

Sisters dishing out selfless service with free meals

FLEDGLING CHARITY FEEDS HOMELESS

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Sisters Simryn (left), 15, and Jasmyn Singh, 11, will fill more than 600 containers and hand out the food at the Rockin' the Village concert.

Motivated by the principle of selflessly serving others, two Winnipeg sisters have combined two aspects of their Sikh faith into a fledgling charity dedicated to helping feed the city's homeless.

Today, the Singh sisters — 15-year-old Simryn and 11-year-old Jasmyn — will feed more people than ever before, as they team up with Got Bannock Inc. to serve more than 600 meals at the Rockin' the Village free community concert in St. John's Park in the North End.

It will mark the second time the girls, under the banner of Langar Seva Winnipeg, work with Got Bannock founder Althea Guiboche to offer traditional vegetarian Sikh meals to those in need — regardless of social status, gender, faith or race.

Langar is a Sikh cultural tradition where a community comes together for a meal, while seva (a word derived from Sanskrit) refers to selfless service. Those principles made the sisters want to get involved in trying to make the world a better place through charity.

"We noticed how hard it is for youth who don't have everything that we do. We thought the least we could do was try to give back and help others," Simryn said Friday.

"We're working in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Canada. The last time, we were able to see the impact on the people who needed the food and just how they were so grateful. (Saturday) we're helping that much more people, which I think is going to make it that much more special."

Established in May, Langar Seva Winnipeg didn't get off the ground until June 18, when they served their first meals alongside Got Bannock at Main Street and Dufferin Avenue.

The youngsters got involved with the organization through a connection forged by their mother, Jyoti Singh, who works with Guiboche. While the sisters want to break out on their own eventually, they've been soaking up the experience of working with an experienced activist.

"We technically haven't really become our own charity yet, although we're planning to," Simryn said.

"We definitely want this to be a youth-led organization. We're the ones who will be living in the future, so we need to start now to make it a better world for us. If we want to stop homelessness and poverty, we need to start now."

When they begin serving their meals at St. John's Park (starting at 2 p.m.), it'll be the culmination of many hours of planning and preparation. They'll begin cooking at home at 8 a.m. (with the assistance of their mother and some other families), finishing up by 11:30 a.m. and packing up for the park.

The free concert/family fun day runs from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m. at St. John's Park (on Main Street at Mountain Avenue).

Got Bannock received a \$5,000 Manitoba Arts Council grant to help fund the event, and will provide a free lunch and dinner. There will also be children's events such as face painting, games and a bouncy castle, while 15 musical acts and one comedian are slated to take to the stage.

The sisters will contribute a traditional dish of rice and vegetables, and bottled water, for the lunch.

Simryn admitted she was nervous about the huge amount of food they'll prepare and serve.

"The first time we served, it felt like a lot (of people to feed) and now this is triple that. But we do have a lot of help and we know, with the community, it'll come together."

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