



DIGNIFIED

FOOD

ACCESS



**A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION AND
HANDBOOK FOR ORGANIZATIONS**

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Roots to Harvest would like to acknowledge that the land we are on—our staff, partners, board members and community—are the lands lived on in respect and reciprocity by the Fort William First Nation for time immemorial. We pay respects to the Elders, past, present and future, and acknowledge the presence and resilience of our neighbours, friends and partners as members of a sovereign nation.

Roots to Harvest is a settler-run organization found within the commonly named Robinson-Superior Treaty area. Specifically, we are in the area known by many as Thunder Bay, found along the north shore of Lake Superior (Gichigamii). Fort William First Nation is recognized in the treaty as signatories in the year of 1850 and in spirit, intent and written word are the original custodians and occupants of these lands. We recognize we are all treaty people and acknowledge this treaty was not fully honoured by the Crown of Canada and that we have a responsibility to reconcile the injustices perpetuated today. In this spirit, we continue to work toward equitable relationships, acknowledging the work being done with and alongside Anishnaabek youth, Elders and communities.

This place is sacred and despite the varied lenses through which we approach land and relation at various points of our lives, we carry respect for the land as a living part of our world, to reciprocate with care and love as is given to us by the land, the water, the sky and all living beings from coast to coast to coast.

DIGNIFIED FOOD ACCESS

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**“Really, people should
~~be happy with~~
~~whatever they get.~~”**

**have access to
good food and
welcoming
spaces. Always.”**

IT'S TIME TO CHECK YOUR ASSUMPTIONS.

Every person who needs food has their own reasons. Those reasons are personal and should be free from judgment by others. And it's OK if they have opinions and preferences because choice means dignity too. Let's make room for everyone at the table.

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DIGNIFIED FOOD ACCESS A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION AND HANDBOOK FOR ORGANIZATIONS

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Roots to Harvest
Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada



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THANK YOU TO EVERYONE INVOLVED

A special thanks to community members with lived experience of food insecurity who shared their knowledge, experience and insight to guide the direction of this handbook by forming the Dignified Food Access Advisory Circle: Stacey Jakobsen, Kylie Tschirsch, Shaneek MacDonald and Sherry Leach.

This handbook was also informed by conversations and meetings with many organizations in Thunder Bay who engage with food access for their members and continue to ask how to do so in a supportive manner. Organizations involved with this handbook and the Dignified Food Access Organizations Working Group include:



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Dignified Food Access: A Framework for Action and Handbook for Organizations represents the aspirations of the people involved to build a community that supports anyone accessing community services in a way that maintains their dignity as deserving members of our community. Toward this goal we propose a definition of dignified food access, guiding principles and four key elements for enacting dignified food access.

This handbook was developed based on several sources:

- Focus groups with the **Dignified Food Access Advisory Circle**, community members with lived experience of food insecurity who met several times during the winter and spring of 2021.
- Conversations with staff at Roots to Harvest.
- Meetings of the **Dignified Food Access Organizations Working Group**, including presentations by the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy, Community Food Centres Canada, and the Ontario Dieticians in Public Health.
- Early drafts of this handbook were shared with Roots to Harvest staff and members of the Advisory Circle and Working Group and their feedback was incorporated.
- Quotes in this handbook are from community members in the Dignified Food Access (DFA) Advisory Circle and the DFA Organizations Working Group and describe their experiences related to accessing emergency food in Thunder Bay.

WHO IS THIS HANDBOOK FOR?

The intended audience for this handbook is staff and volunteers working with social service organizations who support people accessing community resources through providing access to food.

However, this handbook is for anyone who wants to support those who are experiencing food insecurity and who is also willing to think through the best ways we can do this. This approach includes questioning how things have always been done and wondering if there are better ways to support people. It also includes examining our own feelings and assumptions about what it means to help. Many of us who want to help have feelings of gratification from our actions, but it is important to pay attention to the feelings of those who are receiving help. The ways in which we offer help change the feelings of those receiving our support.

SHORT SUMMARY

This handbook is an aspirational work in progress. The creation of *Dignified Food Access: A Framework for Action and Handbook for Organizations* coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. As organizations in Thunder Bay pivoted to support the growing need for food assistance, they recognized a need to consult with community members and to come together to discuss how they could make accessing emergency food a more dignified experience. This handbook is an attempt to bring together the experience, diverse voices and perspectives of both community members experiencing food insecurity and those who have worked to support their communities through offering services in Thunder Bay. In bringing together these perspectives, this handbook proposes a framework for action that can build a more dignified food access experience for community members in need of support. Guided by the principles of respect and trust, care and empathy, and non-judgmental support, four key elements of action come together in this approach to form dignified food access: (1) providing quality food choices, in a (2) respectful way in (3) welcoming places, and by (4) engaging in advocacy at various scales to fight the root causes of food insecurity.

Suggestions of what these four key elements could look like are made and local programs are highlighted to help readers imagine the possible ways actions can be put into practice in their community.

LANGUAGE MATTERS

It is important to acknowledge that language matters. To offer dignified food access means to be thoughtful and critical about the way language represents relationships of mutual respect.

The phrase *community members* is used in this handbook to refer to people who live in Thunder Bay. This handbook does not use 'low-income

people' or 'poor people' because they label people's identity according to the situation they are in. People are not poor; they are living in poverty. A person's identity should not be labelled by the circumstances they live in. Labelling people in this way is dehumanizing. This type of language also divides communities into those with adequate income and those without. By using the phrase *community members*, we remind ourselves and others that those seeking emergency food are members of our community and should be treated as such.

This handbook also uses the phrase *quality food*. Quality food reflects many aspects including two meanings of the word *fresh*. Quality food is defined in this handbook as:

- *fresh* meaning perishable and not highly processed, i.e., vegetables, fruit, whole grains, dairy, legumes and meat, and also meaning not old, expired, dented or moldy;
- *nutritious* meaning containing a high nutritional value including vitamins, minerals, protein and healthy sources of fat; and
- *culturally appropriate* as defined by community members themselves.

The phrase *healthy food* is not used in this handbook as a way to recognize that healthy food means different things to different people and within different cultures. By including *culturally appropriate* in our definition of quality food we recognize that what we eat is defined by our culture. Culturally appropriate food is not fixed, but changes. What food is culturally appropriate should be decided by community members accessing food. This means asking community members directly, or through surveys and focus groups, what foods are culturally appropriate for them. It is important not to assume that all Indigenous groups eat the same thing, or that everyone from Syria eats the same thing. Culturally appropriate foods vary regionally and across different cultural groups. Using the phrase quality food is not perfect either. What each person defines as quality will differ. It is important to approach the question of how to provide food in a dignified way by striving toward equity.

Equality means giving everyone the same resources and opportunities. *Equity*, on the other hand, recognizes that everyone has different needs according to their circumstances. Equity means treating people with fairness according to their needs and the situation, so that the outcomes they reach are equal. This handbook approaches food access from an equity lens.

