



KNOWING OUR NEIGHBOURS II 2022



PARKDALE
FOOD CENTRE

At the Parkdale Food Centre (PFC), we believe in an Ottawa where everyone has the means and opportunity to live a healthy, connected and fulfilling life. Our mission is to build healthier, more connected Neighbours¹ and neighbourhoods through access to good food and innovative community partnerships, and by challenging inequalities to create lasting impacts. We believe that healthy food is a Human Right, and we are working to ensure all Neighbours have the means to access:

“a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food.”²

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KNOWING OUR NEIGHBOURS

This report provides a summary of the results from the Knowing Our Neighbours II survey, completed in April 2022. Even in the midst of a global pandemic, the staff and volunteers at the Parkdale Food Centre have used food as a way to connect with Neighbours; through in person interactions as at our take-out meal distribution³, community programming, fresh produce markets, grocery offerings, and virtually via cooking workshops. We collect minimal demographic information to minimize barriers for those who access programs, however, we have recognized that this limits our ability to obtain a detailed understanding of our community, especially with respect to food insecurity, ethnicity, income and disability statuses.

In early 2021, we completed the first-annual “Knowing Our Neighbours” survey to obtain answers to these questions. The information from the survey helped us to adapt our services to meet the ever-changing needs of Neighbours and to inform our evolving advocacy work. We completed this survey again in early 2022 in order to get an up-to-date and detailed picture of households.

Some of our key questions included:

- Who uses the services of PFC?
- What are some of their challenges as they relate to disability, chronic health conditions, Covid-19, accessibility, and income?
- What is the food security status of our Neighbours?
- What are the usage patterns of our food bank? Where else do our Neighbours get food?
- How well does PFC meet the needs of our Neighbours?
- What could PFC do better?

THE STUDY

Neighbours from all PFC programs were invited to participate in the Knowing Our Neighbours II survey, undertaken in spring 2022. Available in French or English, all questions were voluntary, no identifying information was recorded with the survey data, and a \$10 grocery gift card was shared as an honorarium upon completion. This report was compiled from the key results obtained from the 324 households who completed the questionnaire.

1 At PFC, we use ‘Neighbours’ when referring to everyone who uses our services

2 Article 25, UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

3 As of May 2, 2022 our takeaway meals shifted to in person Community meals.

Takeaway options are available upon request



OUR NEIGHBOURS

While not all Neighbours completed the survey, we are confident that the households that did respond provide a representative sample of those who are supported through PFC programs. Here are some of the key results of the households and the individuals that live in them:

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

- 23%** of individuals lived in a single-person household
- 26%** of households contained 5 persons or more.
- 51%** of households had at least one adult aged 51 years or more.
- 53%** of persons in households responding to the survey identified themselves as being Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Colour (BIPOC).
- 35%** of respondents lived in private (market rent) housing.
- 40%** live in social housing.
- 72%** of households had at least one person with a disability. Of those households:
 - 22%** have a mental illness
 - 18%** have a physical disability
 - 16%** have a chronic illness
 - 13%** have developmental disability

From these results, it is clear that many Neighbours represent vulnerable segments of the population of Ottawa, for example; being a member of a BIPOC group, living with a disability and/or living in precarious housing.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Of the households in the survey:

- 70%** had an annual income of less than \$20,000
- 45%** had an income of \$15,000 per year or less.
- 21%** had an income of \$10,000 or less
- 38%** had at least one adult in full- or part-time employment.
- 42%** had at least one adult receiving Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).
- 19%** had at least one adult receiving Ontario Works (OW).
- 23%** had at least one adult on the Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) and/or Old Age Security (OAS).

The basic annual social assistance rates for a single person on ODSP is \$14,028 and on OW is \$8,796⁴. Adding in Federal and Provincial tax credits, these increase to \$10,385 and \$15,731, respectively. This is *far below* the cost of a modest, basic standard of living as estimated by Statistics Canada's Market-Based Measure (MBM). In 2019, the MBM for a single person household in Ottawa Gatineau was \$21,480⁵, and for a four-person household was \$48,816 in 2020⁶. Households with an income of less than 75% of the MBM are classified as being in Deep Income Poverty (DIP). Most households in the survey were below these thresholds, and so would be classified as living in Deep Income Poverty.

