

Ramadan Food Drive to return in support of Orangeville Food Bank

By **Sam Odrowski**

The Holy Month of Ramadan runs from March 10 to April 9, and in keeping with her faith, a local Muslim woman is running a food drive to help those who are less fortunate.

Orangeville resident Tricia Celik, who was raised Christian but converted to Islam in 2017, held her first Ramadan Food Drive last year with the Orangeville Food Bank.

Muslims fast from before the first light of dawn until the setting of the sun on each day of Ramadan. And since the food bank does not receive many halal-specific donations that Muslims can eat before fasting or to break their fast, Celik decided to address the need.

There are two donation bins currently set up in the community, one at Orangeville Town Hall and one at the Alder Recreation Centre.

Celik runs Mrs. C's Private Home Day Care and will be collecting donations there as well as through her teaching role with Parkinson Centennial Public School (PCPS).

A Ramadan display is being set up at the Orangeville Food Bank, featuring halal food donations, decorations, books, and colouring activities for kids.

"When there's Muslims accessing the food bank, I want them to feel included too," said Celik.

The table was also set up last year and it was well received by Muslims who access the Orangeville Food Bank.

"Apparently it was a great hit last year," Celik said. "Other people [non-Muslims] seem to appreciate it too because it's a learning experience."

She added, "It just creates more awareness."

In addition to collecting Halal items, Celik is also encouraging members of the public to donate some of the Orangeville Food Bank's most needed items. They include canned pasta, apple sauce, canned vegetables, jugs of juice, juice boxes, cereal, large soup, peanut butter, dish soap and laundry soap.

Some halal foods include vegan candies with no gelatin like marshmallows and dried fruits, such as dates and apricots.

"It's important to give to those in need, and as Muslims, it's actually a requirement to feed the needy, and give back what we can," Celik said, of her motivation behind the food drive.

At PCPS, Celik does Ramadan-themed crafts each year with her class and said it's a great way to help Muslim students feel represented and teach other kids a bit about the religion.

"There [were] quite a few students in the school that teachers didn't even know were Muslim, and some students didn't know each other was Muslim. So, it was great for them to connect and then also bringing some understanding to why people fast."

As a woman who converted to Islam later in life, Celik there can sometimes be a lack of understanding from people about her faith. Through the food drive and raising awareness about Ramadan, she hopes to combat ignorance in the community and change people's

perceptions of Islam.

?Even as a white, blue-eyed Muslim, you still get reservations from people. So, I've always tried to counteract that with an act of kindness,? Celik said.

She told the Citizen, ?I have faced hate discrimination and people being very standoffish after I converted and started wearing my hijab. If I can soften anyone's heart and bring light to the fact that Muslims are just like anybody else or a Christian so that they see us as humans and not what they necessarily read or hear in the media, then I feel like I'm doing a good job as a Muslim.?

If anybody isn't available during the business hours of the Alder Recreation Centre, Town Hall or Orangeville Food Bank but would like to donate to the Ramadan Food Drive, Celik can accept donations.

Email theplace2biswithmrs.c@outlook.com to make arrangements.