



# HELPING HANDS

Story and Photos by Rhea Munroe

Three nights a week, the Belleville City Mission fills with people who come to take advantage of the dollar meals, entertainment, church service and Bible study. Martina Bruce, the co-owner of the mission expresses, that the Christian perspective that they operate from is vital for the people who come there for help and mentoring. Jim Bruce, co-owner and pastor for the Sunday services, starts off most of his services with Christian music and time for people to reflect on the good aspects of their lives.

Martina Bruce started taking an interest in poverty and helping people in need at a young age. She did a speech on poverty for her eighth grade class and has been helping people since. Martina and Jim started putting efforts towards helping people in 2008 within their home. They started by distributing bags of food and clothing to people, but wanted to do more. This is when they started to run a food bank and then shortly after started the mission.

Martina describes the mission as “a very different way to go about it, yet it is the way to go about it”.

The mission does not receive any government funding and relies solely on corporate donations and monthly sponsors. Jim Bruce often goes out with his truck and trailer and returns with many boxes of meat, fruit, snacks, etc.

The volunteers mainly come from two different age groups, many high school and college kids who are helping out for their community hours at school as well as older people who may be retired looking for something to do or something to help out with. Not everyone sticks around for the long run, but they do get a steady flow of volunteers over all.

Margaret Brown, a regular attendee at the mission, says that for her it is “a lift up, a good spirit, lots of love here.”

“I get a high off of knowing that somebody has progressed, you know it’s part of my life. I believe in having a hand in changing people’s lives and making a difference” says Martina, “I am not just one of those people who just sits back and twiddles her thumbs and watches TV. I like to be out there where the action is and to see people have different lives than what they are experiencing.”



**Top:** Summer and her mother settle down at the mission for a nice warm meal during a cold, winter day.

**Upper centre left:** During the Sunday services, volunteers sit at the back and turn on and off the lights on cue.

**Lower centre left:** People from the mission line up for dinner.

**Above:** Two long-time volunteers of the mission engage in some conversation in between doing work.

**Left:** The Belleville City Mission is always crowded with people who enjoy the company of each other and the volunteers and the support that is offered there.