



FEASIBILITY STUDY

**LOW-COST FOOD PROGRAM FOR LOW-INCOME
SINGLE PARENTS IN WHITEHORSE**

Yukon Status of Women Council

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Executive Summary

Yukon Status of Women Council (YSWC) is an advocacy and awareness group for women's equality. YSWC has been operating for over thirty years, and is a strong lobbyist for feminist political change through political activism, public awareness, and education. The Community Development Fund (CDF) provided funds to YSWC to conduct a feasibility study on Low-Cost Food Programs. The feasibility study allowed YSWC to explore ways to implement a food program that will give low-income single parents the opportunity to step-out of the emergency food cycle (such as canned good and non-perishable foods) and into a food program that includes fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy, and meat at wholesale prices.

The study navigated the food needs of the community by analyzing Yukon food security statistics, attending local food security conferences, conducting interviews with service providers, and interviewing local farmers. Preliminary research suggested that there was a need for a program that addressed the barriers to food security for low-income single parents in Whitehorse. Further research was conducted on low-cost food program models in cities across Canada. The low-cost food box program was adopted as a model that would be the most feasible start-up model in Whitehorse.

Low-cost food box programs operate by purchasing produce from local producers and distributors at wholesale prices. This produce is then offered to low-income, single parents at cost. Single parents set aside part of their monthly food allowances (social assistance or other) and make one monthly deposit to their member accounts. This deposit is the only deposit necessary for a full month of food. The food boxes are delivered to members once a week. Low-cost food box programs

also offer cooking classes, budgeting classes, gardening classes, canning classes, and traditional First Nation food-gathering classes such as berry and herb picking sessions with elders.

Low-cost food box programs not only provide nutritious food, but they foster community between single parent members and their families strengthening social and community networks between the members and the community workshop instructors. The workshop days allow for knowledge sharing between workshop leaders and members along with building meaningful partnerships. Single parents are able to develop useable skills, which contribute to the over-all wellbeing of the community at large in a sustainable manner.

The Low-Cost Food Box model was adapted from the Winnipeg Good Food Club model and the Toronto based FoodShare: Good Food Box model. Low-income single parent members pay for a portion of what it costs to produce the Food Box, the program and various funding sources make up for the rest. Members benefit from the cost savings of wholesale bulk buying, the time saved from the box distribution method, and skill development gained through workshops and budgeting for their monthly deposit. This means purchasing high quality, fresh food is within the reach of many more people than through the regular retail system.

The Low-Cost Box Food model is most feasible for Whitehorse as it has low operational costs and community organizations and local farms are keen to collaborate. The Whitehorse Food Bank has shown an interest in sharing space for distribution days. Aurora Mountain Farm has expressed a desire to provide farming workshops and garden plots for food box members. Currently, the Whitehorse Food Bank and Salvation Army struggle to meet the needs of community members. Although emergency food services are needed, our community needs to implement food programs that can guide low-income community members towards a sustainable, healthy, nutritious path that

will allow them to break-out of cyclical food emergency patterns, developing positive life skills for themselves and for their children.

Background Information

In describing hunger, Janet Poppendieck writes that it has become both “a symptom and a cause of our society’s failure to face up to and deal with the erosion of equality.”¹

“I use social services and the soup kitchen to eat mostly. Going to your sisters or your brothers and collecting a little bit of food from them helps too. [My children] don’t want to go to school anymore because they don’t get any sleep and they don’t want to go hungry. Feeding my children is the biggest challenge.”² The constant struggle to get food takes a heavy toll. It wears on the body, mind and soul. Food is literally the fuel for life—when there isn’t enough, all areas of life are affected. Living with the uncertainty of never knowing if you’ll have enough food affects confidence, self-esteem and a sense of safety. Not being able to provide enough food for yourself or your family hits hard on a person’s pride, dignity and self-respect. In addition to a person’s own feelings, they also have to deal with other people who can be harsh and judgmental.³

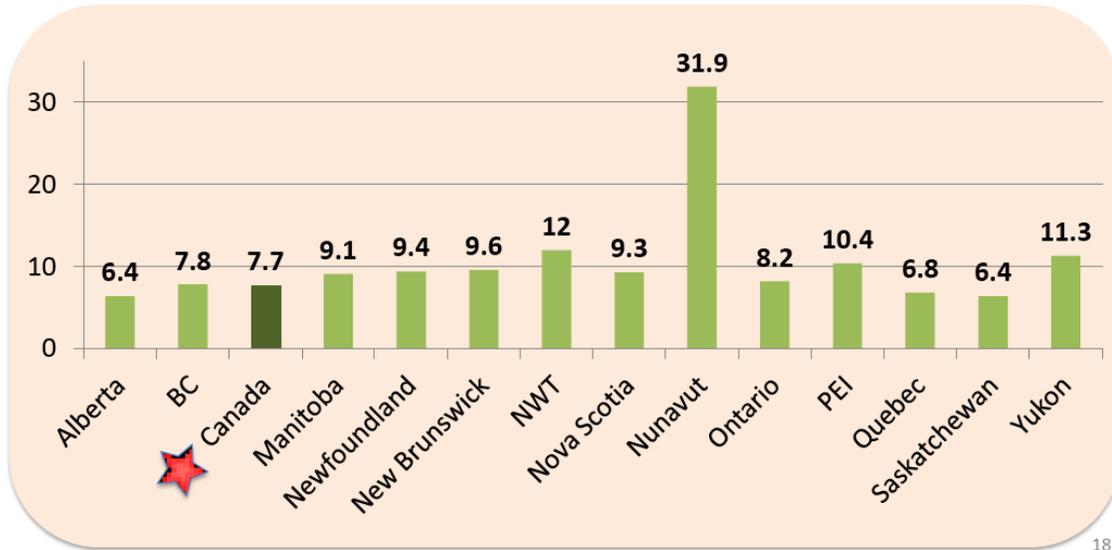
¹ Janet Poppendieck, 1998, *Sweet Charity: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, New York: Penguin, p 16.

