



Remarks by Executive Director
Jerry Novack
at the
2020 Annual General Meeting, 2021 June 24

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I join Matt in thanking you for joining us tonight.

My role tonight is to highlight the year 2020 from an operations standpoint. I draw your attention to the 2020 Annual Report that was distributed to you prior to tonight's meeting. It provides you with a bird's eye view of how The Grind responded during the year to the needs of at-risk community members through several of our programs and services.

My presentation will try to avoid repeating what is already presented in the report. Instead, I will focus on operational issues we faced and successes we celebrated. In general, the quality and reach of our interactions with clients changed – some were positive while others caused us some angst and impacted clients considerably.

Three events were at the centre of this dynamic. The first was the need on day one of the New Year to adjust operations in the Coffee House to meet both the needs of clients for an assembly/relaxation space while meeting health and fire safety regulations required to operate a kitchen. The second was the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of the year. The third was the uncertainty of the outcome of discussions with the City of Pembroke related to our interest in leasing their decommissioned fire hall to permit The Grind to move its operations from the downtown core. These events created financial, functional and logistical stresses on the organization that were overcome for the most part – but just.

The Board decision to temporarily take over the Salvation Army's lunch-time meal service in March of 2019 was accommodated without too much dislocation because of the generous donations of meals prepared off-site and delivered to the Grind's Coffee House by area businesses, restaurants, churches and individuals. We realized, however, that this arrangement would only be a stop-gap solution and could not be sustained for more than a few months. While the Board's ultimate decision at the end of 2019 to assume responsibility for the lunch service on a permanent basis was prompted by the failure to find a suitable alternate location for a commercial kitchen and a sponsor, the earlier prediction that offers of prepared meals would taper off became a reality.

By the early weeks of 2020 January, a big push was undertaken to create a more workable kitchen within the back half of the Coffee House in order to accommodate meal preparation in-house. A cook was secured and simple hot



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and cold lunches were planned and prepared using electric roasting pans supported by newly constructed counters on which to prepare the food. All the while, clients continued to have access to the Coffee House during regular operating hours. So, between 10:00 when the facility opened until lunch service ended at 1:00 p.m., the Coffee House was literally a “beehive” of activity.

Then the pandemic hit us hard in the March/April timeframe when required health regulations forced us to close the Coffee House and replace indoor meals with a take-out service. Additional renovations were required at the front entrance to facilitate the safe distribution of meals. Because the Client Services Office had to close as well, it became a challenge for volunteers to deal with both meal preparation and distribution as well as to assist patrons with issues.

COVID definitely negatively impacted the ability of Grind personnel to maintain relationships that had been built up with clients over a period of time. Opportunities to interact with people were diminished as well as the quality of any interactions that were possible. The closure of community businesses and other services added more stresses to the community’s marginalized population as washrooms and places to wash, previously available to the homeless, were denied to them. The Grind attempted to advocate for its clients by raising the issue with local authorities. The Grind even secured funding from the County of Renfrew’s Relief Fund to rent a port-a-potty and wash station that was placed in the alleyway behind the Client Services Office. After public complaints, The Grind removed the temporary service. Ultimately, the City of Pembroke agreed to open its washroom facilities at the marina. However, these facilities were subsequently closed as winter approached.

By late Spring of 2020, both federal and provincial governments recognized the financial burden created by the pandemic on the not-for-profit, charitable sector who rose to the occasion to provide additional services to the marginalized population with little or no opportunities to raise funds in the community as they had been used to doing. Generous COVID relief funding was made available and The Grind took full advantage in applying for assistance. The pandemic saw larger numbers of people requiring meals and emergency food support. So the funding applications The Grind submitted were largely to support its food security program like take-out meals. Successful applications were made to the County of Renfrew’s Community Services Division to access provincial relief funding from 2020 May to August, and for federal government funding through the United Way Simcoe Muskoka for the period 2020 September – 2021 March 31.



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Both funding sources allowed The Grind to expand its food offering to include breakfasts four days per week and two dinners per week, in addition to lunches four days per week. This funding, totalling over \$93,000 not only covered the cost of food purchases, but also covered the wages and benefits of three term positions, including a second cook, van rental for delivery to clients unable to attend the take-out service in person, and securing donated food from grocery outlets. Further county funding was later secured to cover the wages and benefits of the principal cook to prepare lunches for the period 2020 September to 2021 March 31.

Renting a van also allowed staff delivering meals to perform wellness checks of 17 homeless individuals living on the streets of Pembroke during the hot summer of 2020 and during the following cold Fall and early Winter. During these checks, staff ensured that these individuals, who had been offered emergency sheltering in local motels but refused, had food and hygiene products, were hydrated, and possessed ground coverings and blankets in the colder weather. Additional funding of \$10,000 was received from United Way East Ontario allowing The Grind to extend its lease of the van and pay its insurance costs from 2020 October to 2021 August.

