



Canada India Foundation Completes 15,000 Free ‘Thank You Meals’ Program to Frontline Workers

Oakville: Canada India Foundation, a national, not-for-profit organization, working in strengthening Canada India bilateral relationship, recently concluded an ambitious free meals distribution program aimed at those working on the frontlines of the fight against Covid19. Named ‘Thank You Meals’, it was executed in partnership with Hindu Federation, Ekal Vidyalaya and Tamarind Indian Bistro.



Anil Shah, Chair of Canada India Foundation, seen with Humber River Hospital staff

Anil Shah, the Chair of Canada India Foundation, recalls, “As the deadly Covid19 virus spread globally, bringing economic destruction and misery to the world, we at CIF felt that this was a time of great challenge and also change. We at CIF which basically functioned as a Think Tank, felt that the time is now right to be proactive, and to make a positive contribution to the communities in which we live.”

The CIF team got to work in early March 2020 as the pandemic was taking a firm grip; four priority areas were chosen: free grocery distribution; taking care of senior citizens and reaching out to them; giving financial assistance to some Indian international students who found themselves in dire need; and finding accommodation for those stranded tourists in Canada due to the travel restrictions. Fifteen thousand dollars were raised initially from within CIF members for supporting the Hindu Federation of Canada in their efforts toward relief work relating to Covid19.

An early beneficiary of the initiative was Mrs. P. Kaur, an international student stuck in Canada while her husband was away in India. “We were told that she needed food, groceries and medicines. We made sure that she was looked after. This was a turning point for us. We were extremely touched by her gratitude. And we knew we were on the right track,” says Shah.

As the virus raged, an area that was most under stress was the hospital system. The frontline workers in hospitals were not only fighting to save lives but doing so at considerable risk to their own. And they were doing their job under never-before-seen challenges. “That’s when we hit up on this idea of ‘Thank You Meals’ – free distribution of hot vegetarian meals to frontline workers.” Trillium Hospital system was chosen to be the first, but then they would’ve been ready only on May 13. “We wanted to get going as soon as possible. We did cover Trillium later, but Oakville Hospital became our first stop,” says Shah.



The response was so good that the CIF team began thinking on a larger scale by seeking donations from friends, supporters and well-wishers. “We were totally overwhelmed by the support. We received contributions in various amounts from \$100 to \$250 to \$500, even two very generous individuals who gave \$5000 each. It was very encouraging for us to see so many people getting involved with the

Thank You Meals program,” notes Shah.

For example, a successful local architect, Kamal Paul, wanted to accompany the team to the distribution at the Peel Police headquarters. Seeing the enthusiasm of the volunteers and the appreciation from the men in uniform, he picked up the tab for the day on the spot!

The logistics involved in the much expanded Thank You Meals program was quite formidable. As Shah puts it with a smile, “worthy of the Canadian armed forces”. In comes Tamarind Indian Bistro Restaurant with their efficient distribution system. With

the help of several international students and community volunteers under the wings of owner, Karan Arora, the goals were met in a timely fashion. They designed a wholesome hot, hygienically packaged vegetarian meal for easy delivery.

From hospitals, the Thank You Meals program was expanded to include police, rehab centres and senior care homes. In the following weeks, teams of volunteers carried a stunning 15,000 meals to a total of 42 large institutions spread across Southern Ontario. The list includes almost all major hospitals, Peel Police, Firefighters, and Caregivers.

CIF Vancouver chapter initiated a similar program in Vancouver under the guidance of Hema Bhatt, Member, CIF Board of Governors, by distributing meals at Royal Columbian Hospital and City Reach Care Centre. ([Click here for details](#)).

By all accounts the Thank You Meals program has been a great success. Not only have the recipients expressed appreciation for the gesture, they came out to say that the meals were delicious too! Testimonials have come in from all quarters, including community leaders, officials, and frontline workers. ([to see testimonials click here](#)).



Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown thanks CIF

The success of the program is evident from the fact it has drawn the attention and admiration of public officials as well as common citizens. Patrick Brown, Mayor of Brampton, who was present when CIF distributed the meals at the Peel Police headquarters, noted, “The police

are certainly on the frontline during this crisis, they face a higher risk keeping our community safe and the fact that our friends from CIF will provide 450 meals for our first responders here is a real morale booster. So, on behalf of the City of Brampton, I say thank you for that act of kindness and generosity.”



Anil Shah presents a Thank You Meal to Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie

Mayor Bonnie Crombie of Mississauga, who was also present on the occasion, echoed similar sentiments when she complimented the CIF team for the “generosity” shown “to our heroes”.

Other public officials and elected representatives who had complimented the CIF program include: Mark Saunders, Toronto Police Chief; Dipika Damarla, Mississauga City Councillor; MPP Deepak Anand; MPP Amarjot Sandhu; Randy Patrick, Peel Region Deputy Chief of Police.

