

Hungry for Change: Food Insecurity Forum
December 1, 2017, BOCC- Notes

*presentations are available on the Parry Sound Area Food website here:
<https://parrysoundareafood.com/2017/12/06/hungry-for-change-recap/>

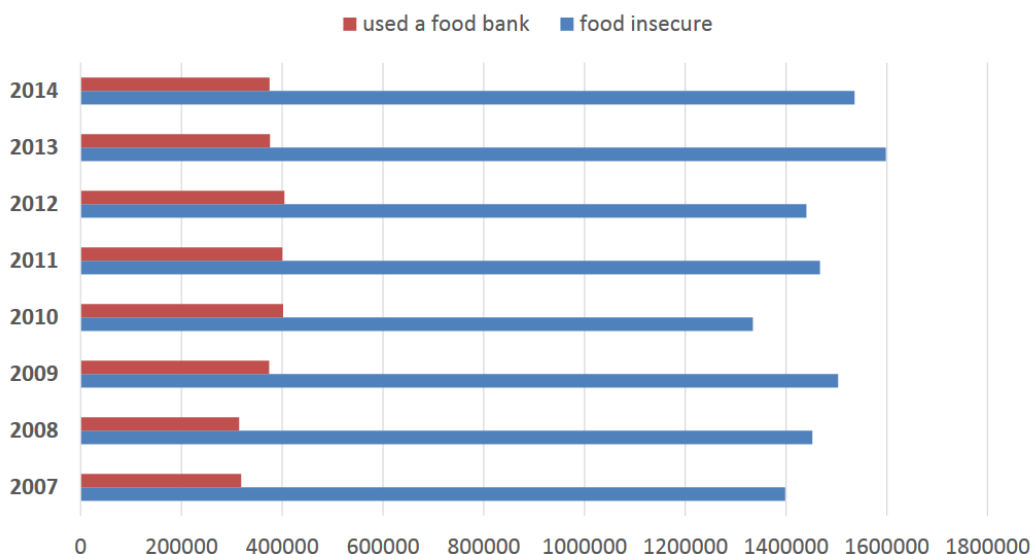
Valerie Tarasuk

-According to Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 12.6 % households are food insecure, i.e., **4 million Canadians**. This is an underestimate as the survey doesn't capture First Nations or anybody without a fixed address

-only a **small fraction of food insecure individuals (a quarter or 25%) are using food banks** (see below).

-People try to manage however they can (e.g., turn to family/friends, miss utility bill payments or rent/mortgage, ask for help from a community org. Food bank use is at the bottom of the list with 'pawn possessions').

Number of Ontarians living in food insecure households vs number reported to be helped by food banks, March 2007-2014.



(Sources: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey 2007-14; Food Banks Canada, HungerCounts 2007-14)



-Situation is **worse for families with children**, in Ontario 15% of children under 18 living in food insecure households

-Highest food insecurity levels for those whose main source of income is **social assistance**

-Data shows **no change through years of poverty reduction strategy**

-Food insecurity is **bad news for people's health** across the board, whether dental, blood pressure, depression/anxiety, asthma, diabetes, people are both more likely to have chronic conditions and **less able to manage** those conditions, huge costs in health care dollars, the more severe the food insecurity, the more costly (\$3930 health care dollars used for those who are food insecure vs \$1608 for food secure)

-Seniors are lowest food insecure at 7%, when turn 65 seniors receive Old Age Security (OAS) and often Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), public pension program has an amazing effect on food security, numbers drop by **more than half**. This is like a 'basic income' (an income floor for seniors).

-Case of Newfoundland poverty reduction strategy (Premier Danny Williams. [Policy](#) raised income support rates, indexed welfare to inflation, increased earning exemptions, increased liquid asset limits, increased health benefits) shows people did spend money on food, food insecurity **dropped by almost half** over the period of 2007 – 2012, didn't eliminate poverty, but addressed depth of poverty.

-Food insecure households' main source of income: **62% were earning working and wages/salaries**. But they were not able to earn enough due to precarious, low wage, short-term etc, or multi-person household reliant on one wage earner, coupled with inadequacy of income transfers provided to supplement low employment incomes, case for a basic income- would reach people in precarious work

-Currently the response is mainly community food programs (e.g., community meals, kitchens, gardens, good food box etc.)

-People who use food banks are very food insecure and highly **likely to stay food insecure** after using, food isn't enough to change the situation. Community programs trying to do the best they can with resources that cannot meet the needs of people coming through the door

-**No evidence that food insecure people have lower cooking/food skills**, rather they are far more likely to shop with a budget, know what they're doing just don't have enough money to do it

-What else can communities be doing about food insecurity?