Statistics Canada also calculates a Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) to identify households that are likely to spend a disproportionately large share of their income on the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. The LICO for a single-person household in a large urban area in 2020 was \$22,060⁷. The vast majority of households in the survey were below this threshold.

Around two thirds of households also reported that they found it more or much more difficult to eat an adequate and healthy diet since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

⁴ [Welfare in Canada - Canada - Maytree](#)

⁵ [Hunger-Report-2019-Feed-Ontario-Digital.pdf \(feedontario.ca\)](#)

⁶ [Market Basket Measure \(MBM\) thresholds for the reference family by Market Basket Measure region, component and base year \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

⁷ [Low income cut-offs \(LICOs\) before and after tax by community size and family size, in current dollars \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)



FOOD SECURITY STATUS OF NEIGHBOUR HOUSEHOLDS

To assess the degree of food insecurity of Neighbours, the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) used by Statistics Canada was included in the survey⁸. The HFSSM provides a reliable and validated way to assess the food security status of households, and of adults and children within those households. Of the households represented:

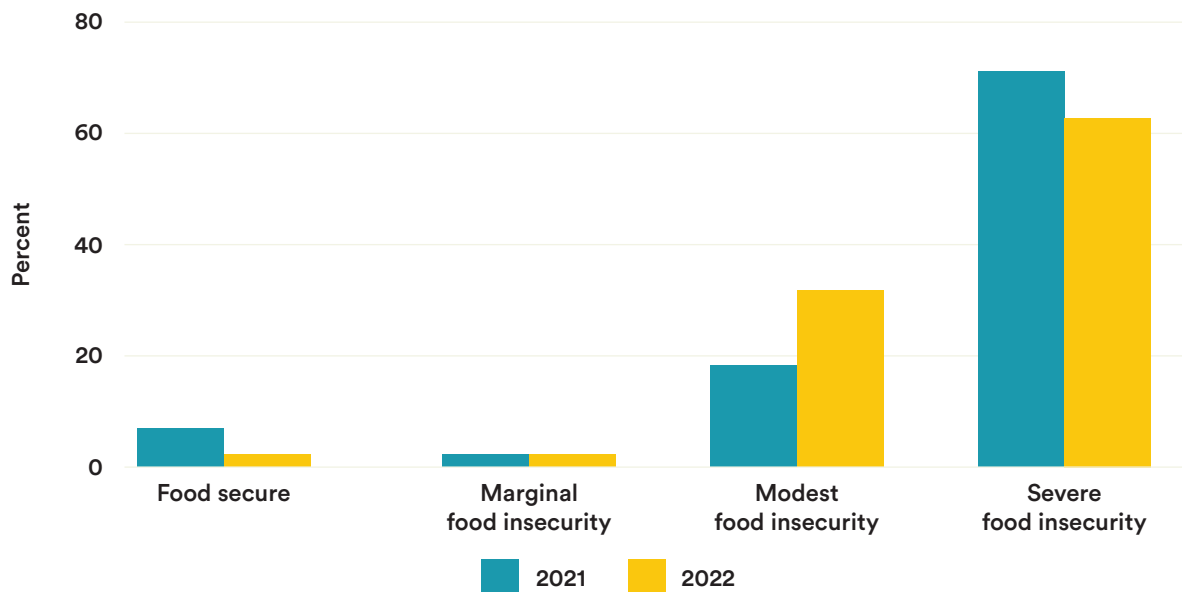
- **63%** were severely food insecure.
- **32%** were moderately food insecure (Figure 1).
- **66%** of households identifying at least one household member as BIPOC identified as severely food insecure, in comparison to **33%** of non-BIPOC households.
- **3%** of households were food secure.

“The cost of food, especially fruit, has risen considerably, while my income has been reduced to about 1/4 - 1/3 of what it was pre-pandemic. I do gig work which provides zero security.”

