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Food banks see huge usage spike; Nanaimo 7-10 Club serves more meals, takes in fewer donations during tough 2011-12 fiscal year

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A non-profit that feeds some of Nanaimo's most needy by providing hot breakfasts and bag lunches is the latest organization to see demand rise while donations fall off.

The 7-10 Club, which just closed its books on its 2011-12 fiscal year, recorded 80,000 meals served in that period.

That's an 18% increase from last year. Costs rose 17.5% in the same period but overall donations fell by 25%.

Donations from individuals, which account for 37% of revenues, dropped by 31%.

The rise in demand follows a similar pattern seen with other non-profits that provide services to the unemployed and low-income earners, such as the Salvation Army and Loaves and Fishes food bank.

While the organization does not consider the situation dire yet, continued funding shortfalls could see changes to the program or temporary closures in future.

"My thoughts are that it's the economy," said Gord Fuller, Nanaimo 7-10 Society chairman.

"When you're at the lower income and you find yourself not able to make ends meet, you utilize programs like the food bank and 7-10. And if you're a donor, you may find

that you don't have the money to donate."

In January, Loaves and Fishes reported it saw a 1% bump in need over the holiday season, which, fortunately, was met by higher generosity from donors over Christmas.

In March, the Salvation Army reported it saw demand for its services rise by 18% over the winter season, compared to the same time last year.

At that time, Dawne Anderson, Salvation Army fundraising and promotions co-ordinator, said it appeared to be rising costs of living hitting the working poor.

In real terms, the Army reported seeing 20 more families per month than during the same period a year ago.

And as is the case with the 7-10 Club, donations were down for the Army, too. To address the problem, the Army sponsored a one-day food drive.

The 7-10 Club is still viable, but that could change.

"If it continues into June or July, we may find ourselves having to cut back for one week, or having to shut down for a week," Fuller said. "We've had to do that in the past, but it's been a number of years and we

really don't want to."

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