² You Just Blink and it Can Happen: A Study of Women’s Homelessness North of 60, Pan-Territorial Report, November 2007.

³ Bissell Centre, “Living without food: You don’t realize how important food is until you don’t have it: Stories from people who live without food in Edmonton, Alberta,” March 2007, p. 4.

A Snapshot of Food Insecurity in Canada

Canadian Community Health Survey 2007-08
-7.7% of all households (5.1% moderate; 2.7% severe)⁴



Yukon has the third highest levels of food insecurity in Canada next to NWT and Nunavut. Food insecurity is highest amongst vulnerable minorities such as single parent households, aboriginal households and low-income households. Food insecurity is most severe in Canada's north. This can be seen in the graph above where the three territories hold the highest levels of food insecurity in Canada.⁵

⁴ Statistics Canada. Household Food Insecurity, 2007-2008.

⁵ Statistics Canada. Household Food Insecurity, 2007-2008.

Definitions of Terms

The social determinants of health

The social determinants of health are the “economic and social conditions that shape the health of individuals, communities, and jurisdictions as a whole . . . [and] determine the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and cope with the environment.”⁶

Emergency Food

Whitehorse currently provides emergency food programs for low-income people such as soup kitchens (Salvation Army drop-in meals, church dinners...), and a food bank (Whitehorse Food Bank.) Sources of emergency food include donated non-perishables, reclaimed groceries and surplus stock. Both the availability and nutritional value of emergency food are inconsistent at best, making it very difficult for families to prepare complete nutritious meals. Diet and nutrition have an immediate and direct impact on wellness and quality of life, particularly for pregnant women and families with young children. When families regularly access emergency food, they are at risk of poor physical and mental health.

Emergency food is intended to bridge an unexpected gap. This feasibility study on low-cost food programs examines ways that individuals and families can move away from emergency food situations and move towards food security by giving the poor and the working poor (specifically single parents) opportunities to access fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy, and meat at wholesale prices.

⁶ D. Raphael, 2004, “Introduction to the Social Determinants of Health,” in Raphael, D., ed., *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press.

Hunger and Food Security

Food security is a state in which all people have reliable access, both physically and economically, to a nutritionally adequate and culturally acceptable diet at all times through local *non-emergency* sources and are free from hunger. Food security can become a complex balance between national self-sufficiency (to ensure food supplies in times of shortage and high prices) and land set aside for export farm commodities. Some government subsidies pertain to self-sufficiency, some to trade advantages, and some to both.⁷

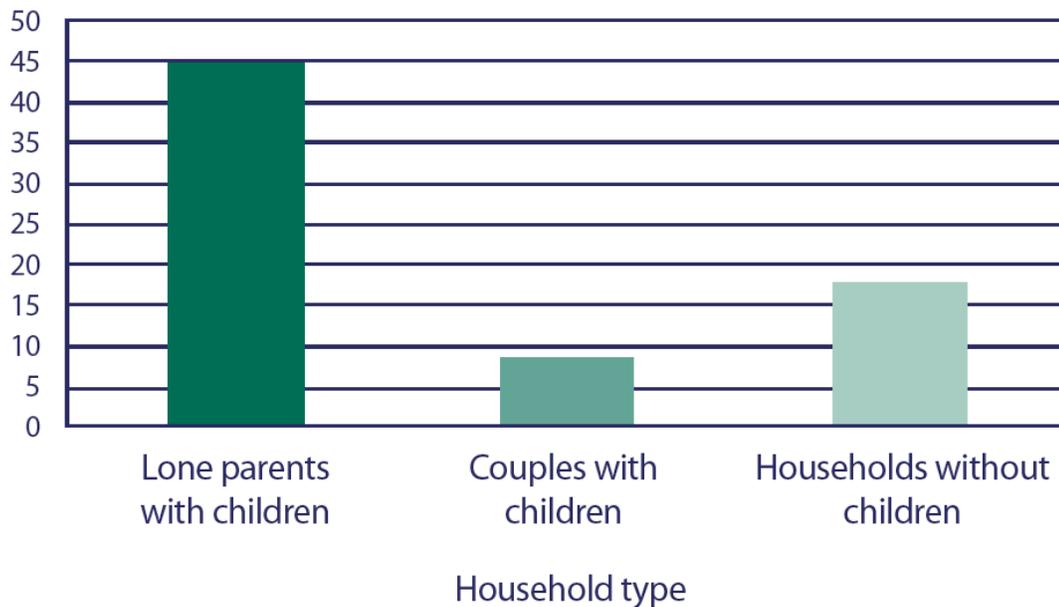
Food Insecurity

Food insecurity, as it relates to this project, is broadly defined as a lack of food due to financial constraints. The western model of food insecurity has basically four dimensions. The first dimension is that the quantity of food is reduced resulting in the absolute deprivation of hunger. The second includes changes in the quality of food; a poor-quality diet that could lead to malnutrition due to a deficiency of vitamins or minerals. The third dimension is the psychological aspect of food insecurity; the anxiety of not having enough food, the worry about where your next meal is coming from. The fourth dimension is a social construction where people must do things that are time consuming and often demeaning in order to acquire food, such as lining up for food banks. “This association, that food insecurity leads to child hunger, hasn’t really been born out. In fact, it’s worked the opposite, whereby if a child comes to school hungry, the assumption is of parental neglect. That is what is challenging us when it comes to studying food insecurity. We really have to consider the household phenomenon that children are protected and that the way you reduce food

⁷ Paul Hawken, “Blessed Unrest: How the largest social movement in history is restoring grace, justice and beauty to the world,” New York: Penguin publishing group: 2007, p. 239.

insecurity is by poverty alleviation, the change in the cost of staples for a healthy diet or the reduction of other expenses such as housing.”⁸

Households experiencing food insecurity (2003)



The 2009 Yukon Health Status Report clearly demonstrates that “lone parents with children” i.e. single parents experience the highest levels of food insecurity.⁹ Although this statistic above is from 2003 it was highlighted in the 2009 Health Status Report suggesting that very little has improved in the area of food security since 2003. If anything, the negative situation of “lone parent households” has increased with higher levels of unemployment in recent months. The outdated statistics demonstrates an overall lack of concern regarding updating food insecurity statistics in Yukon, further suggesting that food security is not a priority.