Through building relationships with community members, we understand that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work for everyone. This handbook uses an equity approach to dignified food access to recognize that each community member who seeks support is coming from a different circumstance. This handbook is an attempt to build a framework for an equity approach to food access in Thunder Bay.



LOCAL CONTEXT

This handbook was created in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Thunder Bay is uniquely situated in Northern Ontario due to its proximity to Lake Superior, the border with the USA and being the largest centre within eight hours of Winnipeg, Manitoba and Sault Ste Marie, Ontario.

Thunder Bay is the hub city for the numerous First Nation Communities in Northern Ontario for education, supplies and medical care. This location has allowed for some creative community relationships to be built but also gives Thunder Bay the feeling of being quite isolated.

Approximately 15% of the population in Thunder Bay earns less than the Low-Income Measure which is \$22,133 for a single person or \$38,335 for a family of three.¹ This means that there are over 15,000 people living on less than the Low-Income Measure in Thunder Bay. This group is diverse: there are many circumstances that result in earnings less than the Low-Income Measure. These include working part-time or full-time for minimum wage, being a single parent, living on long-term disability payments, living on Ontario Works payments, leaving prison, and suffering from major physical health issues, addictions, or mental health issues that prevent a person from keeping employment.

LIVING ON A LOW INCOME CAUSES FOOD INSECURITY

Food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial limits.²

Food insecurity can range in severity from:

- worrying about running out of food because of a lack of money for food

- having limited food selection because of a lack of money for food
- making compromises in quality and/or quantity of food because of a lack of money
- missing meals or reducing food intake
- at the most extreme, going a day or days without food

In Canada, 4.4 million people experienced food insecurity in 2017–2018, including 1.2 million children. Food insecurity is experienced by those who are working as well as those who are on social assistance. There are significantly higher rates of food insecurity in Black and Indigenous households.³ Rates of food insecurity are higher for Indigenous persons, recent immigrants, racialized peoples, single female parents, and people living in rural and remote areas.⁴ Feeding a family in the North costs more when compared with southern regions because of the high cost of food, transportation and storage.⁵

Food insecurity also negatively affects physical, mental and social health. Community members who live with food insecurity are more vulnerable to diet-related health conditions including diabetes and heart disease. These health conditions are made worse when lack of money limits a person's ability to access fresh fruit and vegetables. This situation was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020/2021, with local organizations seeing a significant rise in the number of people accessing emergency food during this time.

CHRONIC FOOD INSECURITY

As people working in service organizations in Thunder Bay, we have seen that many people in our community are unfortunately living with *chronic food insecurity*.⁶ This means that a person experiences long-term or persistent food insecurity rather than short-term or temporary food insecurity. Chronic food insecurity is due to extended periods of poverty, lack of assets and lack of access to financial support. This causes a consistent need to access emergency food. Community members living with chronic food insecurity depend on emergency food access programs as a source of food. What is offered and the way it is offered significantly affects the quality of life of these community members.

Food insecurity among Canadians is not a new problem. Although the recent COVID-19 pandemic has made the situation worse, food insecurity in Canada has been an ongoing issue since at least the 1980s. When foodbanks arose in communities in the 1980s to meet the emergency food needs of community members, they were meant to be temporary. But the persistence of food insecurity has meant a continued need for emergency food access. This means we have been continually offering emergency food to people

¹Building a Better Thunder Bay for All: A Community Action Plan to Reduce Poverty 2018-2020. Lakehead Social Planning Council. <https://www.lspc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018-Poverty-Reduction-Strategy.pdf>

²Tarasuk, V., Mitchell, A. (2020). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF).

³Ibid.

⁴Building Ontario's First Food Security Strategy. Discussion paper. Ontario Government. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/building-ontarios-first-food-security-strategy>

⁵Paying For Nutrition: A Report on Food Costing in the North. Food Secure Canada. https://foodsecurecanada.org/sites/foodsecurecanada.org/files/201609_paying_for_nutrition_fsc_report_final.pdf

⁶Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Insecurity (FAO, 2008). <http://www.fao.org/3/al936e/al936e.pdf>

for 40 years, and yet food insecurity has continued to grow year after year. The amount of food provided by emergency food programs has never been enough to meet the demand.

Food insecurity is therefore not a problem of scarcity of food; it is an issue of equity in access to food. If all Canadians had enough income to purchase food, food insecurity would not exist.

BASIC INCOME PILOT PROGRAM IN THUNDER BAY

We have seen in our organizations that when community members have sufficient funds to purchase food, they do not need to access emergency food. Not only that, participants shared in interviews about the Basic Income Pilot program in Thunder Bay that during this program they were able to buy fruits and vegetables, they no longer skipped meals, and they didn't worry about paying rent or having enough money. They also said with a stable income they felt more human. It improved their mental health, and they were able to make plans for their future including completing education and training for employment.⁷ Unfortunately, when the pilot program was cancelled after only a short time by the Progressive Conservative Government of Ontario in 2019, the participants' situations worsened. The solution to food insecurity is not more food, but more income.

As we still have community members who cannot afford to purchase enough food, organizations offering support will need to continue to provide emergency food access. We propose that these organizations need to do more than just offer food. We also need to work to advocate for and build solutions to the root cause of food insecurity: lack of adequate income.

NO ONE WANTS A HANDOUT

Unfortunately, there is stigma⁸ around accessing emergency food in Canada, and because of this, feelings of shame are felt by those accessing food.

This handbook is an attempt to answer the question: "What would 'dignified' food access look like?" Trying to create a dignified experience for those accessing emergency food requires challenging systemic structures that present barriers and create stigma around accessing food for community members.

⁷Gokani, R., Thibault, J., & Sweers, B. (forthcoming). Insights into the human face of basic income: experiences with the Ontario Basic Income Pilot in Thunder Bay, Canada. <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/users/rgokani>

⁸Bruckner, H. K., Westbrook, M., Loberg, L., Teig, E., & Schaeferbauer, C. (2021). "Free" food with a side of shame? Combating stigma in emergency food assistance programs in the quest for food justice. *Geoforum*, 123, 99-106.



PHOTO ABOVE: GARDENING WITH MEMBERS OF THE THUNDER BAY MULTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION

DIGNIFIED FOOD ACCESS

Dignified describes how people should feel when they must access food. By naming it *dignified food access*, this handbook makes a statement that everyone deserves to access quality food in a respectful way. This approach is about recognizing people's dignity by offering access to quality food on their terms and delivering it in a way that is free of stigma and judgment. Dignified food access means providing quality food choices, in a respectful way, in welcoming places. It also includes advocacy at various levels to fight the root causes of food insecurity.

Our goal is to build a community with food supports in a way that looks, sounds, feels and tastes good. There are many ways organizations can work to make food access a dignified experience for our community members. The ways will look different within each organization and in different communities. This handbook proposes three principles to guide action toward dignified food access: 1) respect and trust, 2) care and empathy, and 3) non-judgmental support.

