

HE HAS PROVIDED HUNDREDS OF MEALS TO PEOPLE IN NEED

"If someone is hungry, you have to arrange for them to eat!"

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Claude Desrochers has prepared and distributed more than 500 lunch boxes to homeless people in downtown Joliette to meet their daily energy needs. This winter, Desrochers was able to deliver up to 40 meals per week, which required nearly 50 hours of work.

"I couldn't expect the demand to increase that much," said Desrochers, who has lived near the downtown area for about five years. He had already been sharing food for several years, whenever he came across people in need, but it was in March 2020 that his initiative gained momentum and he started doing twice-daily distributions.

"Some agencies had closed their doors, as had restaurants and stores. The homeless couldn't get warm anymore, couldn't beg. I couldn't let them starve, so I did it because it was a necessity and so they could eat despite COVID-19."

When he started, he was handing out about eight lunches a week. "My goal was to give them everything they needed in a day, in terms of calories and protein, to properly support them." To do that, he paid for all the expenses out of his own pocket.

Then in April, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Joliette, where he was already volunteering, decided to provide the financial resources to allow him to continue his initiative.

"I'm grateful and I really don't want to waste donor money, so I go to all the businesses where there are discounts and I'm very careful when I give the meals, so that those who receive them don't abuse what they are offered and me."

The financial analyst by training mentions that each lunch bag has production costs of less than \$5 and that it contains all the necessary nutrients so that the body of the person who will benefit from it has enough energy to fight the cold.

In fact, it was during the month of December, when temperatures were very cold, that the need for lunches peaked. "It hit hard; I went from 10 meals a week to about 40. In addition to sandwiches, I was adding chocolate and nuts and also making soup, it was the only way I could find to give them a little more vitamin."

The dedicated man spent up to 50 hours a week preparing and delivering those meals. In his biggest week, he served them to 11 different people. "Sometimes I had to go to the grocery store at least four times a week!" Then, on Christmas Day, he met with the homeless downtown and brought them a dozen hot, full meals.

It should also be noted that when preparing the meals, Mr. Desrochers follows all sanitary rules, including wearing a mask and net.

Recognition and mutual aid

The demand has gradually decreased and in March, Mr. Desrochers was distributing about ten meals per week. Desrochers says that most of the homeless people are just passing through downtown and disappear after two or three days. Among those he sees most often, he says that some cheerfully thank him every time he gives them a meal, while others start to take the gesture a little more for granted.

He added that he sometimes feels some judgement from people who see him handing out his meals. "Some citizens look at me a little sideways, but in general I get more positive than negative reaction!"

Desrochers wants to continue his initiative until COVID-19 and its consequences are resolved. "If someone is hungry, we have to organize for them to eat!"

Afterwards, he will continue, but in a different way. Those who want to contribute can do so by making a donation to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. "This is the best way to help; it is thanks to this money that I was able to make so many lunches!"

Another way to give

In addition to this action, Mr. Desrochers has been letting his hair grow longer for almost a year in order to donate it. It will be used to make hairpieces for people who have undergone chemotherapy.

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<https://www.laction.com/article/2021/03/31/il-a-offert-des-centaines-de-repas-a-des-gens-dans-le-besoin>

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