⁸ Ryan Charkow. “School nutrition programs failing Canadian children: Are we properly addressing issues surrounding child hunger?” <http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/story/2011/08/29/f-food-insecurity.html>

⁹ Yukon Health Status Report 2009, “Households experiencing food insecurity,” p. 16.

Food sovereignty

The basic principle behind food sovereignty is when citizens have the right to decide what they eat and to ensure that food in their community is healthy and accessible. The food sovereignty movement ensures health, justice and dignity for all where farmers, ranchers and fishers have control over their lands, water, seeds and livelihoods.

Food sovereignty is essential because our current food and farm system is broken. Small farmers in Canada and globally cannot earn a fair price for what they raise, despite their high productivity. Meanwhile, more than 1.2 billion people around the world go hungry everyday. As corporate-controlled agriculture spreads across the globe, the social and environmental costs weigh heavily on our communities. Driven by big corporations, the agricultural system no longer values healthy, delicious food, productive and sustainable rural communities, or people's right to make decisions about their communities and their farms.¹⁰

Food Literacy

Food literacy refers to the degree to which people are able to obtain, process, and understand basic information about food in order to make appropriate health decisions. Food literacy encompasses understanding labeling on food and knowledge of nutrition.¹¹ The low-cost food program would deliver workshops that would help single family households better understand labeling, allowing them to have more autonomy over their food choices. That being said, it is important to note that many low-income individuals are aware of healthy choices but do not have the

¹⁰ Grassroots International: Funding Global Movements for Social Change, "Food Sovereignty Explained in Simple Language", <http://www.grassrootsonline.org/publications/fact-sheets-reports/food-sovereignty-explained-simple-language-new-booklet>

¹¹ Paul Hawken, "Blessed Unrest: How the largest social movement in history is restoring grace, justice and beauty to the world," New York: Penguin publishing group: 2007, p. 238.

financial capacity to buy healthy alternatives. The low-cost food program would allow for learning to take place along with the ability to affordably purchase healthy alternatives. Please note the breakdown of information below regarding food insecure vulnerable subpopulations:

Vulnerable subpopulations

- Aboriginal Households: 20.9%
- Children: 12.5%
- Low-income Households: 32.5%
- Recent immigrant households: 12.6%¹²

*Women make up 96.5% of low-income single parent households, placing them in the highest risk category.¹³

Income and Food Security

Food is a highly elastic budget component and in times of financial crisis, food is often the last item you purchase. Rent, electricity and other utilities are the first to be paid and the remaining money (if any) is left for food purchasing. Limited income may result in restricted food choices – both in quality and quantity. Cheaper foods are usually higher in energy due to high levels of refined sugar and saturated fat, however have little to no nutritional value. Poor nutritional choices lead to higher levels of diabetes and depression in these vulnerable subpopulations.¹⁴

¹² Statistics Canada. 2006 Census. Portrait of the Canadian Population in 2006, by Age and Sex: National Portrait. 12 May 2008

¹³ McIntyre L, Glanville NT, Officer S, Anderson B, Raine KD, Dayle JB. Food insecurity of low-income lone mothers and their children in Atlantic Canada. 2002. Can J Public Health 93(6):686-91.

Food security is a serious concern in Canada, specifically in rural northern areas such as Yukon. First, many factors affect an individual or family's ability to achieve food security, especially geography and income. Second, food insecurity affects diet quality and quantity, which can lead to chronic disease. Evidence directly links food insecurity to several chronic diseases including diabetes. Last, when food security is made a priority, the long-term health and wellness of our community is ensured.¹⁵

Low-cost food program

Winnipeg is a city with a similar demographic to Whitehorse. Winnipeg currently has multiple low-cost food programs. Low-cost programs operate by purchasing produce from local producers and distributors at wholesale prices. The fresh produce is offered to low-income families at cost. Individuals and families set aside part of their monthly food allowances (social assistance/other) and make one monthly deposit to their low-cost food program member accounts. This deposit is the only deposit necessary for a full month of fresh, reliable, food. The food program operates once a week and individuals and families select nutritious food right for their families. In addition, the low-cost food programs provide cooking classes with community chefs to assist with meal planning, gardening workshops, and canning classes.

The YSWC believes that a low-cost food program will be effective at preventing cyclical food emergencies because it will increase the purchasing power of the low-income dollar. Increasing access to affordable nutrition is an effective way to alleviate cyclical food emergencies and food