PRINCIPLES GUIDING DIGNIFIED FOOD ACCESS

1. Respect and Trust: This is number one. We need to respect every person's dignity. This means listening to people, recognizing that they have capabilities and aspirations, asking them for their opinions, and involving them in decisions. In providing food access, we need to respect the different realities people may face. Rather than assuming the needs of each person are the same, we take an equity approach that recognizes that everyone's needs are different.

“We are working hard in our organization to challenge the stigma that people face when accessing food, but really we need to look closely at ourselves and our own judgments first. If we don't do that, then we will never begin to address the stigma our members feel ... it begins with us first.”

DFA ORGANIZATIONS WORKING GROUP

“The stigma around going to a food bank is huge. Being physically at the food bank doesn’t feel dignified because there is even a fear that you will be seen, and then be judged, for needing help.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

For example, the needs of a single person are different from the needs of a mother of three children. Similarly, those with food allergies and dietary restrictions also have unique needs that must be respected. The equity approach means giving community members choice in how they fulfill their needs. Respecting community members means acknowledging that they know their own needs and can be trusted to choose food that meets their needs. Dignified food access is about people accessing quality food on their terms and that is delivered in a way that is free of stigma and judgment. Community members should be able to take what they need, not what has been decided ahead by someone else who is not familiar with their situation.

In recognizing that everyone’s needs are different, we cannot continue to offer a one-size-fits-all approach to emergency food access. This change makes flexibility important. Rather than having a blanket policy dictate our response to need, we should allow the personal circumstances of those in need to guide our responses. Rather than assuming what community members need, it is important to ask them directly through in-person interactions, surveys or focus groups.

If we are to make emergency food access a dignified experience, what we provide needs to be directly associated with community members’ specific needs, rather than dissociated from them. This applies to asking what food choices are important, what is the most respectful way to offer food choices, what makes a place welcoming and what issues are causing stress and tension for community members.

It also includes asking community members to evaluate our programs on a regular basis. Asking participants how we are doing shows respect for them to judge what they need and the best way for those needs to be fulfilled.

2. Care and Empathy: Learning people’s names and offering welcoming greetings goes a long way. Building relationships with community members makes food access a better experience. This can help form a sense of safety and belonging for community members rather than feelings of vulnerability.

If we get to know our community members and understand their situations, we are less likely to make judgments about whether or not they need or deserve to access food. In acting with care and empathy, we are treating each community member as a human being and not a number. This handbook reflects the belief that everyone deserves quality food.

Our goal is to break down the stigma of accessing food so that people come to eat somewhere not because they have to, but because they choose to. The principle of caring and empathy means challenging assumptions we may have built that maintain the idea of an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ in our community and beginning to view everyone as equally deserving members of our community. Sharing meals together can be a powerful way to break down these barriers.

In many Community Food Centres and at the Dew Drop Inn in Thunder Bay, for example, meal programs are open to all community members regardless of income. The specific purpose of this model is to break down stigma and build community by creating relationships across differences.

Offering cultural competency training for volunteers and staff is important for any organization wishing to adopt such a model to cultivate understanding across cultural differences. It is especially important for volunteers and staff to learn about the history of our region from an Indigenous perspective. People are often unaware of how colonization, dispossession of land, residential schools, and current policies continue to recreate intergenerational trauma for Indigenous Peoples.

3. Non-Judgmental Support: It does not matter why a person is seeking support, what matters in dignified food access is how we (as organizations) show up to support our community members. This means continually checking to see what our assumptions are about people and their situations and attempting to put those assumptions or unconscious biases aside, and instead, to listen.

By offering non-judgmental support, we trust that those asking for support need it. Unfortunately, there is a culture of judgment that creates stigma for those accessing emergency food. In our current culture, it is already shameful to ask for help, so to be judged by others as to whether you actually need that help can be very painful. Community members feel judged by volunteers and other community members as to whether they need or deserve support.

This judgment does not recognize that there are many reasons why someone would need support and those reasons are theirs to share if they feel comfortable doing so. It is not our place to judge whether or not someone needs support; it is our place to provide that support in a non-judgmental way.

Non-judgmental support also includes only offering health or food choice advice if it is requested. People’s health status is private information that they should not have to share unless they want to. It is also important to check our assumptions about diet-related diseases and do our own homework about cultural and economic influences on food choices.

“I don’t want to hang my dignity on the door on the way in and leave it there to get the services I need—and then I can’t pick it back up on the way out because of the way I was treated while I was inside.”

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ELEMENTS OF DIGNIFIED FOOD ACCESS IN PRACTICE

The principles of respect and trust, care and empathy, and non-judgmental support are put into action through four key elements that come together to make the experience of food access more dignified for our community members. Dignified food access means providing quality food choices in a respectful way in welcoming places. It also includes advocacy at various levels to fight the root causes of food insecurity. These four elements come together to form dignified food access experiences for community members.

DIGNIFIED FOOD ACCESS



QUALITY FOOD CHOICES

- Safe
- Fresh
- Nutrient rich
- Culturally appropriate

RESPECTFUL WAY

- Checking assumptions and biases
- Focusing on relationships
- Learning names and stories
- Listening and empathizing
- Choice
- No means testing
- No surveillance
- Opportunities to participate

WELCOMING PLACES

- Meeting people where they are
- Clean, bright, open
- Accessible by transit and accessible in general
- Open hours to suit various schedules
- Positive signage and attention to create a welcoming atmosphere
- Places to sit down, use a bathroom, drink water, tea or coffee
- Places to be social, engage in ceremony and offer mutual support

ADVOCACY

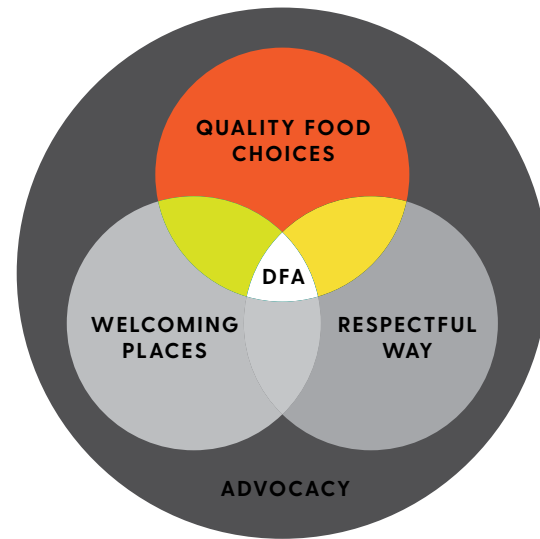
- Individual
- Community
- Provincial/National

“Everyone deserves a good meal.”

DFA ORGANIZATIONS WORKING GROUP

“When you get something expired, you lose your trust for that service, because then it feels like that’s all your worth ... bad, rotten, expired food.”

