

THE INVISIBLE FACE OF HUNGER

OTTAWA HUNGER REPORT 2016



Ottawa Food Bank

LETTER FROM MICHAEL MAIDMENT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Many of the facts and figures in our Ottawa Hunger Report 2016 will not come as a surprise.

What is less obvious is the alarming trend this report uncovers. The first-hand accounts of clients who seek our help is proof that hunger is not reserved for the homeless or those on social assistance. It is all around us and largely invisible. It could be someone you work with or your neighbour. Someday it could even be you.

We face daunting challenges ahead. We must identify program gaps to ensure everyone who is hungry has access to nutritious food. We need to address capacity issues for our network and clients to ensure they can have access to fresh food like eggs, dairy and meat. But we also know more food does not solve the issue of hunger.

We must drive change at the local level to address the root issues of hunger. We will work with our counterparts at the provincial and national levels to institute broad systemic change. We will push for more affordable housing and the guaranteed basic income.

But I am hopeful. The Ottawa Food Bank has an incredibly supportive community of donors, agencies, politicians and advocates who are committed to changing this community and ensuring everyone has access to good food.

Together, we can end hunger. The time to act is now.



Michael Maidment,
Executive Director, Ottawa Food Bank

41,540

**TOTAL NUMBER OF FOOD BANK
USERS PER MONTH**

**“RESEARCH INDICATES...
ADULTS IN FOOD INSECURE
HOUSEHOLDS HAVE POORER
MENTAL AND PHYSICAL
HEALTH AND HIGHER
ANXIETY AND STRESS THAN
THOSE WITH ACCESS TO
ENOUGH FOOD. GOOD
NUTRITION IS ESSENTIAL
FOR A HEALTHY BODY,
HEALTHY MIND AND SOCIAL
WELL-BEING.”**

**DR. ISRA LEVY,
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH,
OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH**



**I HAVE A FULL TIME JOB BUT
SOMETIMES I CAN'T MAKE IT
TO THE END OF THE MONTH.**

My job isn't high-paying, but it's a good job and I work hard. Even with how hard I work, there are months when my paycheck isn't enough to cover my bills. Some weeks, especially in the winter, I have to choose between paying for heat in my apartment and buying groceries. Then when I see that one of my kids is growing out of their shoes, I really start to panic. I try not to use the food bank unless I need it, because I know there are people who need it every single month. When I do though, there are at least some meals I don't have to worry about.

WHAT DOES HUNGER DO?

The impact of hunger is felt not only from a lack of food but also the type of food a person eats.

Undernourishment occurs when a person does not consume enough calories to meet his or her minimum physiological needs to be active.

Malnutrition occurs when a person does not consume enough protein, energy, and micronutrients like iron, vitamin B12, and vitamin A—all necessary for good health. One does not have to be undernourished to be malnourished. A person can eat enough calories to be overweight and yet still suffer from malnutrition.

Hunger. Dr. Kamila Premji

References: World Food Programme. (2011). **Hunger**. Retrieved May 8, 2011



I KEEP TRYING, BUT I CAN'T FIGHT CANCER AND HUNGER AT THE SAME TIME.

When my doctor told me my cancer had come back, it was like I couldn't hear his words. I was so scared. After the chemo treatment I am sick and worn out. But the really hard part is keeping things going at home. Forty-five for a bus pass. Fifty for a phone. Ninety for heat. Then paying for my medical needs, and trying to do all that on my disability cheque. It doesn't work. I end up at the food bank when I know I can't make it. The extra chicken gives me the energy to get through the next week.

WHO LIVES WITH HUNGER IN OTTAWA?

40%

of our clients come from homes with children

36%

of our clients come from homes with children under the age of 18

65%

of clients report their highest income source as social assistance or disability related benefits

8%

of clients self-identify as living with a disability

FIGHTING HUNGER - A COMPLEX CHALLENGE

We may think we don't know anyone who experiences hunger, yet there are people all around us who do. They are the neighbours across the street recovering from a dramatic life change. They are family members or friends who have lost a job. They are people we work with who are struggling with an illness. They are students or seniors living in the next apartment who are living paycheque-to-paycheque, just barely. These people live with hunger, but unless they tell us we won't know.

HUNGER IS INVISIBLE

The Ottawa Food Bank fights hunger by getting nutritious food to those who need it. But it takes more than that. Hunger is a complex, persistent and changing problem. We can't meet our vision to ensure that no one in our community goes hungry without understanding the root causes of the problem.

Our new investment in *Link2Feed*, a food bank analytics technology solution, will empower us to gather more accurate information about who and where our clients are, understand their needs, and find the best solutions to help them. Deeper insight on hunger in our community will enable us to plan more strategically and target our actions more effectively and efficiently to end it.

