



Social Planning Council Oxford
www.spcoxford.ca

FOOD FOR CHANGE

From Charity to Dignity

DEC 2015

LOOKING AT POSSIBILITIES

Food banks were started as a short term response to a temporary problem. In the last 34 years a whole charity based food distribution system has grown up that is designed specifically for poor people. This “system” includes community meals, food banks, distribution of damaged grocery store items and end of day perishable food, and manufacturer dumping of failed products.

There have been many social and technological changes in the last thirty-four years; however, food banks remain rooted in the distribution of non-perishable food. This antiquated model undermines people’s dignity, distributes foods high in sugar, fat, and salt, contributes to a diet that does not promote good health, and does not make the recipient food secure. With each passing decade, the reliance on donations to support emergency food programs becomes more entrenched, despite the limitations with this approach.

FOOD CHARITY

- ◆ Offers temporary hunger relief—but food insecurity does not go away
- ◆ Has limited reach—3 out of 4 food insecure households do not go to food banks
- ◆ Has limited operating hours and restricts the number of visits and the amount of food provided
- ◆ Does not meet people’s daily needs for nutritious food
- ◆ Undermines people’s dignity
- ◆ Excuses decision makers from ensuring the basic right to food¹

It's time to rethink the model

447 Hunter Street, Woodstock, ON , N4S 4G7

Tel: (519) 602-2421 | Website: www.spcoxford.ca | Email: info@spcoxford.ca

facebook.com/spcoxford | twitter.com/spcoxford

IT'S TIME TO RETHINK THE MODEL

Dignity	Although food banks allow many people to feel good about helping, we need to find ways to contribute that do not erode the self-esteem and dignity of the recipient
Grocery Cards	Giving people grocery cards will allow them to select foods that reflect individual needs, and allow choices that the rest of the population enjoys both in selection and hours of access
Community Food Centre	Community Food Centres provide people with emergency access to high-quality food in a dignified setting that doesn't compromise their self-worth
Social Assistance Reform	The Social Assistance Review Commission report "Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario" has made sweeping recommendations to move Social Assistance recipients out of poverty
Affordable Housing	In the absence of national and provincial housing strategies, municipalities including Oxford County are leading the way in trying to address the issue of lack of affordable housing
Student Nutrition	Eating healthy food at school supports learning and lifelong healthy eating habits
Healthy food system	The Oxford County Food Charter promotes a system from farm to plate that provides access to socially just, and environmentally sustainable local food
Employment	People need a secure job with benefits and stable, adequate hours
Living wage	There is a growing movement across Canada to pass policies whereby employers pay at minimum, a living wage to employees. This wage is calculated based on local costs of housing, food, and other basic necessities

Food security is defined as a situation in which all people obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice (Hamm and Bellows, J Nutr Educ Behav. 2003; 35:27-43).

LOOKING AT OXFORD COUNTY

According to information collected by the Social Planning Council Oxford in 2013, approximately 30% of people visiting emergency food providers in Oxford County are new cases each year. This means that it's not the same people accessing the programs each year. In 2012, anywhere between 30-40% of people receiving services from emergency food providers were under the age of 18.²

Across Canada, it is believed that food bank clients are educated, employed, and in families with children.

WHAT IS THE COMPARISON BETWEEN INCOME AND BASIC NEEDS?

Each year, the Oxford County Public Health & Emergency Services department conducts the *Nutritious Food Basket Survey* to measure the cost of basic healthy eating. The following chart compares incomes and basic needs using the average cost of rent in Oxford County (as determined by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) and the cost of a Nutritious Food Basket in 2014. This chart only includes rent and food, not the many other living expenses households must pay each month.

	Two parents with two children, Ontario Works	One person household, Ontario Works (Male 31-50 years of age)
Estimated total monthly income	\$1,408	\$681
Estimated monthly rent	\$836	\$555
Nutritious Food Basket cost	\$885	\$248
Remaining funds for further needs	\$313 Shortfall	\$122 Shortfall

2014 Nutritious Food Basket Oxford County: <http://www.oxfordcounty.ca>
Monthly amounts were calculated by multiplying weekly rate by 4.3.

When monthly income is allotted, people usually pay their rent and other fixed expenses such as heat, hydro, and transportation first. They buy food after. When income is inadequate, food becomes a “discretionary” expense. This results in an inadequate diet of poor nutritional value.

Canadian adults in food insecure households consume fewer servings of milk products, fruits and vegetables, and, in some cases, meat and meat alternatives.³ As incomes drop, high calorie foods that are low in nutrients provide people with their daily calories, at a lower cost.⁴

The probability of adults with chronic health conditions in severely food insecure households is much higher than adults in food secure households.⁵ People in food insecure households are more likely to report poor health, restricted activity, and multiple health conditions. These conditions include major depression and distress, as well as poor social support. People in food insecure households are also more likely to report heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and food allergies.⁶

Additionally, low income lone mothers have been found to compromise their own nutritional intake in order to preserve the adequacy of their children's diets.⁷ As an example of the harmful effects of food insecurity, a recent study in Nova Scotia revealed that children with diabetes from food insecure families had higher rates of hospitalization than children with diabetes from food secure families. Food security status was the only independent predictor for these higher rates of hospitalization.⁸

As well, researchers following children and youth over a 10 year period report that children and youth in Canada who experience hunger are more likely to have poorer health outcomes even when baseline health and household markers of disadvantage are accounted for. Repeated exposures to food insecurity exacerbate these adverse health effects.⁹ Moreover, there is direct relationship between overall diet quality and academic performance.¹⁰

WHY ARE PEOPLE HUNGRY IN OXFORD COUNTY?