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QUALITY FOOD CHOICES

Too often, low-quality donated food is what is available to those seeking help through emergency food access programs. Dignity means having access to good-quality food and being able to choose between many options.

Quality food has various aspects including being safe, fresh, nutrient-rich and culturally appropriate. Fresh food has two meanings. First, it includes perishable food such as vegetables, fruit, dairy and meat as well as other minimally processed foods such as whole grains and protein-rich legumes, nuts and eggs. When emergency food programs provide only non-perishable food items, community members often receive foods which are high in carbohydrates and salt and low in vitamins, minerals and fibre.

By offering a variety of fresh foods, community members have access to foods that are higher in vitamins, minerals and other important nutrients that are needed to maintain good health. In order to offer fresh food, organizations would need to fundraise to purchase fridges, or partner with another organization that has fridges, freezers and cold storage.

The second meaning of fresh food is the opposite of stale, wilted, expired or mouldy. By offering fresh food that is not old or spoiled, we are showing respect for community members and sending a message that they are just as deserving of quality food as anyone else in our community.

In working toward providing quality food choices to community members we must ask ourselves, “Is our organization acting as a way for companies to dump unwanted food?” and “Is it ethical to offer food that we would not eat to those who are in need of emergency food?” We need to balance our desire to avoid wasting food with our desire to provide dignified food access.

The food choices we offer should be culturally appropriate. In our community we have many people from different cultural groups. Each different culture

has different food ways. These food ways change how and what foods are eaten. By offering food choices that are appropriate to the culture of community members, we are showing respect for them and their culture. Getting to know community members will allow us to understand which culturally appropriate choices to offer. In some cases, this may require hiring a language interpreter or involving volunteers from different cultural groups to assist in sourcing and cooking appropriate food for various cultures.

What could this look like? Offer food hampers with all the ingredients to make a meal including the recipe. Two different hampers could be offered to give participants choice, as well as provide two meals for those in households with more people. Recipes should be simple and modified if they have ingredients that are expensive or difficult to find in the local area.

- Offer culturally appropriate food boxes.
- Become a hub for bulk purchasing of culturally appropriate staples that members can pay a lower price for; if possible, offer a ‘pay what you can’ sliding scale.
- Become a hub for processing, storing and distributing culturally appropriate hunted meats.
- Partner with schools to provide healthy food choices for students.
- Create community gardens or collective gardens that give community members a way to grow food; surplus food could supply fresh produce to meal programs or emergency food programs.
- Become part of the Good Food Box Program run by the Northwestern Ontario Women’s Centre (goodfoodboxtb.org).
- Build a partnership between a food bank and a meal program so that meals can be created from ingredients that are no longer fresh, so they don’t go to waste.
- Form food procurement partnerships with gleaning programs or other food redirection projects.

“Hampers are so limiting, and there is never anything fresh—you can never really make a meal with what you get.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

NEWCOMER WOMEN ACCESSING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FOOD BOXES AT ROOTS TO HARVEST



LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Dew Drop Inn and Senior Food Bags

In partnership with Roots to Harvest, the Dew Drop Inn has been able to target extra support for seniors that attend their daily meal program. The Senior Food Bags include food items specifically for seniors’ diets (e.g., softer fruit to help with sensitive teeth and smaller portion sizes) that are modified each week with an effort to offer variety based on feedback from recipients. In this way, the program allows for adjustments in food to be driven by input from users. dewdropinnthunderbay.ca and rootstoharvest.org



COMMUNITY MEMBER GARDENING AT NWCHC
SIMPSON ST GARDEN

“People going into an [emergency food program] are already low and having someone treat you badly is just another kick in the teeth.”

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LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

NorWest Community Health Centres programming

NorWest Community Health Centres provide diverse programming for their clients. One such in-person program is its community garden where clients, program participants and neighbourhood members learn how food grows and how to use the produce. They are also involved in beautifying the area with community plantings of flowers in their planters.

norwestchc.org

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Thunder Bay District Health Unit and gleaning initiative

Gleaning is a practice of gathering crops that would otherwise be left in the fields after harvesting to help people who otherwise would not have the means to pick their own fresh produce. The Thunder Bay District Health Unit facilitates a gleaning program by getting in touch with farming host sites, partnering-up organizations and arranging the dates and times for gleaning. Free transportation is offered. This program has been successful in getting people out to get fresh local fruits and vegetables in larger quantities. tbdhu.com/resource/gleaning

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Good Food Box

The Thunder Bay Good Food Box is a non-profit, volunteer-powered, community-based, food security initiative administered by the Northwestern Ontario Women’s Centre since 2005. It is a fruit and vegetable distribution program that aims to improve access to good food by making quality, fresh produce available at a low cost in neighbourhoods across Thunder Bay. It is intended to assist people with low or fixed incomes to access affordable fresh produce year round. goodfoodboxtb.org



COMMUNITY MEMBER ACCESSING FOOD AT
THE THUNDER BAY FOOD BANK



RESPECTFUL WAY

Dignified food access is as much about the manner of delivery as it is about the food itself.

If a community member is treated with respect by a volunteer or employee that has empathy for their situation, this can help community members feel safe and welcomed. Learning community members names and taking time to listen can go a long way toward helping community members feel safe and welcome.

Giving time and energy to developing relationships with community members can make the experience of accessing food more dignified. This requires that there are enough volunteers or staff to attend to everyone, even if one person is taking extra time to listen to a community member. This could be as simple as sitting down to share a meal with someone or taking a few minutes to help someone load food into a taxi or bus. This could also mean having prepared meals available for those who are coming to access groceries to acknowledge that by the time they arrive to access food they are likely already hungry. It is important for volunteers and staff to be present and helpful, but refrain from following or watching participants as they access their food.

If we begin with the belief that everyone is deserving of a good meal, and we trust that everyone has a reason for needing to access emergency food, then we begin to understand that it is not our place to judge whether or not a person is in need. By letting go of our own judgments of other people, we open ourselves up to respect and empathy. By acting with respect and empathy toward community members, we can offer emergency food in a dignified way. Training volunteers and staff to actively examine their own biases and set aside their judgments is likely one of the least expensive ways to move toward offering more dignified food access. Cultural sensitivity training for staff and volunteers is an important way to support this type of learning.

“It shouldn’t feel like we’re at war and I need to put on my armour to access it. I am telling you I need this, and I need to be trusted in that need.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

“Choice is so important; we don’t want to just be assumed to need the same items and then be expected to be grateful.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

It is not only the attitudes of staff and volunteers that contribute to a dignified food access experience. The way the emergency food is offered is critical to their experience. The way includes how an emergency food program operates. Do community members stand in line? Are they asked for their ID or other documents? Do they have any choice in what they accept? If those seeking support stand in line, are asked to prove their need for assistance and have no choice in what food they accept, their experience is not a dignified one. These situations create feelings of disrespect, or lack of understanding for the situations that people are facing.

