**Red Cross ends meal delivery service to seniors in Moncton, 5 other communities**

**Citing low participation, aid agency ends contract with province for all but 2 regions**

By Sarah Trainor, Posted: Mar 14, 2018 12:20 PM AT Last Updated: Mar 14, 2018 12:20 PM AT

At the end of the month, the Canadian Red Cross in New Brunswick will end its meal delivery service for seniors in six New Brunswick communities. After 20 years, the Red Cross Meals to Seniors program will be cancelled in Sussex, Moncton, Sackville, Richibucto, Tracadie and Bathurst.

'Just because you don't get participation doesn't mean there isn't a need there.'*- Lois King, Sussex Sharing Club* The provincial government says it has been lining up replacement services. The Red Cross held the contracts with the Department of Social Development, but Bill Lawlor, a spokesperson for the aid agency, said participation has dropped over the years, "making it no longer financially sustainable" to renew its agreements.

"Naturally, we had seniors who passed away," Lawlor said Wednesday in an interview with *Information Morning Saint John*. "For some, the level of care they required was far greater than the provision of the meal. It required something more significant like home support, or maybe they were even transferred to a health care facility, such as a nursing home."

In Sussex, the program was down to "literally only four clients," Lawlor said. The Red Cross served eight seniors in Sackville, 17 on the Acadian Peninsula, and 55 in an area from Moncton to Shediac. "So it's quite a wide swatch of geography," Lawlor said.



Lois King, right, of the Sussex Sharing Club, says the group is trying to expand its outreach to more seniors through its welcome basket program. (Sussex Sharing Club/Facebook)

Lois King, administrator of the Sussex Sharing Club, said she was surprised to hear only four seniors in the town were making use of the meal delivery program. The food bank, and not-for-profit social services organization is aware of many seniors who are struggling, King said.

**'I'm OK' mentality**

"We have had several home-care workers coming in and saying they're working with seniors, and they found they didn't have food in their homes," King said. "The ones who don't have family members, there's a lot of seniors struggling to pay the rent, maybe they own their own home so they pay the hydro, and they just say, 'I don't need the food, I'm OK.'"

King said the Sharing Club wasn't informed about the meal delivery service ending.  She said the group is "more than eager" to help anyone in need and recently rolled out a welcome basket program intended to get more seniors through its doors. One of the members makes a house call with a basket of food, "has a cup of tea with them, and proceeds to see if they need us in any way," said King.

**'More out there'**

"We try to register them with us, and we have had some success, but I know there's a lot more out there who can use our services." A few months in, only a dozen seniors have taken part, King said, but she suspects as many as 50 would benefit. "Just because you don't get participation doesn't mean there isn't a need there," she said.

As for the Meals to Seniors program, the Red Cross has agreed to continue the service in the remaining two communities of Edmundston and Grand Falls into March, 2019. "Volumes are higher in that part of the province, and there aren't as many options for folks to go to," Lawlor said. "That made it more sustainable, so we decided to stay there."

**Replacements found**

Anne Mooers, a spokesperson for the Department of Social Development, said it found organizations to replace Meals to Seniors in communities where the Red Cross cancelled the contract. "The department understands how important [these] programs are to people remaining independent in their own homes," Mooers said in an email. "The department appreciates the work and dedication of the Red Cross in helping New Brunswick seniors and adults living with disabilities."

The department is in the process of signing contracts, she said.

"Once all are signed, we will provide the names of the organizations," said Mooers.