Early on in the Thank You Meals program, Ontario Premier Doug Ford, had these encouraging words for the CIF team: “Whether it’s delivering groceries or free food or medical supplies and transportation, your compassion, your generosity shows the Ontario spirit. It is organizations like yours that will get us through this challenging time. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for opening your heart during this time. You are the real heroes, keep up the incredible work.”



Premier Doug Ford thanks CIF for its 'Thank You Meals' Initiative

The program was concluded with the distribution of hundreds of meals to the staff at the two Grand River Hospitals in Kitchener. Accepting the meals on behalf of his staff, Ron

Gagnon, CEO of Grand River Hospitals, thanked CIF, and its volunteers for this act of compassion and support.



Kuldeep Sharma with Raj Saini, MP from Kitchener Centre

Raj Saini, MP for Kitchener Centre, said, “I know most of your work is in GTA. But thank you very much for driving up the 401 to support us in the Waterloo-Kitchener area.” While acknowledging the roles of governments at all levels, he added, “It’s the members of the civil society like you who take the time and effort and chip in with their contributions that keep all of us safe and

help us get through this pandemic. Thank you.”



CIF members & volunteers pose in front of the Grand River hospital

The ‘Three Amigos’ that took upon the strenuous journey of being present personally at each of the forty-two locations, come rain or sunshine (and there were quite a bit of both in May and June!) are Anil Shah, Satish Thakkar, National Convenor; and Pankaj Dave, Co-convenor. Speaking at the Grand River event, Thakkar, said, “Though we at CIF have been focused on the Canada India corridor and its development for over a decade and a

half, this new initiative has given us extra energy and a new direction.” He thanked the Mayors of Waterloo and Kitchener, Dave Jaworsky and Berry Vrbanovic, who were present to show their support.



Anil Shah thanking the volunteers

Shah took the opportunity to thank all the volunteers, the various levels of government and the leaders, like Premier Doug Ford and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, donors and the institutions who took part. “This has given us all a new momentum. And I am happy to say that though we have concluded this phase, the Free Meals program will continue. We plan to

distribute at least 500 meals each week to select old age homes and long-term care facilities,” he announced on the occasion.

Shah says that though it was a lot of time spent away from his own business responsibilities, it was one of the most satisfying experiences of his life. “My colleagues at CIF all feel the same. We are energized. Seeing those frontline workers, or the COVID19 warriors, as some would call them, working so hard, our first instinct is to give them a hug or at least shake their hands. In the present circumstances, both are not options! This was our hug of appreciation.”

CIF is encouraging people from all walks of life to strengthen their efforts in the future by donating at <http://www.cifcharitablefoundation.org/donate/>. All contributions above \$100 will be issued a tax receipt. You can also donate directly by email to: cifcharity@cifcharitablefoundation.com.



Glimpses of CIF 'Thank You Meals' Journey from April to July



Kacee Vasudeva of Waterloo based Maxtech Group donated sanitizers for the GR Hospital



Markham-Unionville MP, Bob Saroya, with Anil Shah



TO Police chief Mark Saunders and team at the Thank You Meals event



Mr and Mrs. Subhash Chandra fully committed to the Thank You Meals initiative



Anil Shah speaks at Brampton Civic Hospital



Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie with CIF members, Ramesh Chotai & Norton Kothari



CIF team with members of the TO Police department



Thumbs go up in support at Brampton Civic Hospital



CIF team reach out to the Canadian Army in appreciation



CIF team pose against a Peel Fire truck



Fire hot (not quite as the spice levels were kept moderates) meals for the brave fire fighters



Meals delivery at Toronto Rehab



Just a few of the 15, 000 boxes distributed



Hon. Sylvia Jones, Commissioner, Board of Internal Economy Solicitor General, Ontario appreciated CIF work



The Grand River Hospitals. Seen in the picture are Mayors of Waterloo and Kitchener, Dave Jaworsky and Berry Urbanovic



Thank You Meals reach Markham Stouffville hospital



'Thank You Meals' is also just one of the 'incredible things' that happened at Toronto Rehab Centre



Members of Ekal Youth volunteer at Oshawa Hospital



Thumbs Up from Milton Hospital Staff



CIF National Convenor, Satish Thakkar, Ritesh Malik & Indira Khurana with Minister Michael Tibollo



The team outside North York General hospital



National Co-convenor, Pankaj Dave, on the job



Streetsville Old Age home



St. Joseph's Healthcare Centre, Hamilton



Sunnybrook Hospital, Toronto



'Thank You Meals' at Toronto Rehab Centre



Volunteers and officers at the TO Police HQ



Everyone associated with the CIF Charitable Foundation pulled their weight or more to make it a success



Vinod Vyas, Vivek Vyas & Mayor of Waterloo, Dave Jaworsky

