

## **A Quest to Change Food Supply**

B.C.'s largest food exchange redistributes food to people who need it most

The community relations co-ordinator for [Quest Food Exchange](#) says that's what makes her most proud to work for an organization pioneering a new approach to food waste and feeding low-income individuals and families.

Quest Food Outreach partners with local food wholesalers, restaurants, airlines, freight lines, supermarkets and farmers who donate food that would otherwise go to waste. Quest then reuses the food, distributing the food to social service agencies as well as selling the food in its three low-cost grocery stores.

Nichol says the grocery stores combine dignity with buying food, reducing the stigma of people having to rely on food banks and other assistance.

"We enable them to buy groceries and give people choice to come in and buy what they want," she says.

In order to shop at Quest, a person must receive a referral. They are then able to shop for food that is 35-95 per cent less than at a regular grocery store. Last year, these grocery stores served 420,000 people.

People can also volunteer to work in the store, and receive a \$13 food voucher for four hours work. According to Nichol, three quarters of the people volunteering are low income and can use the vouchers to buying healthy and nutritious food.

Recent volunteer Amy Tran blogged about her experience, saying she is "both thrilled and fortunate to be able to spend a \$13 voucher in exchange for working a four-hour shift," that allowed her to buy items ranging from fruit juices and vegetables to breads and tofu.

“My voucher allows me to feel much more comfortable about my own food situation and security, granting me that piece of mind, which not surprisingly often comes with real and good food,” writes Tran.

In addition to feeding people, Quest says the food reduces waste and helps the environment. Methane gas produced by decomposing food scraps contributes significantly to global warming.

While Quest has achieved significant success in Vancouver, Nichol says the impact does not come without hard work. Quest receives no government funding but relies on corporate donations to be self-sufficient.

She says they are constantly seeking more donors and working to educate people about Quest’s mission. They’d like to see some larger organizations come on board to help them expand their services, which includes opening a community kitchen to teach people how to cook their own food and offer workshops on topics like food combination and nutrition.

The Vancouver-based social enterprise is the largest food exchange in B.C., according to Nichol, who adds the model is one that can be reproduced elsewhere.

“If we can do it, anyone can do it,” she says.

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