Organizations looking to set up emergency food access can help make the experience more dignified for those accessing food. **The number one way to offer food in a respectful way is to allow community members to choose what they would like to consume and what they are able to consume.**

Unfortunately, many people are still stuck in a way of thinking that “beggars can’t be choosers”. This attitude also creates a situation where those in search of food are given food, chosen by others, that they may not have eaten before, may not know how to prepare and may not be a good choice for them. If those accessing food attempt to leave items behind that they will not eat, they feel they are judged as not in need of support.

Community members spoke of how their experiences accessing food would be more dignified if they didn’t have to take anything they didn’t want to. Following the principle of non-judgmental support, while providing food options we must not shame community members’ choices, even if they do not fit into our own definition of what we would consider to be healthy. It is also important to recognize that community members with health conditions such as diabetes will have a restricted diet. When donated food does not meet their dietary needs, offering community members gift cards can be one way to give them access to foods they need.

What could this look like? Setting up a grocery store experience in the space where food is being accessed, where community members can shop for what they need. The Mustard Seed Street Church is one successful local example.⁹ mustardseed.ca

- Give out grocery store gift cards or vouchers for affordable food markets as a way to give community members in need of food the same choices over their food as other community members.
- Offer hot meals where community members sit at tables together and volunteer servers offer each person a choice between meal options.¹⁰
- Cooperate with other organizations to set up neighbourhood affordable food markets so community members can shop for items they need at affordable prices where they live.

⁹Van der Zwan, I. (Dec. 5, 2019). Victoria’s market-style food bank lends dignity to those who use it. CBC News British Columbia. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/mustard-seed-market-food-bank-victoria-1.5379464>

¹⁰Kitchen Confidential: How to start a Community Meal program. Community Food Centres Canada. <https://cfccanada.ca/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=74d00bdb-3839-4871-b6e3-031af9bab67e>

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Elevate NWO

Elevate continues to offer non-judgmental, compassionate and confidential support to people living with or affected by HIV and Hep C in Thunder Bay. They have an in-house food bank with curated foods for people living with such complex health situations. They use food as an engagement tool and as a way to bring the community together. elevatenwo.org

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Dew Drop Inn

The Dew Drop Inn has been feeding the hungry in Thunder Bay for 40 years now. They offer a safe, welcoming environment where hungry adults and children can access a lunch or a hot meal with no questions asked and are treated with respect and dignity. dewdropinnthunderbay.ca



“The Community Food Market in Limbrick is my main access to produce. I switched because it’s closer, cheaper, and a part of the community so I like to be involved in it.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

ABOVE LEFT: VOLUNTEERS AT DEW DROP INN PREPARING A MEAL

BELOW: ROOTS TO HARVEST SET UP AT THE COMMUNITY FOOD MARKET



LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Community Food Market

NorWest Community Health Centres and Roots to Harvest have partnered to bring food to the community in the form of a Community Food Market at the Limbrick Resource Centre. The Community Food Market provides an opportunity for anyone in the community to have access to fruits and vegetables at wholesale prices. When people shop for fruits and vegetables at the Community Food Market, their money goes further than it would at a grocery store and they can head home with loads of fresh ingredients to prepare healthy meals. rootstoharvest.org/community-food-market.html

“It feels like you’re being monitored, as if you’re not trusted while you’re there.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

NO REQUIREMENT FOR PROOF OF NEED

Although many emergency food programs are required to collect some personal information for tracking purposes, any means testing should be removed. A means test is an assessment of a person’s financial state for the purpose of determining their eligibility for assistance. Asking someone to prove their need for services requires them to share their personal information and have their relative need for food judged by a stranger. Asking for proof of need sends a message of mistrust to community members, as if they may be coming to access food even when they don’t need it. No one comes to ask for emergency food unless they need it.

Asking for personal information that proves need also sets up a hierarchy where those providing services have the power to judge if someone deserves to receive food or not. This does not build community around healthy relationships but instead continues to reinforce ‘us’ and ‘them’ divisions amongst community members.

If we treat those who access emergency food as fellow community members and neighbours, who are able to judge their own needs, we can begin to create a welcoming experience where community members can have a good meal or access quality food and do not have to trade their dignity in exchange. Dignified food access should take a ‘no-questions-asked’ approach. Means testing is sadly still in use in some organizations in Thunder Bay. The removal of means testing can begin to create a structure for accessing food that is supportive and free from feelings of judgment and surveillance.

NO WATCHING

Community members also spoke of feeling under surveillance while accessing food. Surveillance means being closely watched under suspicion.

Being watched or followed while accessing food creates feelings of being suspected of doing something wrong. Guided by the principle of respect and trust we can begin to understand that if we trust that community members will take what they need, there is no need to watch them closely as they access food. Having an atmosphere where community members can act free of surveillance is especially important for members of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour Communities, who experience surveillance more than white or white-passing community members. Being trusted to meet their own needs without judgment communicates respect to those needing to access emergency food.

OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE

Another important way in which emergency food programs can offer dignified food access is by offering community members opportunities to participate in programs. Whenever possible, hire community members to help run programs. This is a way of building a respectful community through recognizing that community members who seek support also have skills and knowledge.

Participation can also build community by breaking down the sometimes-unspoken class division between those serving and those being served. Community members who have lived experiences with food insecurity can bring important insights into how to offer dignified food access. By hiring community members or giving them opportunities to volunteer, we can shift how we see emergency food access. Instead of thinking about supporting community members, we can shift to the idea of building community with those experiencing food insecurity to offer each other support.

In order for community members to participate and succeed, their basic needs must be met including monetary or in-kind compensation, childcare, transportation costs, and food or meals. Fairly compensating people for their time, energy and labour shows you value them as equal contributors to the work you are doing and equal members of our community.

What could this look like? Offer community members opportunities to:

- participate in community gardens, community farms or demonstration gardens including skill sharing and education in gardening.
- sit on advisory councils or in board member positions to ensure participation in decision making around how to offer dignified food access.
- share their cooking skills in cooking programs and helping prepare community meals.
- hold cooking demonstrations or classes to share their cultures and skills with other interested community members.
- Organizations can also
 - offer youth-focused cooking and gardening programs.
 - create partnerships with First Nations communities to offer opportunities for skill sharing in traditional food ways including hunting, fishing, gathering wild foods and medicines.
 - support Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives as an approach to address the underlying issues impacting Indigenous Peoples and their ability to respond to their needs for healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods.

“Volunteer attitude would make a big difference—like friendly greeting, using names, like it’s a community and not a service for poor people.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Royal Aleppo Catering

Royal Aleppo is a food business specializing in Syrian food that grew out of involvement in the Culture Kitchen Program at Roots to Harvest. They continue to participate in the Thunder Bay community by providing cooking demonstrations with individuals and organizations such as the Good Food Box and the Métis Nation of Ontario to share their skills and build community. royaleppofood.ca

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Roots to Harvest and high-school-aged youth

The Urban Youth Farm Program has been at the core of the Roots to Harvest employment strategy from the very beginning. In partnership with the Lakehead District School Board, 10 high school students aged 15–18 are hired for eight weeks in July and August to build employment skills and get co-op credits for running one of our urban garden sites and work with local farmers.