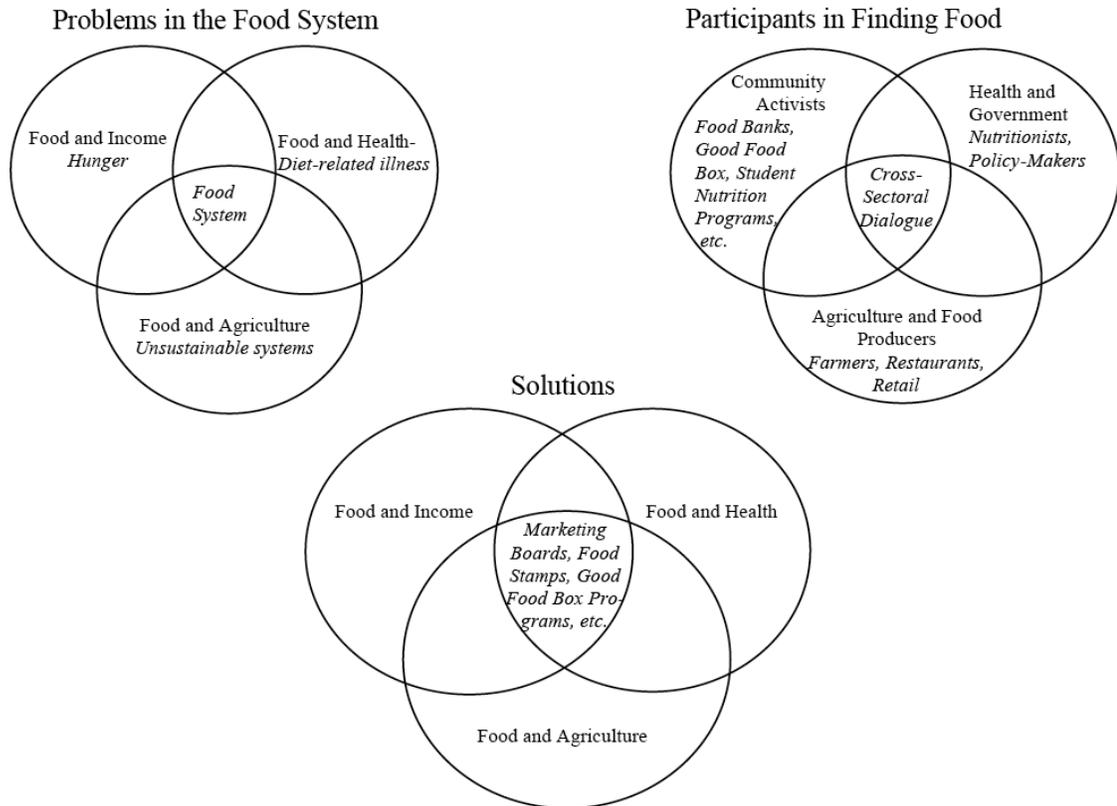
¹⁴ Drewnowski A. The cost of US foods as related to their nutritive value. 2010. AJCN 92(5):1181-8.

¹⁵ Mary Anne Smith, "CHNET: Food Security Webinar," CDPAC, Fireside Chat#246, November 29, 2011, P 18.

insecurity. Low-cost food programs empower low-income members of the community by assisting families with budgeting, meal planning, and diet choices.

Emergency Food Services in Whitehorse

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR EVERYONE TO HAVE ADEQUATE ACCESS
TO AFFORDABLE AND HEALTHY FOOD¹⁶



The above image captures a different approach to addressing food insecurity. It highlights the difference between regular grocery store food systems, emergency food systems and food box

¹⁶ The Stop, “Food Access Circles: What would it take for everyone to have access to affordable and healthy food?” www.thestop.org.

programs all within the context of agricultural demands, income levels and health. There are currently no low-cost food box programs in Whitehorse, which exclusively focus on low-income single parents. Current emergency food systems are:

Whitehorse Food Bank

The Whitehorse Food Bank provides emergency food to the hungry while supporting the greater effort to alleviate poverty. Anyone with a valid identification can be a client. Each month, registered clients can pick up a food hamper containing three days worth of food. Since May 2009, the Food Bank has registered 1,744 clients (individual and families), which represents 3,471 people (13% of the population of Whitehorse). The Food Bank serves an average of 485 people each month. Single parents are the second largest group served at the Food Bank and the majority of the clients disclosed that their primary source of income is social assistance (57%).

Sally and Sisters

Sally & Sisters is a lunch program for women and children who may not feel comfortable eating at the Salvation Army soup kitchen. Women can access the lunch two days a week, Monday and Friday. It is a safe and sober environment. Here women relax, share laughs and tell stories while eating a free hot lunch. Their children can eat and play with toys.

Blood Ties Four Directions Centre

Blood Ties Four Directions Centre serves a hot meal at their centre in Whitehorse each Wednesday between 1-3pm for their clients.

No Fixed Address Outreach Van

The 'No Fixed Address Outreach Van' provides food such as sandwiches, soups, baked goods, and fruit to Whitehorse residence in need: Monday- Saturday from 4-9pm (except Statuary Holidays).

Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre

The Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre provides a women and children's only lunch at their centre in Whitehorse each Wednesday between 11:30am-1:30pm.

Maryhouse

Offers sandwiches on Tuesday and Thursday from 1pm-4pm.

Salvation Army

Doors open daily at 8pm to provide a warm meal and ten beds. It remains open until 3pm offering lunch from 11:30pm- 1pm and coffee/tea throughout the day.

Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church

Provides a warm meal from 12:30 to 1pm on Saturdays and 2-2:30pm on Sundays.¹⁷

Low-Cost Food Box Program

Demonstration of Need: Why Whitehorse would benefit from a Low-Cost Food Box Program

Whitehorse has many emergency food programs for those who find themselves in food emergencies, however there are no programs for people who want to breakout of the emergency food cycle and need assistance in this process. Emergency food programs are an essential component in our community, but steps need to be taken to help people move beyond this reliance with assistance, if they are in a position to do so.

¹⁷ It is possible that a few agencies and community organizations were missed that offer emergency food, but the above are the major players in Whitehorse.

Aboriginal households make up 20.9 percent of Canada's vulnerable-food insecure population, along with low-income households (32.5 percent). In addition, women make up 96.5 percent of low-income single parent households, placing them in the highest risk category.¹⁸ It is important to take note of the statistics above as Yukon holds some of these 'vulnerable-food insecure populations' as mentioned above. Yukon has high numbers of First Nations people and as demonstrated in the 2009 Yukon Health Status Report, 'lone parent households' experience the highest levels of food insecurity. According to the statistics above 96.5 percent of single parent households are women and many of these households are low-income. The above statistics demonstrates the need to develop a food access program that can address food insecurity amongst vulnerable populations such as First Nations and low-income single mothers.