-**Advocate for policy changes** to address this problem, to raise voice about need for adequate incomes

Jane Shrestha

"No Money for Food is Cent\$less" campaign

Goal: to raise awareness, build support, engage others, build capacity for advocacy related to policies to give people more money for food (e.g., basic income, social assistance rates that cover real living costs, policies that lead to more good jobs with regular hours and benefits)

-See links on [HU webpage](#) and Cent\$less income press kit, presentation to organizations and groups, posters, videos, sharing stories

Phase 2 (present)– It takes more than food to solve hunger – advocate as well as donate, build more capacity for advocacy, involve food banks and people living with poverty

-Have postcards that can be sent to premiere

Food banks help meet urgent food needs but don't solve underlying problem and many who can't meet food needs do not use, root cause is poverty, in order to tackle that in meaningful way, need to look at ways to make sure everyone has enough to have what they need

Campaign includes suggestions for making healthy **food donations**; working with food banks to add healthy donation and advocacy page

Next phase – looking at lead up to **provincial elections**, support local partners in making local candidates and party leaders aware this is an election issue

Joseph LeBlanc

-we need to empower people to participate in food systems; reclaim our role in the food system
-Indigenous philosophy/practice –mutual respect for the land and each other; funding models now often lend themselves better to capitalist development. We need to push for local representation and for a more indigenous system (vs 1 representative in Toronto deciding for land area the size of countries in Europe)

-**Food sovereignty and security** – distinction – food security as quantifiable access to food vs sovereignty about agency, participating in and informing the food system

-it is our responsibility to look at whole picture and not perpetuate stereotype ‘it’s your fault for preferring pop and chips over broccoli’ (when you don’t have the money or access to buy broccoli)

Fort Albany Farmers Market – [see video](#) – distinction between making food available for profit vs making food available

Sudbury’s Community Emergency Fund – piece of emergency food system – can be used to help someone pay their rent or their bills so they keep their housing

-Income security advocacy- Doing something right in protecting people 65 and over

-Community-based food plans, charters, strategies are important!

-Management of **natural resources** as food systems, currently being managed for industrial interests vs for the good of all, opportunity to connect with species at risk efforts

We as people who do vote need to **let politicians know** it’s important to us, everyone needs to say what’s happening here is not okay, relegated to role of consumer when there are many other roles

Reclaim, reorganize, reskill, rebuild local indigenous food systems

Carolyn Doris

-So many programs (GFB, gardens, collective kitchens etc.), but the needle on food insecurity has worsened in our community

-almost 30 years have passed and things haven’t changed which is why trying other approaches

Peterborough Food Action Network-working on a Food Security continuum (need to build capacity etc, at the end of the day have to change systems- but still doing work along that continuum)

Policies, basic income advocacy, food policy for Canada, ON food security strategy, bill 6 advocacy, fair workplaces, and better jobs

Nourish – includes advocacy with all programming; inspired by Stop Community Food Centre

-food as entry point, way to get people at the table, shared vision/goals/principles

-Midway through a 5 year Grow grant (Trillium)

-Peer advocacy – participant driven, need people’s voices, lived experience informing direction, testing and trying, speakers, projects, group learning (example of peer advocates going with people to appts, attending council meetings etc)

Panel discussion

Q: What can advocacy look like?

- Val - Important for agencies to **name the problem**. Community programs cannot solve the problem of food insecurity, these problems are too big, it's really important that advocates say that over and over (I've been doing this work for 20 years and it has NOT gotten better) so I'm just asking for communities to name it-just say 'we're not fixing this'. This is a starting point **from a community perspective- to stand up and say that this doesn't fix a very serious problem**
- Joseph- Look for opportunities for systemic change. **Advocacy is not something we should be scared of! Sharing facts and empowering ourselves, speaking with lived experience**. This is important. Carolyn and Jane- Stories and real life experiences so critical to get across. [Income reform](#) report – just have to send an email by Jan 5 to tell them can't wait 10 years

Q: Where does money for basic income (or better welfare rates, etc) come from?

- Joseph- There is lots of money out there, it's about prioritization. The same govt is spending billions on dirt road to the ring of fire (but only 6 million over 5 years on poverty reduction strategy). **Propping up capitalism is nobody's responsibility but all levels of govt do that**, vs what they're supposed to do (build hospitals, schools)
-we need a unified platform that everyone can stand behind vs piecemeal
- Val – I think we should be **unifying behind eradicating food security (not figuring out what policy is going to work- that's their job)**. Policy makers making very calculated decisions, and they would do it differently if they had to. Where will the money coming from? Have to remember it's costing us now (e.g., health care dollars) – have to remember not starting from zero

Q: How do we deal with restrictions related to food and public health inspectors?

- Joseph-local MOH ability to set direction. One suggestion is to approach as part of a local food strategy (see examples in other communities), seek municipal endorsement then tackle locally. We never ceded right of crown to tell us what to put into our body
- A benefit of small governments is that they can be innovative. Asset based community development- so if we have public kitchen let's grow from that