

## FOOD BANK AND THE SERVICES

**Food Bank** has been in the news, what with the recent expansion plans and the skyrocketing demand for its services. **Renovations are underway** even as we speak, so I thought I would talk a little bit about its history.

There was talk of starting a food bank as long ago as the 1980's, but nothing came of it, though the AMS did organize food drives – there was one at Halloween called **Trick or Eat**, and we would donate the food we raised to the Vancouver Food Bank. But finally in 2005 we opened our own Food Bank in the basement of the **Old SUB** (the old student union building, which is the **Life Building** now), thanks to an **IPF** grant – IPF is the Innovative Projects Fund here at UBC. Also with help from the **Ismaili Students Association** and the **UBC Red Cross**. Funding also came in part from the University's **Food for Fines** program, through which you could donate food items in place of paying your parking and library fines.

At first **Food Bank** was only open on Thursdays, then it expanded to Monday and Thursday, and the numbers served grew to **100**, so that in 2007 it was decided to make the Food Bank one of the AMS Services, though some wondered if there was really enough demand. Unfortunately, said the people in charge, we think there is.

When I started the research on this, I thought the big usage increases only happened in the last couple of years, but what I found is that increases were happening well beyond that. There was talk of **explosive growth** ten years ago, though that still only meant we were getting hundreds of visitors, but it was enough to lead to increased hours and a search for partners and donors. We began getting money from the University, and added an Assistant Coordinator. The **Sororities** raised money for us, and the Constituencies held a food bank competition, as part of the Inter-Faculty Cup [**photo? 2018?**]. UBC President **Santa Ono** was especially keen to help out, and this led to an MoU with the University in 2018-19, at which point the number of clients had grown to **850**

People were talking of the alarming growth in numbers even then, which I'd forgotten about, but still it was much less than now. It was **Covid [that virus photo we've used before]** that really got things going. The numbers became ridiculous, people said, and that was just when they hit **1,000** at the beginning of the pandemic, in 2020. It went to **2400** in 2021, and Kathleen can correct me if I'm wrong, but the next number I found, for 2021-22, was **7,496**, and the latest number was **16,253**. It really is astonishing.

**And here's a picture of the Food Bank last year.**

Anyway, I mentioned that Food Bank became an AMS Service in 2007, which actually makes it quite young as Services go. The AMS has been offering Services since at least the 1970's; in fact, the AMS does lots of things that at other universities you might expect the University itself to be doing, like raising money for buildings – our latest contribution there is the fee we introduced to help pay for the **new Student Recreation Centre** that's under construction now, and of course we raised most of the money for the **Nest**. And we offer all sorts of food outlets, things like **Blue Chip**, something we began doing in the 80's and 90's as an alternative to the limited food offerings the University had then, or sometimes in competition with what the University was offering, which then led them to compete more with us, and now you see all sorts of food outlets all over campus when once upon a time there were only a handful of places, such as the old Subway cafeteria in the SUB and Yum Yum's, the Chinese food cafeteria in the Old Auditorium building [**photo**].

But I digress. I was talking about Services, and the earliest was probably something called **Speakeasy**, which was started up by some students in Social Work on their own initiative in 1970 as a place where students could get some peer support. **Peer Support** is what we call it now, and it's one of our official Services, but it followed part of the usual service development here: an outside group starts something, comes to the AMS for support, and what they started turns into an AMS Service.

**SASC** (the Sexual Assault Support Centre) is another example. It was started by an outside group called **WAVAW** (Women Against Violence Against Women): they just wanted space, they said, which we gave them in the Old SUB, but then they needed funding, so we held referendums to introduce a SASC fee, and at first we partnered with them, but then it just became our own Service.

Sometimes there's a further development: the University steps up and doesn't just offer funding as they have with Food Bank, but starts a parallel service. So we used to have something called **JobLink** to help students find jobs and **Volunteer Connect** to help them find volunteer positions, but the University started up its **Career Services** department, and we handed JobLink and Volunteer Connect over to them. We almost did the same with **SASC** when UBC started **SVPRO**, but there was pushback, so now the two exist side by side.

I should mention **Tutoring**, which goes back to the 90's, and also **Safewalk**, which is also from the 90's, though it was originally called **Walk Home**, and for a while was called **Safe Team** – I think in part to de-emphasize the walking aspect because it's mostly driving now. And our final official Service is **Advocacy**, which in a way is an offshoot of our **Ombudsperson** office.

The Ombudsperson is not part of the official Services, but is a small-s service, offering mediation in club disputes and that sort of thing, but it actually began in the 1960's as a

way of representing students having disputes with the University. At that time the University had no Ombudsoffice of its own – they didn't get one till I think 2006 – so it was just us, the AMS, doing something you might expect the University to be doing. Our Ombudsperson, and I think the University's Ombudsperson, focuses on mediation, so there seemed to be a gap for situations that went beyond mediation and required advocacy and representation in academic and non-academic discipline cases at the University, and that's why our **Advocacy** office was created in 1999.

And since the appearance of the UBC Ombudsperson, the AMS Ombudsperson has shifted to dealing solely with internal AMS matters. Another example of this process is our former Service **eHub**, which was meant to support student entrepreneurs, but since UBC has its own programs doing that, we shut eHub down last year.

And I haven't even mentioned the **Health & Dental Plan** or the **U-Pass**, two more of our services which aren't part of our official Student Services. But perhaps that is enough for tonight.