Given the Knowing Our Neighbours survey has now been completed for two years, it is possible to compare the food security of households that access the services of PFC and those who have responded to the survey. Thus, while there has been a decline in the proportion of households that are severely food insecure (Figure 1), at the other end of the scale, the proportion of food secure households declined from 6% in 2021 to 2% in 2022. That being said, the proportion of moderately food insecure households increased commensurately.

“Pandemic led to job loss and a less dependable income, in turn leading to less spending money for food. Most food cooked was based on whatever was available through public programs, and didn’t always meet dietary/health/cultural needs or last long enough.”

Figure 1. Level of household food security amongst survey respondents



The survey results demonstrated how many Neighbours continue to have anxieties about how they would obtain enough food:

- In **2022**, **92%** worried that food would run out before there was money to purchase more **VS 88% in 2021**.
- In **2022**, **75%** had eaten less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money to buy food **VS 73% in 2021**.
- **80%** of these Neighbours rely on ODSP as income support.

“I would not be able to afford to eat some months if it wasn't for Parkdale Food Centre.”

For many Neighbours, going without food is an all too familiar.

Over the last year 60% had gone hungry because they could not afford enough food. This compares to 51% in 2021.

- **46%** had not eaten for a whole day because there wasn't enough money to buy food **VS 40%** in 2021.
- **50%** of these Neighbours rely on ODSP as income support.
- **48%** indicated that it was a monthly occurrence to go a whole day without eating because there wasn't enough money to buy more.

“I suffer from mental illness and need money for medication. So I skip meals so my partner can eat more and I can afford my medication.”

Where there are children in the household, adults do all that they can to ensure that they have enough to eat. In many cases, this means that adults go without food themselves. Households often also compromise on the food they feed to their children to ensure that they do not go hungry.

In the last year:

- In **2022**, **92%** of households with children had often or sometimes relied on a few kinds of low-cost food to feed their children **VS 77% in 2021**.
- In **2022**, **66%** of households with children reported that they did not have the money to feed their children a balanced meal.
- **42%** of households with children, it was reported that children were often or sometimes not eating enough because they could not afford enough food.

“There were times when I was simply too ill with a long term health issue to go out to reach a food bank, and as a result really stopped eating entirely, which made me even more ill and as a result suffered from malnutrition”

ACCESSING AND PREPARING FOOD

Households in the survey spent a significant part of their income on food.

On average:

- **27%** of the monthly expenditure of these households was spent on food.
- **48%** of income was spent on housing.

“Food prices have increased, we don't have a car so we can't carry back many groceries or buy larger quantities when on sale, I have to do shopping alone and on foot with both kids so I often only have time or resources to grab easy things my toddler will eat.”

- **71%** of Neighbours shopped for food in discount stores such as; Giant Tiger and Food Basics.
- **61%** purchased at least some of their food in a dollar store.
- The majority of households in the survey purchased food from multiple stores as a strategy to stretch their food budget.

“...all the extra miscellaneous items can be expensive so I started shopping at the dollar store.”

- **85%** of households prepared half or more of their food from raw ingredients.
- **75%** stated that the person who was primarily responsible for cooking in their household enjoyed cooking food.
- **60%** had rarely or never purchased takeout food or eaten in a restaurant in the last 12 months.

Sharing food, within families and, or members of the community was common amongst the households in the survey.



FOOD BANK USE

- **98%** of households have accessed a food bank in their lives.
- **13%** accessed a food bank within the last year.
- **68%** have been accessing a food bank for more than two years.
- **42%** have been accessing a food bank for five years or more (Figure 2).

Clearly, for most Neighbours, food banks are an established and ongoing source of food; it is far from an emergency measure that is used when money gets tight. Thus, most households made regular use of the PFC, Mino’weesini Grocery Program.

- **64%** accessed the Mino’Weesini Grocery Program at least six months in the last year.
- **54%** accessed the Mino’Weesini Grocery Program at least eight months in the last year.
- **34%** accessed the Mino’Weesini Grocery Program every month of the last year.
- **55%** accessed an additional food bank in the last year.