The Whitehorse Food Bank serves an average of 485 people each month. Single parents are the second largest group served at the Food Bank and the majority of the clients disclosed that their primary source of income is social assistance (57%). Families that access the Food Bank receive three days worth of food and can only access this service once a month. Much of the food received from the Food Bank is canned, non-perishable food. Stephen Dunbar-Edge, Executive Director of the Whitehorse Food Bank, agrees that it would be beneficial for Whitehorse to provide food programs such as the Low-Cost Food Box Program for individuals who are in a position (they have a home with cooking facilities) to exit the emergency food cycle with assistance. Low-cost food programs give individuals a break from the constant struggling of food insecurity. Fresh food is delivered each week and the food is meant to last the entire week.

“As a household expense, food is a flexible budget item, whereas the costs of other

¹⁸ McIntyre L, Glanville NT, Officer S, Anderson B, Raine KD, Dayle JB. Food insecurity of low-income lone mothers and their children in Atlantic Canada. 2002. Can J Public Health 93(6):686-91.

necessities (e.g., housing, heat, electricity, etc.) are fixed or less negotiable. Therefore, many households rely on in-kind food charities, such as food banks, to make up the income shortfall, or they consume cheaper more calorie-dense processed food to avoid the most acute forms of hunger” (Drewnowski 2004). In some cases, poor mothers deprive themselves of food in order to ensure that their children eat (McIntyre et al. 2003). The consequence for the long-term health of the people in these households is serious.”¹⁹ We see the negative effects of poor physical and mental health in Yukon due to food insecurity with high levels of diabetes and depression among vulnerable subpopulations such as First Nations, low-income and single-parent households. A community’s ability to combat food insecurity is a way of preventing chronic diseases. Many communities across Canada have come to this realization. Winnipeg is one of these communities.

Low-cost food models in Winnipeg

The Women’s Community Project Funding allowed Linnea Rudachyk, Project Coordinator, to travel to Winnipeg to begin the low-cost food program feasibility study. She was able to explore successful low-cost food models in Winnipeg such as The Good Food Club, and The Agape Table.

During her time in Winnipeg, she met with the Executive Directors of the Good Food Club and The Agape Table and also volunteered on distribution day. Talking with staff gave her a theoretical scope and allowed for important questions to be answered. Volunteering gave her a practical scope, which enabled her to understand what model would best fit in Whitehorse.

The Good Food Club

The goal of the Good Food Club is to help make healthy, nutritious, affordable, food

¹⁹ Kathryn Scharf, Charles Levkoe, Nick Saul, “In Every Community a Place for Food: The Role of Community Food Centre in Building a Local, Sustainable and Just Food System,” pg. 10

available in West Broadway, Winnipeg. They want to build a sense of healthy community- with food, by farming together, cooking together, eating together, talking, telling stories, and sharing ideas. They want to bring about food security.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have access to as much safe and nutritious food as they need in order to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life. The Good Food Club does this by working with members to offer opportunities to work in exchange for “sweat equity points” that can be redeemed for healthy food. These are some of the opportunities:

- Community cafes
- Fresh food boxes in the winter months
- Trips to a local farm June – August
- Vegetable community market
- Active/low income members “work” for their food by volunteering in exchange for sweat equity points.

What does the Good Food Club do?

- Delivers fresh food boxes to people in need
- Feeds residents at community dinners
- Provides 1 ton of fresh local produce at their summer “veggie van” market
- Offer food handling skill development to inner city residents

Memberships

- Self-identified low-income co-op member pay \$5/year
- Community members pay \$25/year

Food boxes are delivered to customers once a month throughout the winter. Members call-in

to place their orders and decide which size box they want. They can choose between a small box, which is \$15 or a large box, which is \$25. The veggie-van replaces the box program during the summer months. At the veggie van, members can go shopping for fresh local produce once a week. Members can also go and harvest at the local farm to offset cost of food through sweat equity. (For every hour they work they get \$10 towards the cost of food.) A video made by the members and employees at the Good Food Club is available by visiting the following link :

<http://mbactivism.wordpress.com/2009/03/30/good-food-club-video/>

For the following reasons, the food box model is the most applicable to Whitehorse. First, the food box program has a lower operational cost, as it does not require storage of produce or a static location. All produce would be packed into boxes and distributed to each customer once a week. Therefore, there would be no need to rent a building, but rather have a space once a week for distribution day sorting. Second, there would be room for collaboration with community organizations. The Whitehorse Food Bank has expressed interest in allowing distribution days to happen in their building with any extra produce being donated to the Food Bank after distribution day each week. Alternatively, the kitchen space at the Fireweed Market or church kitchens such as Whitehorse United Church could be rented on a weekly basis. The rental fee for the church would be around \$200 per day.

Last, this low-cost food program is very accessible for its members; food boxes would be delivered to the door. There is an understanding that people who are part of this program lead very busy lives with little time and resources to allocate to food purchasing. The optional food box delivery program would help decrease the stress and panic of the daily toll of finding food. In time, with increased energy due to healthy food intake and lower stress levels, low-cost food program members may find themselves allotting time to pick up their baskets and or volunteer at distribution

days. However, this would not be a requirement for food program members, but rather a marker of success if this did occur.

The Agape Table

The Agape Table in Winnipeg is a low-cost grocery food program for low-income individuals and families. This food program is a collaborative effort between local Christian faith groups and the local food bank. The Agape Table uses the church space. The food bank and the low-cost food program operate on the same day making it easier for customers/clients to access its services.

The Agape Table model is slightly different from The Good Food Club as it operates more like a market/grocery store. All of the produce is set out (vegetables, dairy and meat) for the customers to choose according to what they can afford on that day. The prices are significantly lower than regular grocery store prices. The food program is available to customers every Tuesday and Thursday between 11-2pm.

