They are desperately looking for solutions!

I am slowly working towards building and training teams to come alongside families and their children to provide support, care, assistance, respite, and encouragement. My motto is this: we want to walk alongside these families in their crisis until they don't need us anymore.

I have a Psychologist and a Mental Health Specialist that are willing to work with me in both discovering and training individuals to become a part of our Mental Health Teams. This is so wonderful and encouraging. I am in pursuit of a psychiatrist as well to give us insight and education in working with kids and teens that are on the spectrum. The next group of professionals that I am touching base with will be a family lawyer, accountant, naturopath, nutritionist, social worker (semi-retired), community police representative and a kinesiologist.

I am really not asking for too much am I??!?!?

Our Board has brought into our charity, Anna Brotzel, who is completing her master's in counselling and is now appointed to our Board of Advisors. Her passion is working with youth aged 12 and older that are diagnosed as Autistic. She is also providing professional counselling to a diverse group of people that are in need here in Chilliwack.

I am also meeting with several leaders in our community that are: pastors, community health directors, social service directors, principals, youth counsellors and recreational development leaders. My intent is to have these assist in recommending quality people to be considered for our Mental Health Teams. Each team would consist of approximately 7 caregivers who are qualified and trained to walk alongside families and be there for whatever may be required to bring about significant solutions. This is a slow process in creating the First Team that has passion and a commitment to excellence in bringing mental & physical health, personal care, kindness, and support to each family referred to us.

The immediate need for Life Exchange funds for Kids and Teens that desire to go to a summer camp or a sports camp but can't afford to do so. Costs are approximately \$500-\$600 per youth. I am working with kids going to Chubb Lake camp once again which is just north of Quesnel. The children and teens love it up there, minus the no-see-ums, deer flies and horse flies... haven't even dealt with the mosquitoes yet which are the worst in history! We have another group that is going to Nanoose Bay Camp on Vancouver Island. I spent many years of my childhood and teen years there, as well as a counsellor and director. There are a couple of Soccer and Martial Arts camps that I am looking to enable children and teens to attend. Sports and summer camps are life-changing in mental health and positive relationships.

I would appreciate your donation as soon as you can to enable approximately 15 children and 12 teens to get to the various camps. There are still a number that have yet to confirm their ability to attend, so those numbers can change.

The Food Market concept that I am looking at is still in the hopper for discussion and pursuit. It is a work in process that will take some time to set up. I have several interested parties that would consider partnering with Life Exchange

in making fresh vegetables, fruit, and meat available to those that we would qualify as in actual and critical need. Need to get this vision activated as soon as possible.

I had the privilege of going to Princeton in early spring where I met up with Kyle & Rae Nichols who have been the Pastoral and Recovery Leadership Team since the November 2021 floods. I also met up with Scott Musgrove who is the Director for the Food Bank plus the Community Kitchen Project. Jeff Fry has come on to the Team to work with children and teens that are still going through very challenging times due to the "flood impact" in their community. There is a real sense of wanting to bring "transformation" in the lives of those affected and traumatized by the flood's damaging effect on the community. I am still working with the team to support them in their endeavours in reaching out to over 250 families and individuals in critical need of groceries, meals and personal care plus the children and teens who are going to be their focus this summer to provide positive relationships and activities that will make a significant difference in their lives. Many families still don't have their homes restored and are struggling in finding places to live.

I still provide Walmart, Save On and Super Store Gift Cards to those families referred to me from the schools and health workers. It is not getting better out there. Donations are greatly appreciated for us to meet the emerging and expanding quest for food on the tables. Hearing more and more of the number of youths that don't have breakfast before coming to school or bringing any lunch. It doesn't end!!

I am also looking to increase our financial capability to provide the funds to assist children and teens requiring mental health counselling and professional guidance. As you know this is very expensive these days. Many families don't have insurance providers to cover the costs. As I shared earlier this spring my desire and the Board's is to increase our donations from \$4,000 a month to \$10,000 a month to achieve our goal and be resourced for the impending crises in our community.

I have been working as a part-time mortgage broker for the past 20 years while I was a Pastor and CEO of Life Exchange, which began in 2008. I have let my license go so I can put my full attention and leadership into the immediate requirements before us now as well the future. I am so very thankful for you who have been so faithful in supporting this charity over the years and those of you that have come alongside more recently. I am pursuing other venues for financial support, but in reality, it is the consistent and regular donor/donations support that has empowered us to be and do what we feel commissioned to pursue and achieve for the children, teens and families in our communities.

We appreciate those who are using our online donation button on our website and Facebook page. Cheques still work great, either by mailing them into the office, or I can connect with you directly. I am in the process of setting up e-transfers that will go directly into our bank account and register each donor for their taxable receipt.

Your love, care and commitment shown to Life Exchange Foundation and its vision, mission, strategy, and implementation for solutions for our youth is incredibly overwhelming and valued year after year. Thank you so much for being there for so many lives.

Blessings once again on you. Keep in touch with any thoughts, comments and/or wisdom!!

Rod L. Bitterman
FOUNDER and CEO. LIFE EXCHANGE FOUNDATION