The Academic Year Program began as an initiative to provide year-round engagement and work for interns in the Urban Youth Farm Program. Selected interns carry over the skills learned through their summer internship and continue on with Roots to Harvest, working part-time while still attending school, engaging in food-related jobs through placements, on farmwork, seed saving and other relevant wintertime tasks such as making granola for sale in the community. rootstoharvest.org

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Indigenous Food Circle

The Indigenous Food Circle aims to better understand and promote Indigenous perspectives and experiences around food. The circle uses food as a tool for reconciliation and resurgence by creating the space to reclaim and weave Indigenous knowledge into the Thunder Bay and region food system. They have worked on a variety of projects including the Understanding our Food Systems project and have created many videos on Indigenous food ways. foodsystems.lakeheadu.ca/indigenous-circle



DUHA SHAAR AND AYA WADI, OWNERS OF ROYAL ALEPPO FOOD, A SYRIAN & MIDDLE EASTERN CATERING AND STOREFRONT RESTAURANT IN THUNDER BAY, ON

Note of Caution. In offering food skills programs, we should be careful not to fall into believing the myth that food insecurity can be solved by increasing food skills. Sometimes Canadians assume that cooking from scratch is less expensive and think that: “If only they could cook from scratch they could manage.” A recent national study showed that food insecurity in Canada is not a problem of food skills.¹¹ There was no difference between cooking skills reported across all income levels. This myth falls into an old pattern of blaming poverty on people’s lack of abilities. This is called a deficit approach. It is important for programs to build on existing skills and not make the assumption that members have no skills to start with. Instead, an emphasis on skill sharing with fellow community members is a dignified way to approach capacity-building programs.

¹¹Huisken, A., Orr, S. & Tarasuk, V. (2016). Adults’ food skills and use of gardens are not associated with household food insecurity in Canada. *Can J Public Health*, 107(6): e526–e32. <https://doi.org/10.17269/CJPH.107.5692>

“WE NEED A COORDINATED EFFORT—
LESS JUDGY, MORE CARING—WHICH
WILL RESULT IN MORE ENGAGEMENT
FROM EVERYONE IN FOOD PROVISION.”

DFA ORGANIZATIONS WORKING GROUP

“Having to register upon entry, in front of others, does not feel dignified. It should be set up differently, in a separate space.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

“When people now come into our space after it has been painted, they comment on how bright and nice it is to be in the space and it has less of a dingy garage feel to it.”

DFA ORGANIZATIONS
WORKING GROUP



WELCOMING PLACES

A place is a space with social meaning. The way a place is laid out and how community members are asked, or expected, to move through that place affects how the place feels. These feelings affect how dignified a food access experience is for community members. Clean, bright spaces can help a food access experience feel dignified.

Spaces that have areas for people to sit down, have water, tea, or coffee to drink, a bathroom to use, information to read, an area for children to play with toys, can also go a long way toward making the food access experience more dignified. The layout of these spaces is also important.

If possible, remove the requirement to register. If your organization must have a registration system, having registration in a separate room where the personal information of community members cannot be overheard is an important way to show respect for community members' right to confidentiality.

Signage is also important in creating a welcoming place. Negatively worded signage about what community members should not be doing creates a negative atmosphere of discipline that can create feelings of uneasiness and anxiety among community members. Also consider using signage as an opportunity to welcome people in various languages spoken in your community.

The hours that the place is open can also make it differently accessible to community members with different needs and commitments. Consider having hours that meet the needs of various populations including those who work during the day, seniors, and families with young children.



“It is really hard to think positively about a place when all the signs tell you what you can't do—why can't we have signs telling us what we can do?”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

COMMUNITY CULTURAL COOKING SESSION AT
ROOTS TO HARVEST

If an organization does not have the capacity to create a welcoming place, consider partnerships to set up dignified food access in a place that community members already visit, or offer home, or school deliveries as a way to bring food access to people where they live rather than having them come to a different location.

It is important to consider if the best way to offer dignified food access in our community is to set up a place for people to come or if resources are better spent on providing food and services where people already are. This is especially important when considering how best to serve remote Northern communities.

In creating welcoming places for dignified food access, we must think of these spaces as community building spaces rather than spaces for food distribution. Creating welcoming places includes asking ourselves questions about how the space reflects the kind of place we would like to create.

“I have never walked into a foodbank [here] because of that fear of judgment and ridicule.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE



QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR PROGRAM

How do people get to this place and get home?

- Is the space accessible by transit?
- How long is the transit ride or walk from where community members live?
- Is there a place where food could be delivered that would be more accessible and welcoming to community members, instead of having them come to you?
- Are home deliveries possible for those who face mobility barriers?
- Are community members' needs best served by offering them gift cards to the grocery store or vouchers to a farmer's market that is closer to their neighborhood? In answering this question, consider how much volunteer and staff time and energy it takes to source, store and distribute food to community members.

Is the place welcoming?

- Does the signage make people feel welcome, or does it tell them what they should not do?
- Is the place beautiful, open, clean, bright?
- Is there a way to set up the space so that community members do not have to wait in line, but could have a place to sit out of the weather (cold, rain, sun, etc.)?
- Is there a space where community members can warm-up, cool down, access water, tea, or coffee?

Is the place accessible to various people with different needs?

- Is there a space where children can play while parents and guardians are accessing food?
- If a meal is being served, are there highchairs available for children?
- Is the space accessible in a wheelchair or with a walker?

Is the place set up to build community and support people in various ways?

- Is there a place or time where community members have the opportunity to find out about other services or supports that are available to them?
- Are their places for culturally important activities such as ceremonies?
- Are their spaces where mutual support networks can meet or social justice groups to organize?

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Thunder Bay Food Bank

The Thunder Bay Food Bank provides twice-a-month food hampers to clients that include perishable and non-perishable items. They have been adapting their procedures so that they can stay open during COVID-19. TBFB has seen an increase in Newcomers to Canada who are becoming clients of the food bank. They have been adjusting their food choices to offer more culturally appropriate foods and halal meats to these families.



“It feels dirty, like you are not good enough.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

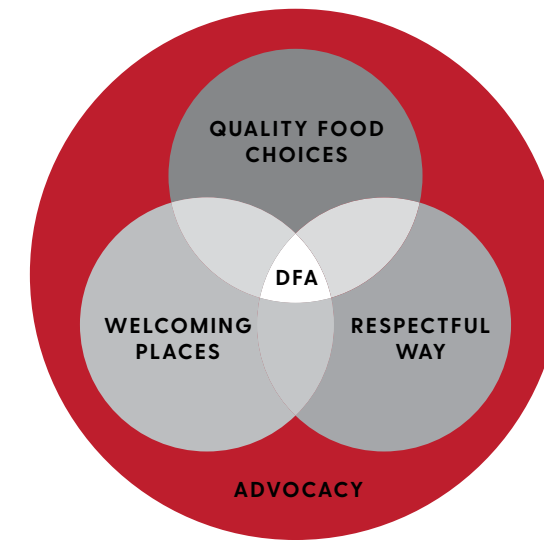
DISTRIBUTING THE GOOD FOOD BOX DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

ADVOCACY: FOOD IS JUST THE BEGINNING!

