



## ABBOTSFORD CLUB FIGHTS STUDENT HUNGER

BY ANNE STEIN

THREE YEARS AGO, Dave Murray, executive director of the Abbotsford Food Bank, got a visit from his daughter, a British Columbia kindergarten teacher. She asked him how to help six students who were coming to school hungry on Monday mornings because they didn't have enough to eat over the weekend.

Around the same time, Bruce Beck, community service director for the Rotary Club of Abbotsford, asked Murray what kind of project the club could adopt to address hunger in the area.

"I told Bruce about the hungry schoolchildren, and Bruce said, 'You have to come talk to Rotary,'" Murray recalls.

The club and the food bank organized what's now known as the Starfish Pack program to feed those six children in January 2013. Club members bought and filled six backpacks with enough non-perishable food to provide two breakfasts, two lunches, two

dinners, and healthy snacks for a weekend. The children took the packs home from school on Friday and returned the empty bags on Monday morning.

"Once word got out, we were overwhelmed by other schools begging us to get the program," Beck explains. The local school district estimates that 400 Abbotsford children participate in their schools' free breakfast or lunch programs, and that more than 300 of them were going without adequate weekend meals.

The club held a major fundraising event three months later. Grants from the government and Rotary District 5050 (parts of British Columbia and Washington) helped it expand the effort to 170 students in 12 schools by the end of the first school year. (The cost of providing weekend backpacks to one child for the academic year is \$525.)

Today the volunteer-run program feeds 263 kids in 22 schools, and it's growing. The

club has collaborated with local businesses, grocery stores, and church groups who shop, pack, deliver, and recover the backpacks weekly. The city's first Starfish Depot opened in April in the basement of the Abbotsford Baptist Church, where families can access meals during school holidays and the summer months. The concept is catching on among other clubs in the area.

One Abbotsford elementary school principal who has 37 students in the program says it has made an extraordinary difference in their lives. "We have fewer behavioural problems on the playground and in the classroom," says the principal, whose name was withheld to protect the privacy of the students. "It increases stress when you don't know where your next meal is coming from, and you can't learn when you are stressed."

*To learn more, get involved, or donate, visit [starfishpack.com](http://starfishpack.com).*



### MEET YOUR MATCH

The Rotary Foundation has expanded opportunities for corporate matching gifts to include Canadian donors. Available in the United States for years, Rotary's matching gift program offers a way for clubs and donors with corporate support to meet giving goals. More than 15,000 companies match gifts to the Foundation, and some will double or triple your donation. Visit [rotary.org/matchinggifts](http://rotary.org/matchinggifts), which now has a Canadian search field, to see if your company has a matching gifts program and to learn about its policy.

Any matching gift received by The Rotary Foundation (Canada) is credited to the club and district of the donor who initiated the gift. Donors receive Foundation recognition points for matching gifts they initiate (though matching gifts do not count toward a donor's personal giving total or Major Donor recognition). Direct questions to the donor's HR department or email [annualfund@rotary.org](mailto:annualfund@rotary.org). Learn more about contributing at [rotary.org/give](http://rotary.org/give).