Food programs such as the Agape Table have to have a moneymaker to offset the operational costs. The moneymaker in this case is the meat. The Agape Table was able to find a meat producer who sells meat below wholesale prices. All of the meat is local, grain feed, organic meat. The Agape Table then sells the meat at wholesale cost plus 10%, which well below grocery store prices. The money made on the meat is invested in the food program and spent on vegetable produce and production costs (part-time coordinator's wages).

This model relies on a large volunteer base and local NGO/ faith group collaboration. It is an expensive model to start with and does not seem feasible for Whitehorse to start with this model in the first year of operation. It is possible that the Whitehorse low-cost food program model could

evolve into a model like The Agape Table in the future after first starting with a food box model like the Good Food Basket.

Proposed Whitehorse Low-Cost Food Box Program

Originally, the project coordinator had hoped to implement a co-op design model, but it became apparent that it would be challenging to find funding for a co-op model. Shannon Albisser the Regional Advisor/ Rural and Cooperatives Secretariat and Jim Huggard an Artic Co-op specialist suggested that it would be more appropriate for the project to partner with an established NGO such as the Whitehorse Food Bank. The reasons presented were that the co-op incorporation alone would be far too much for such a small-scale project. Becoming a co-op would also put the project in competition with local businesses, which could create barriers to community partnership and funding.

The following model has been modified from the Good Food Box Program²⁰ based in Toronto. This project was funded by Heifer International Canada. The Good Food Club based in Winnipeg also influenced the Whitehorse food box model.

Low-Cost Food Basket presentation

Food included in the Food Box should be of the highest quality and geared towards being personally and culturally acceptable to a wide range of people. Produce should be selected for colour and variety and thoughtfully arranged for maximum appeal. A beautiful box reflects the fact that the Food Box is not a handout but a high quality product.²¹

²⁰ http://www.foodshare.net/publications_04.htm

²¹ http://www.foodshare.net/publications_04.htm, The good food box manual pdf. P 19.

Affordability of and accessibility to healthy food

Members pay for a portion of what it costs to produce the Food Box, the program and various funding sources make up for the rest. Members will benefit from the cost savings of bulk buying and the time saved from this distribution method along with skill development at workshops. This means purchasing high quality, fresh food is within the reach of many more people than through the regular retail system.²²

Having fun with the Low-Cost Food Box

A large part of the Toronto Good Food Box's success arises from the sheer fun that people have receiving the box. Opening the box is a surprise each time, "What's in it this time?" Members have even reported that their children are more interested in and willing to eat the Good Food Box food because of the novel method by which it arrives.²³ It is obvious that the Low-Cost Food Box program alone cannot solve the problems of food insecurity. However, it is a good start. At the very least, the box can improve people's access to healthy food, support farmers, bring people together and strengthen communities. Hopefully, it can spur discussion about the kind of system we want to build in which everyone has access to healthy, affordable, local and sustainably produced food.

Support local growers

To create a sustainable and affordable food system we need to invest in our local farmers and support sustainable farming practices. A healthy farm economy helps to boost urban economy and helps to ensure we have access to affordable local produce. In order to support one another, community members and farmers need to work towards a shared vision for food access. The Low-Cost Food Box program creates an opportunity for members to learn more about their local farmers

²² http://www.foodshare.net/publications_04.htm, The good food box manual pdf. P 19.

²³ http://www.foodshare.net/publications_04.htm, The good food box manual pdf. P 19.

and influence the variety of produce and how it is grown.

Participation should be easy for everyone

We need to make sure the Low-Cost food box program meets the needs of low-income people and people on social assistance. For example, in the Toronto based Food Box program, this means requesting payment in advance and delivering towards the end of the month, when money and supplies are running low. Families with little money for food take a risk when paying in advance to purchase a Food Box, so quality is of utmost importance. If the box arrives full of wilted vegetables, this can have a severe impact on a family's food for a week and can dissuade a family from future participation. Damaged food may also call up associations of "seconds," furthering stigmatization and reducing the chance of positive word of mouth advertising – an important component for success.²⁴

Balance revenue & subsidy to achieve financial sustainability

Ideally a Low-Cost Food Box program will both improve access to fresh produce and generate the revenue necessary to cover all costs. This is rarely possible due to the financial limitations of low-income communities, the cost of supporting volunteers and local farmers and the cost of creating educational materials. A combination of subsidy and revenue are necessary.²⁵

Staffing

- One full-time coordinator
- Driver and van to collect and drop food off at client's homes
- Minimum three volunteers for distribution day (food box members could volunteer,

NGO/supportive community members)

²⁴ http://www.foodshare.net/publications_04.htm, The good food box manual pdf, P 20.

²⁵ http://www.foodshare.net/publications_04.htm, The good food box manual pdf, P 20

Space requirements

Each week the produce would be delivered to one location and sorted into boxes by volunteers and the project coordinator. There should not be produce left by the end of each distribution day, therefore there will be no need for long-term storage or refrigeration. Any produce that is not claimed will be donated to emergency food service providers in town such as the Whitehorse Food Bank or Salvation Army.

Site possibilities

- Fireweed Community Kitchen
- Whitehorse Food Bank
- Church kitchens such as Whitehorse United Church

*Each location would have to have bathrooms for volunteers and tables to sort produce. The space must be large enough that volunteers could effectively and efficiently sort through produce. The space would preferably be on the ground level to make it accessible for loading and unloading, and for those who are unable to climb stairs.