Precarious Employment

A 2013 report called *It's More than Poverty* describes what the authors call "employment precarity", which is characterized by lack of job security or benefits, lower incomes, income variability, unpredictable work schedules, limited career prospects, anticipated future reductions in hours, less unionization, and fear of raising an issue of employment rights. The report states that "...precarious employment relationships are becoming the 'new normal' for our workforce." This type of employment has increased by nearly 50% in the last 20 years.¹¹ Similarly, the 2009 Senate Report, *In From the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*, also points to the increase in precarious employment as leading to a failure of employment to lead people out of poverty.¹²

Income Inequality

In their extensive review, the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario reported that the issue of rising income inequality needs to be examined. The gap between high and low income earners continues to grow.¹³

Housing Costs

The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines core housing need as households whose housing falls below one of three standards: adequacy (major repair required), suitability (enough bedrooms based on National Occupancy Standards), or affordability (spending more than 30% of their income on shelter). In 2006, 7% of households in Oxford County were living in core housing need.¹⁴



Social Assistance Rates

The Health Canada Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion reports that in 2007-2008 56% of families reliant on social assistance were food insecure.¹⁵ Researchers have continually indicated that the social assistance system is designed so that recipients decimate assets and savings. Consequently, they cannot manage unavoidable expenses and are trapped in poverty.

The Oxford County Food Charter is committed to supporting a socially just and environmentally sustainable regional food system. We need to move beyond simplistic solutions to policies that ensure adequate household income for food.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Social Planning Council Oxford would like to extend a sincere thanks to the York Region Food Network, for allowing us to duplicate their 2013 publication *Food for Change: From Charity to Dignity*, with some adaptations.

Many thanks to the funders who have made this report possible:



United Way
Oxford

REFERENCES

1. Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health. (2015). Food insecurity is a serious public health problem. Retrieved December 2015, from <http://www.osnp-ph.on.ca/upload/membership/document/food-insecurity-infographic-final.pdf#upload/membership/document/food-insecurity-infographic-final.pdf>
2. Social Planning Council Oxford. (2013). Trends in Oxford County: Food security. Retrieved December 2015, from <http://www.spcoxford.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Oxford-Trends-Food-Security1.pdf>
3. Kirkpatrick, Sharon I & Tarasuk, Valerie. (2008). Food insecurity is associated with nutrient inadequacies among Canadian adults and adolescents. *J. Nutr.* 138:604-612.
4. Drewnowski, A. (2009). Obesity, diets, and social inequalities. *Nutrition reviews.* 67(Suppl. 1).
5. Tarasuk, Valerie. February 9, 2012 presentation to Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada. Retrieved December 2015, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASwnfMnxwqs>
6. Vozoris, N. & Tarasuk, V. (2003). Household food insufficiency is associated with poorer health. *J. Nutr.* 133:120-126.
7. McIntyre, Lynn, Glanville, Theresa, Raine, Kim D, Dayle, Jutta B., Anderson, Bonnie and Battaglia, Noreen. (2003). Do low-income mothers compromise their nutrition to feed their children? *CMAJ.* March 18, 2003; 168(6).
8. Marjerrison, Stacey, Cummings, Elizabeth, Glanville, Theresa, Kirk, Sara, and Ledwell, Mary. (2011). Prevalence and associations of food insecurity in children with diabetes mellitus. *J Pediatr* 2011; 158:607-11.
9. Kirkpatrick, Sharon, McIntyre, Lynn, and Potestio, Melissa. (2010). Child hunger and long-term adverse consequences for health. *Arch Pediatr Adol Med.* 164(8):754-762.
10. Florence, M., Asbridge, M. & Veugelers, P. (2008). Diet quality and academic performance. *Journal of School Health.* 78(4).
11. Poverty and employment precarity in Southern Ontario, McMaster University Social Sciences & United Way Toronto. (2013). *It's more than poverty: Employment precarity and household well-being.*
12. The standing senate committee on social affairs, science and technology. (2009). *In from the margins: A call to action on poverty, housing and homelessness.*
13. Commission for the review of social assistance in Ontario. Frances Lankin and Munir A. Sheikh, Commissioners. (2012). *Brighter prospects: Transforming social assistance in Ontario.* A report to the Minister of Community and Social Services.
14. Oxford County. (2013). *Oxford County shelter plan.* Retrieved December 2015 from, <http://www.oxfordcounty.ca/Portals/15/Documents/Human%20Services/10%20Year%20Shelter%20Plan.pdf>
15. Health Canada. (2012). Household food insecurity in Canada in 2007-2008: Key statistics and graphics. Retrieved December 2015 from, <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/surveill/nutrition/commun/insecurit/key-stats-cles-2007-2008-eng.php>

447 Hunter Street, Woodstock, ON , N4S 4G7

Tel: (519) 602-2421 | Website: www.spcoxford.ca | Email: info@spcoxford.ca

[facebook.com/spcoxford](https://www.facebook.com/spcoxford) | twitter.com/spcoxford