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- Student Life
- Academics
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## Students' Basket Project brings essential supplies to the street

JULY 28, 2020 BY DEBORA VAN BRENK



Jack Tomé and Alex Mastromarini, long-time buddies and classmates, were wrapping up first-year exams in Management and Organizational Studies at Western when the pandemic abruptly sent them home.

"When COVID-19 hit, we knew we had a lot of time on our hands and internships were few and far between," Mastronami said.

So, with friend Nathan Lee who had just finished his first year at the University of Waterloo, they drew on the volunteerism that had already become a habit throughout high school and launched [The Basket Project](#).

Initially intended to help a few dozen vulnerable people, the project now involves a multi-city team distributing nearly 1,500 packages of health-care essentials to those experiencing homelessness in Toronto, Hamilton and Oshawa.

"Our initial goal on our [GoFundMe page](#) was about \$1,000," Tomé said.

They figured that would be enough to provide about 100 baskets of gloves, fabric masks, sanitary wipes, soap, toothpaste, socks and deodorant.

Within a week, they had received \$4,000. Businesses and individuals gave hand sanitizer and other personal-care items. One teen wrote dozens of cards of hope and encouragement.

Donations have now soared to \$14,000.

"It definitely grew a lot faster than we expected it to," Tomé said.

Each time a carload of paper-bag 'baskets' is assembled, they drive to local shelters, where staff deliver the packages to those in need.

The team is buoyed by the courage of people who live on the streets and by people dedicated to helping them.

Eleven people now volunteer with The Basket Project and there are plans to continue to grow.

"We will 100-per-cent expand to London" when they return to campus, Tomé said.



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