Equipment Needs

- Reusable food boxes
- Rented car and driver
- Computer
- Printer
- General office supplies (envelopes, papers, pens...)
- Access to internet
- Access to phone

- Tables
- Chairs

Project Schedule

- Business plan completed by October 2012
- Hire full-time project coordinator
- Secure funding from private and public sources
- Money allocated to farmer by early spring so that they can start planting the needed crop for the low-cost food box program
- Make contact with G and P Distributing to discuss ordering and delivery of produce, if possible at a discounted rate.
- Secure space
- Secure volunteers
- Make contact with clients through Whitehorse Food Bank. (They have agreed to refer clients to the project coordinator who have demonstrated a willingness to exit the emergency food cycle.)
- Secure driver for distribution days
- Purchase 10 baskets for distribution day
- Distribution day will happen once a week → decide which day of the week this should take place
- Find workshops instructors, design implement workshops: Cooking classes, seed saving, gardening, harvesting will take place a few months into project

Voices from the Front

Input from Local Growers

Many local farmers have been very supportive of the Low-Cost Food Box Program demonstrating an overwhelming desire to see food insecurity tackled in our community. Tom and Simone Rudge, owners of Aurora Mountain Organic Farm, made many suggestions regarding collaboration with the proposed Low-Cost Food Box Program with an emphasis on empowerment and participation of the Low-Cost Food Box member.

Collaboration

Collaboration would entail requesting produce from a farm before the farming season begins in early spring and paying in advance with a discounted rate for the entire season. This would benefit farmers as they would have a guaranteed sale of a set amount of produce at the beginning of the season and it would benefit the Low-Cost Food Box Program having produce from local farms at a discounted rate. Also, Low-Cost Food Box Program members could help out with farming once a week during the growing season, allowing the members to feel more connected to their food and allowing for valuable skill development such as seed savings, planting, and harvesting. These skills would contribute to the member's ability to grow their own food. Farmers would also benefit from the volunteer labour.

Tom and Simone Rudge believe that a Low-Cost Food Box program is something that would play an important role in the community. When asked how they could partner on this project their response was very positive. Here are the following ways in which they have agreed to participate. "On our farm we have garden space, equipment, expertise, and a willingness to help with the Low-Cost Food Box Program. There are other farms that would likely provide the same things. The

limiting input is always the labor; building the garden, weeding, harvesting and distribution of the products. That is where a strong connection can be made. If the participants can arrange transportation to a farm once a week during the growing season, the participants can provide a much-needed input and also learn extensive knowledge about growing their own food.”²⁶

The Rudge’s have outlined the following partnership possibilities with the Aurora Mountain Farm and the proposed Low-Cost Food Box Program:

- Provide garden space for 1 or several families (depending on commitment from other farmers).
- Work collaboratively with the participants to select seed varieties they currently have to plant.
- Once a week participants can come to work on their garden plot (a single family/multi family plot depending on project design). During the visit the participants learn about their garden and also other aspects of the farm.
- The participants would have the opportunity to take part in animal husbandry if they wish, with a suggested outcome of raising some meat for their own freezer.
- Participants could help to arrange seeding, weeding, harvesting, washing and bagging of their produce.
- Participate in an end of season celebration of harvest

It is promising to have this kind of commitment from local farmers, as community partnership is essential for the project to be successful. This form of partnership would

²⁶ Tom and Simone Rudge, owners of Aurora Mountain Farm, Interview: Feb. 2012.

allow for the Low-Cost Food Box members/participants to be involved in the growing process, which would promote skill development and community collaboration.

Input from Single Parents and Service Providers

It is important to capture the voices of those that the low-cost food box program would benefit. In this case services providers such as staff at the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre (VFWC) highlight the food security needs of their clients. "Food security and access to fresh, healthy, nutritious food is a human right. It is my understanding that Whitehorse Food Bank clients are increasing making it challenging to meet increased food demands. There is a need in Whitehorse for a more sustainable means to access healthy food. A food box program that addresses the gap between emergency food and the grocery store would benefit the community. We find that people are being forced to choose between basic necessities such as paying the rent or buying groceries. Food insecurity is a barrier to achieving equality. We can't work towards achieving equality if people's basic needs are not being met."²⁷

Each Thursday between 11:30am and 1:30pm VFWC holds a community kitchen lunch for women. The centre has a community kitchen cook who prepares fresh, healthy food for women. Women have told the cook that they really appreciate the fresh vegetables that are available at lunch as these vegetables are at times the only fresh vegetables they have access to all week. "They stock up on vegetables at the community lunch because they know that these vegetables might be the only ones they get all week. There is a willingness to learn how to cook different foods and when new vegetables are presented at meals, women will often ask for a mini cooking lessons on how to

²⁷ Julianna Scramstad, Program Coordinator: Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, February 2012.

prepare the dish. If there are any fresh vegetables leftover, women will ask to take some home to offset limitations in their daily diets or their children's.”²⁸

After conducting the interviews it became apparent that service providers are looking for solutions to address food insecurity in Whitehorse. It is difficult for people to improve their situations if they do not have access to basic needs such as fresh, healthy food. It is challenging for service providers to hear that their clients only have access to fresh, healthy food such as vegetables once a week, which is why many service providers agree that a low-cost food box program would be beneficial to the community.

Short and Long Term Program Goals

Short-term goals

The goal of the program is to give members a chance to achieve food security in their lives. This means that they move out of the emergency food cycle where food is constantly being sought out to a secure food cycle where there is enough food to last a week, a month and so forth. Participation in this program must be very easy and trust must be developed. An additional short-term goal would be to establish the program and recruit a stable membership, sources of funding and a distribution site. We would hope to see a large number of members attend the workshops with their children. The workshops will foster community with the intent of expanding members' social networks.

²⁸ Amanda Mouchet, Community kitchen cook: Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, February 2012.

Pilot project funding for the first two-three years of operation would be necessary to give the project coordinator time to establish the program and to secure private support and additional community support.

Long-term goals

Long-term goals and markers of success would be to see members picking up their food boxes, participating (on their own accord) with distribution days and farming days. Additional markers of success would be to see members graduate from the Low-Cost Food Box program with the confidence and knowledge to grow their own food and successfully manage to stay out of the emergency food cycle. When possible, it would be great to see former members of the program volunteer for the food box program or become mentors for new food box members.

