

For Immediate Release

In Midst of Rising Crisis, Toronto's St. James Town Battles to Provide Emergency Relief

Community organizations providing emergency food relief demand provincial funding and work-space to scale up resources as third wave devastates residents

(Toronto, ON) – The community of St. James Town urgently needs a proportional response to this COVID, food security, poverty and health crisis. On Thursday, April 29, the St. James Town Community Co-op, MP Marci Ien, MPP Suze Morison and Councillor Kristyn Wong Tam will hold a Zoom press conference to address this fast-growing crisis.

St James Town Co-op will present a 10,000+ signature petition urgently requesting appropriate space for food security operations, and is calling on the government to step-up and respond. St. James Town needs to be designated a disaster zone.

The need for emergency food relief is overwhelming, yet all food programs combined have only been able to support approximately 3% of households in St. James Town per month. With other local food programs ending, St. James Town Co-op is requesting more support to be able to reach *at least* 20% of our 23000 + residents. The Co-op's change.org petition to Mayor Tory and the Province requests secure, viable space from the City and private high-rise landlords.

Co-Founder of St. James Town Co-op, Josephine Grey says, *"St James Town is in a dire situation, unlike anything we've ever experienced. Long-standing systemic inequity, amplified by this pandemic has caused an extreme food crisis and rising incidents of health emergencies. Our death toll is rising."* The provincial government has the money and the power to address this emergency.

Red Cross funding helped launch the co-ops' Emergency Food Relief project providing healthy food from December 2020 to February 2021. Since then, the project has raised more funds and support from new partnerships to maintain supply through Spring and Summer 2021-if space is provided. Each week volunteers pack and deliver 110 food boxes including fresh fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs, and dried goods to 330 households per month. Off-site cooks prepare nutrient-rich hot meals for those who cannot cook for themselves. Over Ramadan, more families are receiving Halal food provided by Muslim organizations. But even with this support, residents are turned away each week and must be waitlisted. *"Many people need healthy emergency food every week, but currently we can only provide a hamper once every three weeks due to such high demand. Multi-generational families with seven or more family members living in crowded apartments, need even more"* says Yasmine El Hamamsy-the co-ops' food manager.

Compounding matters, the project has been dependent on month-by-month permits to operate from a room at the Wellesley Community Centre. They cannot guarantee the space for food provision after May 30th . The Community desperately needs more secure spaces to be able to scale up and meet demand for these critical community operations.

Local MP Marcie Ien, MPP Suze Morrison, and City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam are in agreement that more must be done - and fast.

What: St James Town Zoom Press Conference (link available upon request)

Date: April 29, 2021

Time: 12:00 PM – 12:30 PM

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| ▪ Introductions | 12:00 PM - 12:05 PM |
| ▪ St. James Town Co-op Josephine Grey | 12:05 PM - 12:10 PM |
| ▪ Comments from Minister of Parliament
Marcie Ien, Minister of Provincial Parliament | |
| Suze Morrison, City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam | 12:10 PM - 12:20 PM |
| ▪ Panel Q&A | 12:20 PM - 12:30 PM |

Partners working closely with St. James Town Co-op and its OASIS Food Hub project include *FoodShare, African Food Basket, Muslim Welfare, Humaniti, Feed it Forward, Eco-just Food Network, Global Media* and *Auntie Amal Community Centre*.

For more information, please visit:

St. James Community Co-op

<http://stjamestowncoop.org/>

Donate

<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/m/60731/donation>

Change.org petition for space

<https://www.change.org/p/st-james-town-urgently-needs-space-for-food-security>

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To request a Zoom link or to arrange interviews, please contact:

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*B-roll and additional visuals available upon request