

Thank you! You participated in a Sheridan College and Oakville Community Foundation study about access to healthy food in the Halton Region. You said you would like to see a copy of the results, so here are some highlights. Thanks to your participation, we're learning about people who use food programs in the Halton Region and their experiences. This kind of information has not been available before.

The event: Participants were asked to identify the **barriers** to healthy food access (**roots of the tree**). Then they explained the **consequences** of having little access to healthy food (**branches of the tree**). Last, participants imagined what their **ideal food program** looked like.

Consequences from lack of access to healthy food



Physical health

- Chronically hungry; skip meals so there is food for children
- **Common issues:** constant fatigue, lack of muscle mass, obesity, anemia, osteoporosis and diabetes



Poverty Cycle

- Hungry children are unable to concentrate at school
- Stigmatized for attending a child hunger program
- Mislabelled as having behaviour problems because children are hungry and can't learn properly
- Children are isolated because they can't afford social activities
- Children don't have the strength to participate in free school sports
- Fear children would grow up less happy than generations before them and would not be able to become productive members of society



Mental health

- Being hungry, or concerned about potential hunger takes up a lot of energy
- Feelings of hopelessness, depression, tired, stress, anxiety, discouragement
- Feeling less intelligent because unable to concentrate on anything but hunger



Emotional health

- Shame and embarrassment for inability to provide adequate nutrition for families
- Low self-esteem and negative outlook on life
- Feelings of anger, hostility and living in fear



Relationships

- Moving in with or relying on family put a strain in the relationship
- Difficult to socialize, at home or out, because of lack of food or money



Financial health

- Don't pay bills such as hydro and rent to purchase food
- Loss of employment due to inability to concentrate

Barriers to health food access



Access to money

- Most jobs are low-income, precarious labour
- High cost of living while ODSP and OW benefits remain low & seniors weren't prepared to live off of low pensions
- Lone parents did not anticipate breakdown of relationships
- Long wait lists for rent-geared-to-income housing



Access to food programs/banks

- **Getting to programs:** hours of operation, high cost and lack of transportation
- **Being allowed access:** Inconsistent intake policies; difficult screening processes that takes a lot of personal information
- **Experience at the program:** Proving need for program offers little privacy and is degrading



Stigma

- Feel judged by community, other food bank users and volunteers
- Food bank staff's lack of professionalism towards program users



The food: variety, quality, quantity

- Need food that is more kid friendly and meets varying health, cultural and dietary needs
- Lack of toiletries and personal hygiene products
- No labelling on packages, expired food and food that takes too long to process
- Lack of knowledge to cook in bulk when large quantities of particular items were available
- Lack of space to store food cooked in bulk and bulk quantities
- Lack the ability to grow their own foods at home which could significantly increase their input of healthy foods

Communication

- Well-advertised with posters, weekly email updates, phone calls and through door-to-door advertising
- Social service agencies have information including all of the programs and services and their hours of operation and intake requirements
- Food programs would fall under an advisory board that would be made up of neighbours who would be pivotal in determining communication strategies
- Program administrators and boards of directors would work to build bridges with the neighbours to reduce stigma and create a more pleasant experience

Programming

- Programs that offer predetermined food baskets should be accompanied by a number of recipes that include the contents of the basket
- Community gardens so neighbours can actively participate in growing their own food
- Give seeds and directions to plant some of their own produce
- Grocery gift cards could be used to purchase needed items
- Food program set up like a grocery store where they could use a grocery cart and pick out the foods that their family required
- Paid or volunteer staff go through mandatory sensitivity training

The food: variety

- Important considerations: food sensitivities, culturally specific foods, and labels on products
- More access to protein, dairy and fresh produce
- Staff would check daily for expired foods, mark them and place in one area
- A variety of spices, sauces and condiments available

Solutions: Building an ideal food program

An ideal food program includes:

- Community-based cooking & nutritional classes
- Cook in bulk so food that is fresh, in-season on sale or comes in bulk can be prepared and frozen
- Weekly community dinners to help feed people struggling to get enough, but also help with social isolation

Intake processes

- Access to a program should be automatic without any burden of proof of poverty
- Universal membership card - apply one time and allows access to any program without any other requirements

Shifting the method of transportation

- Delivery services, especially for the elderly, lone parents of young children and for those with any type of disability
- See food that is available the following week and pick needed items
- Refrigerated delivery trucks that drop food off to programs which have on-site refrigeration and freezer units, to increase the variety and freshness of foods
- Access day and night, predictable days of the week
- Located in areas easily accessible by public transportation
- Areas not serviced by public transit have mobile trucks with pre-set days and times
- Carpooling with the neighbours and offer small incentives to those willing to pick up other neighbours

Wrap-around services

- Located in a central location with other social services
- Anyone who requires any social services should automatically be accepted into any food program
- One location for all services would increase access for many, help reduce stigma and stress, reduce amount of time, and transportation costs



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