Organizations working toward creating more dignified food access need to acknowledge that emergency food is not enough to end food insecurity.¹² Even if there was enough food to meet demand, providing food is not going to solve the causes of food insecurity.

Instead, our approach to dignified food access includes addressing the emergency and the long-term need for change at the same time. While providing dignified food access to fulfil immediate food needs, we must work together to advocate for changes that will begin addressing the underlying issues of poverty and inequality in our community. This means moving from a reactionary model to a preventative model.

STAFF FROM ROOTS TO HARVEST SHOW EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM



Recognizing that chronic food insecurity exists in our community makes this shift even more important. If we recognize that the same people are returning regularly because they are in need of support, devoting some of our energy to advocating for change becomes important. Advocacy is about pushing to change the system to ensure people have the income they need to purchase their own food through regular food channels. Food is only one piece of the puzzle. In offering support, we need to look beyond simply offering food, but also include creating programs to support the mental, physical and emotional needs of our community members.

Using the guiding principle of respect and trust, this handbook proposes a participatory approach to advocacy. This means rather than speaking on behalf of community members who need dignified food access, we work to provide opportunities for those experiencing food insecurity to advocate for themselves. For example, community members involved in the DFA Advisory Circle that was created to guide the direction of this handbook said, “I’m so excited to see this work being done; we need to do things differently and this is how we do it”.

When asked about how they felt about being involved one member said, “It gave me a sense of belonging.” Another member felt it was important to be involved in this type of work in order to represent those who don’t often have a voice in making decisions about food access: “We are the voice of the voiceless.”

Creating capacity-building opportunities such as peer advocacy training programs for community members to increase advocacy skills and civic engagement is an important way to support participatory advocacy.¹³ Non-judgmental support means working to reduce barriers to accessing food, as well as helping lift people out of the cycle of needing to access emergency food. Advocacy can be done at various levels and in many ways that will either directly or indirectly improve the lives of community members. Advocacy can be at the individual level, the community level or the provincial or national levels.

“We need a coordinated effort—less judgy, more caring—which will result in more engagement from everyone in food provision.”

DFA ORGANIZATIONS WORKING GROUP

¹²Tarasuk, V., Dachner, N., Hamelin, A-M, Ostry, A; Williams P, Bosckei, E, et al. A survey of food bank operations in five Canadian cities. *BMC Public Health*. 2014;14(1):1–11. <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-14-1234>

¹³Community Food Centers Canada. Let’s mobilize! How to start a Community Action Program. <https://cfccanada.ca/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=27286edd-661f-4c61-9289-bed209fe71e9>

“If you’re that hungry, it’s fine—but if it’s a way you need to live, then it’s just not enough.”

DFA ADVISORY CIRCLE

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL ADVOCACY: BIG IMPACT ON FEW LIVES

At the level of the individual, advocacy can mean connecting community members to a variety of supports and helping them navigate issues affecting their lives. This means extending our empathy beyond the food access experience to what community members are faced with before and after they access food. Advocacy means thinking about how supports in other parts of community members’ lives could alleviate stress and possibly reduce the need to access emergency food. Expanding programs and services to meet as many basic needs as possible can support those seeking emergency food in many aspects of their lives. This could be as simple as offering items that can help people lower expenses including hygiene products, toiletries, baby food, diapers, pet food, lightbulbs, and kitchen equipment.

It could also mean expanding programs and services to include individual advocacy. Navigating support programs can be difficult for those experiencing various forms of oppression. If, for example, a community member does not have a monthly phone plan, and no data, then they may not be able to apply for these types of relief programs because the time spent on hold may use up all their prepaid phone minutes. Holding a time and space where volunteers or staff assist community members through the process of applying for hydro bill relief, or other program, either over the phone or online, can be an important way to support community members. A peer advocacy training program is one way to create employment for community members and also increase your organizational capacity to offer individual advocacy. If your organization does not have the capacity to do this, training staff and volunteers to refer community members to services and programs that may be available to support them is an important step.

Collective cooking or gardening programs can be low-pressure learning spaces and places for creative expression and community healing. These types of programs are shown to reduce social isolation and build confidence in food preparation skill. They can also lead to opportunities for community members to participate in dignified food access for themselves and others as volunteers or staff members. These programs can also lead to building employment skills.

What could this look like?

- Hire advocates to help community members access and apply for other supports including warming centres, shelters, affordable housing, counselling services, harm reduction services, addictions services, employment training, emergency rent assistance, affordable housing services, shelters, etc.
- Host events for the purpose of building community such as celebrations around cultural holidays or events.

- Offer youth programming for Indigenous youth who come to high school in Thunder Bay.
- Host events for creativity, healing, and knowledge sharing among community members.
- Offer employment skills programs for adults and youth in farming, cooking, and entrepreneurship.
- Host services or information sessions in your place if you have one: survey your community members and then use your space to host third-party service or information providers to meet the needs that were identified.

Many Community Food Centers and Good Food organizations across Canada have had success in supporting their community members by hosting individual advocacy services in the following areas:

- **legal**—lawyer referrals, understanding court documents, notaries
- **immigration**—non-status rights, appeals, refugee status, applying for citizenship
- **job search**—referrals, writing résumés and cover letters, coaching
- **identification**—applying for or replacing lost or stolen ID
- Raise voter awareness: share knowledge about candidates, assist with voting without ID.
- Make healthcare accessible: provide referrals to healthcare providers and dietitians, along with information on diet-related illnesses.
- Offer support with:
 - housing—assistance with searches, applications, tenant rights
 - taxes—understanding how to file or claim benefits
 - haircuts, bike tune ups and giveaways, clothing swaps¹⁴

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Women’s Tapestry

The Women’s Tapestry in Thunder Bay believes in the power of connection of people and works to increase the knowledge and understanding of all peoples across the diaspora. In partnership with Roots to Harvest, the Women’s Tapestry co-hosted an Ethnic Picnic, where women could showcase food from their culture as a way to incubate small businesses and increase the connections between people in Thunder Bay.