Funding for the additional meal service prompted The Grind to take a closer look at kitchen infrastructure needs, including the addition of a stove and improved preparation and storage space. With the guidance of the Renfrew County & District Health Unit and the City of Pembroke's Fire Department, the required processes and equipment were put into place, including a ventilation system. This added cost wasn't covered by grants but rather required The Grind to dip into its donated operational funds. But it was clear that such measures would only be a temporary fix and that ultimately a new location would have to be found so that a proper commercial kitchen could be accommodated. Search for an alternate location continued with the knowledge that the end of The Grind's lease of its existing space downtown was looming on the horizon. This also led to a decision to consolidate its reduced Client Services Office functions within the Coffee House so that its lease of the adjacent building space could be given up as a cost saving measure.

To our great relief in early 2020, Pembroke Council recognized The Grind's interest in renting the decommissioned fire hall by advising that it was willing to negotiate a lease of the property. Council also undertook to organize public meetings both in council session and in the community to hear the views of the



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public, particularly those living in the neighbourhood of the fire hall and members of the senior's club based in the adjacent Victoria Hall. Despite some concerns being expressed about potential community impacts arising from the presence of Grind patrons and clients in a residential area, city council ultimately made a decision to allow The Grind to move its operations into the space. After lengthy discussions, Council and The Grind Board agreed to the terms of a five-year lease that was signed in 2020 mid-June.

The fire hall offered The Grind the opportunity to finally acquire adequate space for its operations with room to spare for a couple of additional services. But the scope of the renovations required to convert the building into useable, practical space was daunting from both a financial and project management perspective. Estimated to cost between \$500-600,000, it was clear that an energetic grant application effort was required to augment whatever donations could be generated locally. By the latter part of 2020, we were fortunate to have received a couple of large community donations and major funding applications were submitted to Employment and Social Development Canada's Enabling Accessibility Fund and the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Resilient Communities Fund. Despite having failed with the federal government application that would have allowed us to install accessible public washrooms and doorways at a cost of \$100,000, we were successful in being awarded a \$150,000 Trillium grant in late December. This grant and the community donations thus set the stage for an ambitious renovations project that would begin early in the New Year. The Grind Board also struck a sub-committee of four directors to plan and manage the renovations project.

While COVID created havoc to some of our programs, including our Valley Warriors soccer and hockey programs for children with autism and other developmental challenges, a couple of programs remained largely unaffected. One was our assisted independent living project for agency-connected homeless men at Transition House. Renovations of this donated late-1800s vintage home were largely completed by the close of 2019. So for the first couple of months into 2020, the finishing touches were completed on the interior of the house, plus all of the furnishings were purchased and installed. The facility opened to its first client in May. The only impact on this operation arising from the pandemic was a limit on the number of residents allowed. One of the three bedrooms had to remain vacant, as well as the crisis suite. We are indebted to Mental Health Services through Pembroke Regional Hospital for providing the bulk of the renovation's costs through Ministry of Health/LHIN funding. As well, we



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appreciate the support received from Algonquin College student fundraising and generous community donations for helping us complete this important facility. Although small in comparison to the need for such housing, Transition House is helping a few clients of Mental Health Services stabilize their lives. As operator of the facility, MHSRC is responsible for client interaction and life skills training. Mental health and addictions counsellors from their Crisis Team are present during day time hours to work with their clients. The Grind, for its part, is responsible for maintenance and for after-hours on-site monitoring supported by the use of self-contained living quarters used by a caretaker. We also appreciate the support of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada for their donation of \$7,500 towards the cost of operations.

The other largely unaffected program was our after-hours Crisis Monitoring Service that continued throughout 2020 with the financial support (\$12,500) of United Way East Ontario for the period January – June, and the County of Renfrew's Relief Funding for the period July – December with carry-over into the New Year through March 2021. This service was a partnership between The Grind, Ontario Works, Mental Health Services and the OPP. The Grind, with the assistance of two casual, paid staff, was responsible for monitoring a mobile phone seven nights per week between 4:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. With the help of this service, homeless callers could obtain emergency shelter in local motels and local taxi transportation within the Pembroke area. Ontario Works' case workers were responsible for the same services during weekday office hours, and between MHSRC and the OPP, homeless individuals were serviced overnight and on weekends until The Grind staff began their normal nightly shift.

And finally, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the efforts many volunteers put into our fundraising efforts during 2020. Our flagship event, Coldest Night of the Year, took place for the fourth year in a row in late February. With the invaluable help from our national partner and owner of the brand, Blue Sea Foundation of Kitchener, Ontario, participants raised almost \$29,500 for our Community Kitchen and Transition House. Then in October, despite COVID restrictions, The Grind embarked on a second Blue Sea Foundation fundraiser called Ride for Refuge. As the event name suggests, funds raised were focussed on The Grind's Shelter Services Program, principally Transition House. This event raised almost \$7,500.

That then was 2020 in brief. In closing, while The Grind was challenged during the



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year due to several factors, we overcame them thanks to the efforts of our staff and volunteers. I thank them for their dedication and excellent service to our patrons and clients. While COVID did impact our volunteer base significantly as many being of senior age remained home for most of the year, we anticipate that many if not most will return when health conditions permit and our operations are back to normal.

Thank you for joining us tonight.