



# Our Most Basic Needs

An Information Bulletin published by the Basic Needs Task Group  
of the Child, Youth and Family Services Coalition of Simcoe County.

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HUNGER

## FOOD BANKS:

Food banks lack the capacity to respond to unmet food need.



Food supply is contingent on donations



Quantity & quality of food is limited & largely uncontrollable



There are restrictions on amount and frequency of assistance given to individual clients.

*(Tarasuk & Eakin, Social Science & Medicine 2003)*

## Hunger Story in Simcoe County

### *Do you remember the last time you felt hungry?*

Perhaps it was this morning when you woke up from a night's sleep and before breakfast. You went into your kitchen and opened the refrigerator or cupboard and started making yourself something to eat in order to satisfy that hunger. You already know that breakfast is an important meal of the day and that it should include servings from at least 3 of the 4 food groups.

You have noticed that you are running low on milk and make a mental note to pick some up later in the day. Your kids are now up and you serve them some cereal with milk and some fresh berries, as well as a glass of juice. Everyone is ready to start their day and is off to their respective activities. No thought is given on where the next meal will come from.

*Imagine again*, that you wake up in the morning and you are feeling hungry. Immediately a weight is there – you are worried that there may not be enough food to feed everyone today. You go to the kitchen to see what is there, but you already know exactly how much food you have because you are keeping very careful inventory. Payday is not until Friday and today is Monday. You have just \$2.47 to carry you through until payday.

There is very little food in your cupboards and refrigerator. There is a bag of pasta, 2 each of canned fruit and vegetables, a can of tuna, a bottle of ketchup, some powdered fruit drink, a half loaf of bread and some tea. This is what you have to feed your family for the rest of the week. You are very aware of the importance of a nutritious breakfast to a healthy start of

everyone's day. This knowledge is even more distressing, because you know that with what you have on-hand you aren't able to put together the kinds of nutritious meals needed for growing children.

Your children are up and they are hungry. You make a breakfast for them as best you are able with what is available. You decide to skip breakfast, so that the kids will have more to eat. Because there is no school today, you must get them to daycare, before heading for work. Your day is consumed with worry about how you are going to stretch what meagre food you have for the rest of the week—and you are still hungry. (You already know that going to the food bank is out of the question, because you were just there the week before and they only allow one visit per month – with a 3 day supply of food)

## 'EMERGENCY' FOOD ACCESS PROGRAMS IN SIMCOE COUNTY

- ▶ Every month, over 1,500 bags of groceries are distributed to at risk pregnant and new mothers in the County. (Simcoe County Mothercare/Next Step programs)
- ▶ In 2003, over 90,000 meals were served by soup kitchens, community meal programs/supper clubs and in the same year, over 85,000 families and singles accessed food banks and emergency food baskets (over half of those persons were children.)
- ▶ All programs (the majority run by volunteers) have seen total requests for food increase over the years and struggle to keep up with demand.
- ▶ All charitable food programs in the County acknowl-

edge that the term “emergency” is a myth. They are providing an on-going source of food for people, because there is no choice but to incorporate charitable food into their daily lives.

- ▶ These numbers and facts only tell part of the story. Research tells us that only 1/4 of those living with food insecurity will seek help from charitable sources. The remaining majority will use other methods of coping, including reducing quality of food, skipping meals or eating less.

*Simcoe County Nutrition Task Group, Survey/Inventory of Food Access programs, 2004.*

*Machan, Trainor, Whittington, Hunger in Barrie - A Discussion Paper, 2006*



# The Stages of Hunger and its Effects

Food insecurity is dynamic in nature and defined by a sequence of events and experiences. These vary among different groups. For poor families, people first feel anxious about running out of food. At the next stage, they begin to compromise on the quality of food they eat by choosing less expensive options. As resources get scarcer, food insecure people feel hungry because they are unable to purchase enough food to satisfy their needs. At the most severe stage, food insecurity

is experienced as not eating at all. There are negative psychological, social and physical consequences across this continuum. (Tarasuk, '02) Poor people run out of money for food because the grocery budget is flexible, unlike fixed payments such as rent and power bills. Many factors can tip a vulnerable individual or family into hunger. These include increases in rent and energy costs, another mouth to feed, job loss and health problems. (McIntyre, Walsh and Connor, 2001)