¹⁴Community Food Centres Canada, Beyond Emergency Food. Evolve your foodbank into a force for change. <https://cfccanada.ca/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=8b59410d-87b9-4c6c-853c-f305e4326d58>



HARVESTING FOOD FOR MARKET AT LILLIE ST. URBAN FARM

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Elevate NWO

Although food is not in Elevate’s mandate, they have adapted to include food in all of their programming as a meaningful way to engage with their members. They use their garden space as a way to learn gardening skills while getting back to nature and helping out the community. The food harvest goes to support the in-house food bank
elevatenwo.org

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Roots to Harvest and adult employment

The SHOW program debuted as an employment program in the spring of 2016. The program hires youth aged 18–30 years in a five-month long contract for Seasonal Horticultural Outdoor Worker (SHOW) positions, aimed at breaking down barriers to employment and instilling broader-based employment skills and agricultural training.
rootstoharvest.org

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

NorWest Community Health Centres and Kinna Aweya Legal Clinic

Together, these organizations have provided the leadership to the ID Action group to address people’s health concerns through obtaining ID that is required for services. Since this initiative has been created, hundreds of people have been able to obtain necessary identification
kalc.ca/awenen-niin-identification-program

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Anishnawbe Mushkiki

Anishnawbe Mushkiki’s mission is to provide culturally safe, comprehensive care empowering patients through their health and wellness journeys by offering health promotion and primary and traditional approaches to patient and family-centered care. They work with their clients to provide comprehensive care that looks to the integration of health and culture
mushkiki.com

COMMUNITY-LEVEL ADVOCACY: THE BIGGER PICTURE

At the community level, advocacy means finding ways to advocate for community members that can have a positive impact for the whole community. This involves coordination with other organizations and consultation with community members to offer wrap-around support.

What could this look like?

- Launch education campaigns to shift public perception of people experiencing food insecurity.
- Create a quality food policy in collaboration with other organizations providing emergency food access to communicate to the public how they can help provide quality food to community members who need it.
- Collaborate with other organizations to ensure that there is a meal program offered to community members multiple days per week.
- Collaborate with school boards on quality food procurement strategies for schools.
- Establish mobile, affordable food markets in various neighbourhoods or remote communities; mobile markets are opportunities for community members to participate, build employment skills, build community and access food.
- Collaborate on creating an affordable transportation system for community members such as coordinating a volunteer driver system for people to access food and funding drives to pay for monthly bus passes or taxi tokens.
- Collaborate to support a safe driver program for women to feel safe taking taxis such as the IKWE Safe Ride in Winnipeg.¹⁵
- Encourage local businesses, clubs or organizations to sponsor community meals.

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Get Fresh Café

Lakehead Public Schools in partnership with Roots to Harvest created space in their cafeterias for the Get Fresh Café. The Café offers fresh and from-scratch meals using local and Ontario food, every day. New flavours, combined with seasonal ingredients, all blend together to produce menu options that the entire school is excited about. The Get Fresh Café is where food culture for the school begins, and lives. Bringing together community organizations, producers, distributors, decision makers, teachers, students, chefs and good food, Roots to Harvest facilitates high schools to produce local, tasteful, healthy and fresh meals for students
rootstoharvest.org

“My hope for continuing on with food access post-COVID-19 is that people carry on caring on for others in a way that I have not seen related to other illnesses.”

DFA ORGANIZATIONS WORKING GROUP

¹⁵Dashka, R. (March 11, 2012) Safe ride taxi service for women calls for more volunteer drivers amid soaring demand. CTV News. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/safe-ride-taxi-service-for-women-calls-for-more-volunteer-drivers-amid-soaring-demand-1.3838070>



EMERGENCY FOOD RESPONSE REPORT: RECOMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL, PROVINCIAL & NATIONAL CHANGE.

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy

The Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy aims to build healthy, equitable, and sustainable food systems that contribute to the economic, ecological, and social well-being and health of the city of Thunder Bay and area. It has been working on the development of an Emergency Food Response Plan for the region in response to the food-related efforts that were put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. This background research includes literature reviews, as well as interviews and surveys gathered by many of the food access providers who worked to get food to people during an unprecedented time. There are a number of reports and other information about the region's food systems that can be accessed at tbfoodstrategy.com.

PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL-LEVEL ADVOCACY: EMERGENCY FOOD IS NOT THE ANSWER

This approach recognizes that 'emergency' food has evolved beyond simply addressing an emergency need for food. Food charity has evolved into a secondary food system that continues to be an important source of food for those living on low incomes. Food insecurity cannot be solved by offering more food; food insecurity is a symptom of poverty.

The real solution is ending poverty. The persistent issue of food insecurity and the existence of chronic food insecurity indicates that there is a need to push for change beyond the community level that will make emergency food programs unnecessary. Within the goals of building community and fostering a sense of belonging, we as organizations need to engage in advocacy for change at the provincial and national levels so that people can come to cook, eat, garden and gather because they want to, not because they have to.

At the provincial or national level, advocacy means pushing for changes to policies that will positively affect the lives of community members. This can take the form of building advocacy and awareness campaigns around policies and programs that will reduce the need for community members to access emergency food.

What could this look like? Issues that could be the focus of provincial- and national-level advocacy include:

- Indigenous food sovereignty
- food as a human right
- advocating for a living wage
- strengthening income supports including Ontario Works, universal basic income, and increasing minimum wage
- creating or expanding affordable housing
- national- or provincial-level subsidies on fruits and vegetables¹⁶
- school food programs
- pharma-care plan
- support programs for those leaving incarceration
- harm reduction
- programs offering mental health counselling and addiction services

LOCAL PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) Lab at Lakehead University

The SFS Lab is a hub for academics and community-based practitioners engaged in sustainable food systems research and action. It is a collaborative space and a resource for researchers, practitioners and activists. It aims to build meaningful relationships that enable knowledge sharing between research, policy and practice with an ultimate goal of healthy, just and sustainable food systems for all. The SFS Lab has a number of ongoing projects with organizations across Northwestern Ontario, across Canada and internationally.

foodsystems.lakeheadu.ca



AGROECOLOGY IN NORTHERN ONTARIO SEED SAVING DISCUSSION

¹⁶How Nutrition North Canada works. Government of Canada. <https://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1415538638170/1415538670874#tpc1a>

CLOSING

“The human piece is the most important—you can mess up the food piece and the space piece, but if you mess up the people piece your program will be doomed.”

DFA ORGANIZATIONS WORKING GROUP

COMMUNITY CARROT TASTING EVENT



This handbook brought together the experience, diverse voices and perspectives of community members experiencing food insecurity and those who have worked to support people through offering food-related services in the Thunder Bay region. In bringing together these perspectives this handbook proposes a framework for action that can build a more dignified food access experience for people in need of support.

By bringing these voices, experiences and services together we are beginning to build a food access system that is dignified, guided by respect and trust, care and empathy and choice. This handbook is only the first step in this process. It aims to prepare the ground for the work that is needed to challenge the root causes of food insecurity and build a more just and sustainable world for all.

DO YOU
WANT
TO LEARN
MORE?

FURTHER READING:

Bruckner, H. K., Westbrook, M., Loberg, L., Teig, E. & Schaeffbauer, C. (2021). “Free” food with a side of shame? Combating stigma in emergency food assistance programs in the quest for food justice. *Geoforum*, 123, 99–106.

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