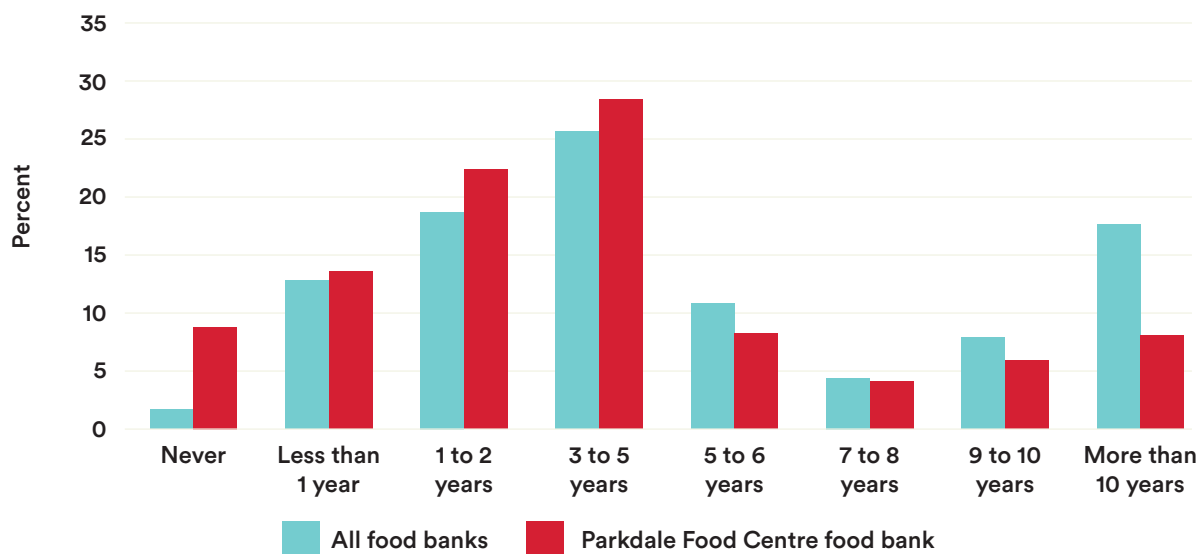
Importantly, however, the majority (61%) of households had not used a food bank continuously since starting to do so. When asked why there were periods of time when their household didn’t access a food bank, about half of respondents reported that it was because they didn’t need it: having enough income or getting food from family and or friends.

There was also widespread sentiment that using the food bank when it was not needed took food away from others that are more in need.

“When we have money for food we try not to use the food bank because we don’t want to take it so other people have food.”

“I honestly try my best not to go to the food bank & only use it in case of emergency because there are other families in need.”

Figure 2. Number of years that households had been using a food bank



Households responding to the survey reported that, on average, the food they received from the Mino’Weesini Grocery Program lasted almost eight days. Just over half indicated that the food they received lasted them around six days. It is evident, therefore, that the Mino’Weesini Grocery Program represents a significant source of food for Neighbours. Despite this fact, however, almost all remain moderately or severely food insecure. Clearly, Mino’Weesini only ‘scrapes the surface’ of the food insecurity faced by Neighbours!

Neighbours are across the City of Ottawa:

- **48%** are accessing food supports from outside of the catchment area as identified by the Ottawa Food Bank. Those Neighbours from out of catchment come to PFC for a variety of reasons, but especially because of the types of food that PFC makes available, and the respect shown to our Neighbours.

For the first time, the Knowing Our Neighbours II survey asked how satisfied Neighbours are with the Mino’Weesini Grocery Program:

- **86%** were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the quality of food provided (Figure 3)
- **77%** were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the amount of food provided.
- **84%** were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the choice of food.