People in food-insecure households are more likely to report:

- Poor or fair self-rated health
- Physical limitations
- Mental health problems
- Children's health problems
- Multiple chronic conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension

(Che & Chen, Health Rep 2001; Vozoris & Tarasuk, J Nutri 2003; McIntyre et al, CMAJ 2000)

## Food - It Connects us ALL

## Dietary, cultural, symbolic, romantic, political ... FOOD

Food matters for a variety of reasons. It is basic to diet and nutrition, and we ignore it at our peril, particularly as diet is significantly related to human disease. It is essential to physical health and to life itself.

Food is clearly an economic commodity but more profoundly, it is a social and cultural good that is vital to our sense of individual, family, community and societal well-being. Food has symbolic meanings in dif-



ferent cultures and religions, and it is central to family and community life. Food can be about pleasure, good company, or romance. As such, it reaches into every corner of human existence.

*continued on page 4*

## Listen to the poor to make change for the better

Two thirds (2/3) of Canadians who are food insecure report their main source of income is employment.

*(S. Kirkpatrick, unpublished analysis of CCCH.1.1)*

We challenge people who aren't poor to listen to people who are poor . . . to join with us in rejecting American style social programs where food

and housing are provided for the poor at the whim of the rich . . . to work with us to change our system to end poverty . . . to demand that our politicians work for a just society, where people are more equal and where the poor don't have to depend on leftovers from the rich to subsist. *(Debbie Ellison, quoted in Hobbs et al. 1993),*

# Food - It Connects us ALL

*continued on page 4.* Food is also a political commodity, fought over within families and communities, by global corporate interests, and the state. Who controls the food system and who has access to it are matters

that should be of concern to society as a whole. This is particularly true when the food system is increasingly controlled by global food traders whose

sole concern is turning a profit. When we deny food to people in our community - such as those on welfare whose benefits have run out - we are not only infringing on their rights of citizenship and denying them access to our community, we are also excluding them from life itself. Food, health, welfare, the environment and justice are inseparable.

**Eradicating food insecurity and hunger in a country as rich as Canada is a necessary and attainable goal.**

Food connects us all. As such, it has the potential of bringing together different sectors of our communities to talk about achieving food security and how to address a range

of community issues, and to link the personal and the political. If, figuratively speaking, you put food on the table for discussion, many people will enter the debate. It allows us to talk about the related issues of poverty and environmental degradation, agricultural reform, fisheries policies, health and social justice, food safety, and genetically modified foods. It links welfare and environmental issues between and within countries of the North and South. Food issues have



a strategic capacity to build progressive movements to advance ecological, health and social justice.

(G. Riches, 2000, *We are what we eat: Food Security & Social Policy*)

## What can we do about hunger in our communities?

### Individually

- Learn more about hunger in your community and what others are doing to eradicate it.
- Counsel clients to maximize access to programs providing food and nutrition assistance, social services, and job training.

### As an Agency

- Make healthy food/snacks available to clients and staff whenever possible and adopt healthy food and nutrition policies to model healthy environments for others.
- Support local agriculture in the food procurement practices in your agency/institution.

### As a Community

- Promote the development of a community food charter and a food policy council.
- Advocate for minimum wage increases, adequate social assistance, a living wage and more affordable housing.

## For more information...

[www.211simcoecounty.ca](http://www.211simcoecounty.ca)  
[www.foodshare.net](http://www.foodshare.net)  
[www.foodsecurecanada.org](http://www.foodsecurecanada.org)  
[www.simcoecountyfarmfresh.ca](http://www.simcoecountyfarmfresh.ca)  
[www.durhamlives.org](http://www.durhamlives.org)

Lives in the Balance—Ontario's Social Audit,  
Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (Pandora Press, 2004)  
Social Determinants of Health—Canadian Perspectives  
(Dennis Raphael, 2004)  
Hunger in Barrie—A Discussion Paper  
(Barrie Community Health Centre, 2006)