

## Those who can, cook

What would you do with a can of chickpeas? Maybe you'd puree the contents with some garlic, tahini, salt, olive oil and lemon juice to make the Middle Eastern dip hummus. Maybe you'd add curry powder and yogurt and serve it over rice. Or maybe you'd toss the high-fibre, low-fat chickpeas with cooled pasta, olives, tomatoes and a nice dressing for a cool summer salad.

All that is great . . . if you're someone who's comfortable in the kitchen. And if you happen to have the spices and other ingredients you need. And if you have a refrigerator to keep the perishables cool. And if you have a stove to cook on and pots to cook in and utensils to cook with.

But what if you don't have those things because you've just moved in to a new apartment and all your money has gone to pay first and last months' rent? Or if you've fled an abusive home, leaving all your kitchen stuff behind? Or if you have a physical disability that makes it hard to open cans and stir pots?

Let's face it — cooking at home is a bit of a dying art in many circles. A lot of perfectly well-off people accustomed to grabbing things out of the heat-and-serve section of the grocery store wouldn't know what to do with a sweet potato or dried lentils, even though both are extremely nutritious and keep for ages.

And yet, many of us continue to have an attitude of "They should be grateful for what they get," when it comes to food bank clients. (That might also help explain why some people have been known to "donate" food from their cupboards that's two or three years past the best-before date.)

If you wouldn't eat it or don't know how to cook it, why assume that someone who's likely working with a much smaller budget will know what to do with the same food item? Let's look at that hummus, for instance. To make it, you need those extra ingredients, some of which, like tahini, are hard to find and not cheap. (You can use peanut butter in a pinch, of course.) Then you need to have a blender; there's just no other way to puree the mixture. And you don't eat it by itself, so bring on the pita bread and celery sticks.

By now, I'm guessing that can of chickpeas isn't looking as much like an opportunity as it is a big fat frustration. And much as I like chickpeas, eating them plain with a piece of bread doesn't strike me as a particularly enjoyable meal.

So why does Kawartha Lakes Food Source frequently ask for canned beans among our most-needed items? Because they're high in protein and not as expensive as canned meat, fish and peanut butter (all of which are also always in demand, of course). And because our member agencies do everything they can to help clients make the best possible use of even tricky things like chickpeas, providing recipes and cooking tips — even making hummus for dubious folks to try.

And yes, we and our member agencies deeply appreciate your donations of beans (and everything else). All we're suggesting is that you put yourself in the place of our typical clients — families trying to make ends meet — to think about what you might like on your kitchen shelves, and whether it's really fair to expect those less fortunate to be grateful for the things we can afford to ignore.

One person who never thought that way was the founding president of Kawartha Lakes Food Source, Will Gilbert. Will died in mid-May after a distinguished career and an

equally distinguished life spent serving charitable causes. He was instrumental in establishing the Food Source more than eight years ago and was an active volunteer until his sudden death. Will's tireless dedication to helping the hungry in our community has changed many lives for the better. As the packed church at St. Andrew's Presbyterian on May 22 attested, he will be very much missed.

*Nancy Payne is president of Kawartha Lakes Food Source. If you're interested in donating to KLFS or becoming a volunteer, call 324-0707.*