Hunger does not discriminate, and in Ottawa it is mostly invisible.

- **Children** don't wear a sign to say they haven't eaten a nutritious breakfast before coming to school.
- **Seniors** who run short of money to pay their monthly bills can't easily be spotted at the bus stop.
- **University students** balancing classes, part-time jobs and living expenses won't tell you they're hungry when they serve you at your local coffee shop.
- **New Canadians** making a fresh start don't always know where to find help for their families if they run out of food.

HUNGER IN OTTAWA

The experience of hunger for most of us is limited to how it feels when we skip a meal. For others, hunger is the result of hard choices that nobody should have to make. The choice between nutritious food or paying the rent. Between having enough food for the family or paying the latest utility bill.

Hunger makes people tired and unable to concentrate on their tasks - like caring for their family or looking for a job. When hunger persists, all a person can think about is their next meal.

WE CAN'T MEET OUR MISSION TO ENSURE THAT NO ONE IN OUR COMMUNITY GOES HUNGRY WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE PROBLEM.

26%

OF CLIENTS HAVE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION (COLLEGE, TRADE ACCREDITATION, UNDERGRADUATE, MASTER OR PHD DEGREE)

REASONS WHY PEOPLE MIGHT BECOME AN OTTAWA FOOD BANK CLIENT

- A FAMILY MEMBER LOSES THEIR JOB
- AN ILLNESS THAT REQUIRES A LEAVE OF ABSENCE FROM WORK OR LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT
- A LACK OF CRITICAL ILLNESS INSURANCE OR HEALTH BENEFITS
- A SIGNIFICANT AND UNEXPECTED INCREASE IN INTEREST RATES
- HIGH RENT AND RISE IN UTILITY COSTS
- LOW SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RATES
- A STEADY INCREASE IN THE COST OF LIVING

FOOD SECURITY

Food security means having economic and physical access to food that meets our dietary needs and enables us to live active and healthy lives. When that access is threatened or interrupted by job loss, a critical illness, or rising costs of basic necessities, people are often forced to make food choices that may not be healthy for them or their families.

Food insecurity can add up to a serious public health issue. People who don't have access to a steady supply of nutritious food are more susceptible to chronic illnesses like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer and depression.

WHAT IS GOOD NUTRITION?

Good nutrition plays an important role in leading a healthy, active and productive life. A wholesome, healthy diet promotes overall physical and mental health. Nutritious food helps us maintain a healthy weight and reduces the risks of preventable chronic diseases.

HUNGER BY THE NUMBERS

\$11.40

Minimum hourly wage in Ontario

\$1,824

Monthly income of a minimum wage income earner (40 hours/wk)

\$23,712

Annual income (before tax) of a minimum wage employee earning \$11.40 / hr., 40 hours/week, 52 week/yr.

\$863

Cost of feeding a family of four per month

\$1,390

Cost of rent for a 3-bedroom unit

TOTAL

-\$429

What is left to pay for child care, transportation, heat and all other bills.

\$45,206

MINIMUM NECESSARY INCOME
(LICO, 2010) FOR A FAMILY OF FOUR)

\$23,000

POVERTY LINE INCOME (2014 FIGURES)

“NUTRITION AND ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD FROM A YOUNG AGE PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN A CHILD’S PHYSICAL, INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT. FOR KIDS TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL, WE NEED ALL FAMILIES IN OUR REGION TO HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD, NUTRITION INFORMATION AND SUPPORT TO PROVIDE A BALANCED DIET FOR THEIR CHILDREN.”

**DR. LINDY SAMSON,
CHIEF OF STAFF AND CHIEF
MEDICAL OFFICER AT THE
CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL OF
EASTERN ONTARIO (CHEO)**

SOMETIMES MY MOM AND DAD SKIP DINNER SO WE HAVE ENOUGH TO EAT.

I pretend like I don’t notice but it makes me really sad. I know they are just trying to make it ok for us. My dad hurt his back in the summer, but he keeps saying everything will be fine. I wish we could help them. I don’t want them to worry about money or about my brother and me.

THEY CUT JOBS FROM MY DIVISION AND THEN I GOT TO KNOW HUNGER.

My wife and I, we've always worked and we're careful with our money. Some months we even had a little bit to put away. That helped at first after I lost my job, but then our savings ran out. I still have to put food on the table for my wife and kids and there are days I go without so my kids don't have to. There are those days too when I go to the food bank. I am not sure how we'd make it through this time without it. I look for work every day but they just aren't hiring.

A HELPING HAND

YOU CAN HELP. Your donation of money enables us to buy the fresh nutritious food that can't be donated at food drives but goes a long way in helping us put healthy, wholesome food on the tables of Ottawa families when they need it.

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