The pilot project could move beyond the first two-three years with private donors, community support and a large volunteer base allowing it to be sustainable with little government operational funding. Another long-term goal would be to expand the box program beyond the initial member base of six families. It would be beneficial to secure a location and have more workshops available for participants. Longer-term goals would be to operate a market style low-cost food program where members could choose the type and quantity of produce they want each week.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates Whitehorse's need to address food insecurity, particularly low-income single parents' ability to access fresh produce. This need was highlighted through the voices of single parents, services providers, Yukon Health Status Report statistics and local farmers. Food security is a serious concern in Canada, specifically in rural northern areas such as Yukon. First,

many factors affect an individual or family's ability to achieve food security, especially geography and income. Second, food insecurity affects diet quality and quantity, which can lead to chronic disease. Evidence directly links food insecurity to several chronic diseases including diabetes. Last, when food security is made a priority, the long-term health and wellness of our community is ensured.²⁹

Whitehorse has the capacity to create a Low-Cost Food Box Program, especially when there is support from the community at large. The Whitehorse Food Bank has offered to collaborate by sharing space on distribution days and the Aurora Mountain Farm has agreed to participate by providing farming workshops along with garden plots for program members.

The Low-Cost Food Box program alone cannot solve the problems of food insecurity. However, it is a good start. At the very least, the box can improve people's access to healthy food, support farmers, bring people together and strengthen communities. Hopefully, it can spur discussion about the kind of system we want to build in which everyone has access to healthy, affordable, local and sustainably produced food. All Yukoners have the right to decide what they eat and to ensure that food in their community is healthy and accessible. Implementation of a Low-Cost Food Box Program would bring Whitehorse one-step closer to achieving these goals and addressing food insecurity in our community.

²⁹ Mary Anne Smith, "CHNET: Food Security Webinar," CDPAC, Fireside Chat#246, November 29, 2011, P 18.

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APPENDIX 1

FOOD 2002 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS GREATER FOOD SECURITY

Food and Income

1. The federal government should establish basic minimum income standards, so that Canadians have enough money to purchase nutritious foods. It should further explore establishing a guaranteed annual income (GAI) for all Canadians, so they can meet their basic needs.
2. The federal government should implement a national health and nutrition credit that would allow all Canadians to consistently access nutritious healthy foods regardless of their income level.
3. In order to address unemployment and underemployment, which leads to the lack of substantial income levels, governments should explore policy measures that redistribute work in an equitable manner.

Food and Health

4. Because all levels of government spend billions on illnesses that could be prevented or reduced by dietary changes, governments should promote greater vegetable and fruit consumption through educational campaigns at schools, workplaces and stores, highlighting the connection between disease prevention and healthy eating.
5. Governments should work to make food a right by legislating the wholesale distribution of basic foods.
6. Governments should explore cost measures such as differential pricing for healthy food to

encourage increased consumption of vegetables, fruits, grains and beans.

7. Given the yet unknown health risks associated with genetically modified (GM) foods, governments should mandate the labeling and careful research of this new technology.

Food Access, Hunger and the Food Industry

8. Governments should lead a process to re-think the charitable distribution of surplus food, and explore the potential of non-charity food projects, such as wholesale food distribution outlets, community gardens and kitchens, alternative-buying clubs to meet food access needs.
9. Municipal governments should support citywide composting programs that allow food retailers, processors, and the restaurant sector to dispose of their organic wastes in an effective, low-cost and environmentally-sound manner.
10. Governments should explore the licensing of community-run food discount stores (similar to Goodwill clothing stores), which would assure that excess or dented foods would be managed to meet the industry's need for quality control, while creating a non-stigmatizing alternative to food banks.

Food and Agriculture

11. Governments should explore marketing boards as a way of guaranteeing stable conditions for farmers and rural communities.
12. Organic farming and other sustainable agricultural methods and practices should be encouraged through policy initiatives.
13. Unchecked development of farmlands should be legislated against and careful monitored.
14. Governments should develop policies, similar to what is currently being done in the U.S. and in Europe, that support farmers and rural life.

Food and Consumers' Rights

15. The federal government should implement comprehensive labeling policies, that include attention to nutritional information, country of origin, fair trade, organic standards and GM content.
16. Governments and industries should develop policy measures that apply the precautionary principle to new food products and technologies, such as GM foods.
17. The food industry should integrate the costs of labeling into their overall operation costs.
18. The federal government should retain strong control over national food regulation and inspection processes, and seriously reconsider the devolved shift in such responsibilities to the CFIA.

Food and Community-Based Food Programs

19. Foundations and governments should fund training, networking and coalition building among non-profit food agencies, as a means to enhance the capacity of grassroots food groups to provide the best service to their clients and participants.
20. Municipalities should establish food policy councils or working groups within city government that can work in partnership with third sector organizations.
21. Municipal governments should establish a commission to identify policy and program changes required to improve the coordination and delivery of food and hunger related services, and to determine the appropriate role for each level of government.
22. Governments at all levels should fund community-based food security projects through special grants programs.

Food, Cooking, and Commensality

23. Governments and foundations should finance community-based food programs (such as

community gardens and kitchens, cooking groups and classes).

24. Policies should be implemented that allow for basic foods to be offered to the entire population at wholesale prices; this might encourage further cooking and experimentation with fresh foods.
25. Governments should mandate home economics and cooking education for the entire student population through provincial educational guidelines.

Food and Student Nutrition

26. The Canadian government should create and fund a nation-wide student nutrition program.
27. The federal government should create an expanded social safety net, which should include both adequate income along with student nutrition programs to help all children and their parents meet their basic food needs.
28. The federal government should invest in more comprehensive research to evaluate the success of current school-based nutrition programs in meeting the goal of reducing immediate hunger, and in improving the long term health and success of students.³⁰

³⁰ Food Share, Food Policy, “Policy Recommendation towards greater food security,” <http://www.foodshare.net/foodpolicy03.htm>