These results suggest that PFC is providing a good service to Neighbours, albeit one that is limited in its ability to significantly reduce their food insecurity status. This conclusion is borne out by the qualitative sentiments of respondents in the survey:

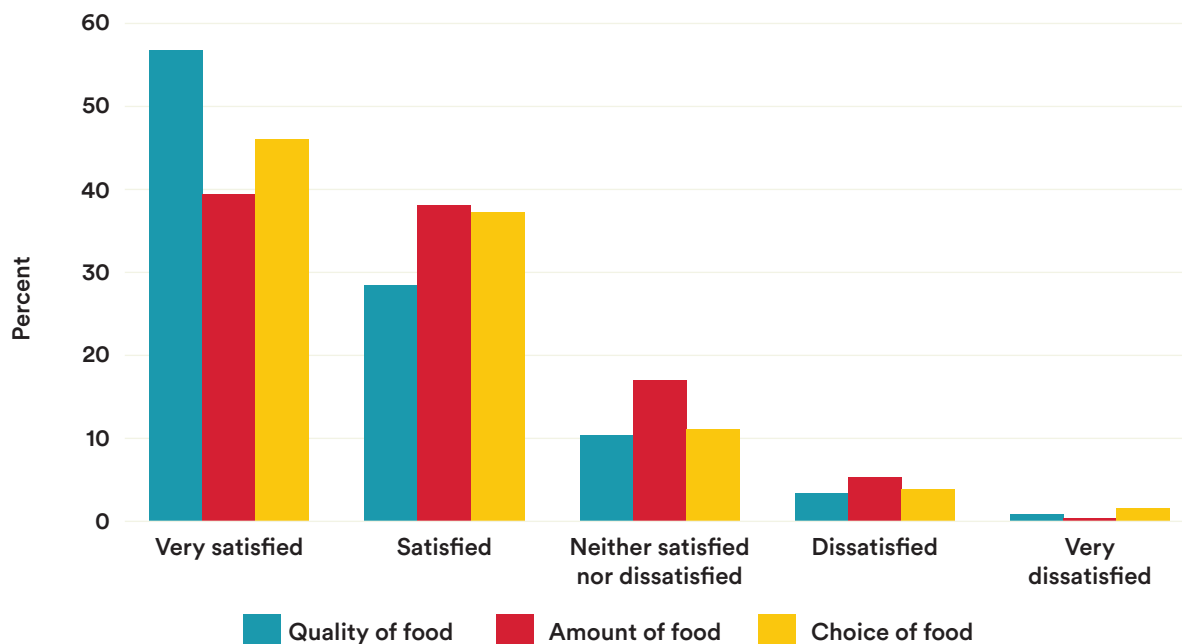
“I am very grateful for our Parkdale Food Centre, the staff are very helpful and friendly. It takes a lot of pressure and anxiety off my mind by knowing they will be there in my time of need.”

“I like that at PFC I am not a number, but just another human being.”

I like that it is a “food centre” and not just a food bank.”

“Do you realise how hard it is to ask for help all the time?”

Figure 3. Satisfaction with the Parkdale Food Centre food bank



PFC'S OTHER SERVICES

In addition to Mino'Weesini Grocery Program, PFC distributes fresh produce and takeout meals every Friday at the Fresh Eats market.⁹

Of households that responded to the survey:

- **27%** received fresh produce in the last month.
- The average Neighbor received fresh produce **three times** in the last month.
- **36%** received takeout meals in the last month.
- The average Neighbour received between **four and five meals** in the last month.

Less than a quarter of households that had used the PFC food bank in the last year had received fresh produce and or takeout meals in the previous month. Additionally, 10% of those that had accessed Fresh Eats did not access additional PFC programs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, PFC has offered weekly virtual cooking workshops. Participants obtain the ingredients they need and then cook these at home during the workshop. Around 10% of households responding to the survey had attended one of these workshops in the previous month.

"I am perceptive to the Friday program (rather) than ordering the food (from the food bank)."

"Takeout meals are really important for me. I do not have a place to cook."

"The Friday produce helps me a lot. I eat much more healthily. After finding out about it I decided to start eating vegetarian."

"I have been working from home and have learnt so much in the workshop cooking with Anna & Troy."

SUGGESTIONS FROM NEIGHBOURS

An important part of the survey was asking how Neighbours felt PFC could offer better programming. We are reviewing and adjusting our service delivery based on these comments, in order to ensure that our work is always Neighbour informed. There were many suggestions related to food distribution, such as how much Neighbours received from our Grocery Program, and wanting to reduce the time spent accessing weekly markets:

"Good amount, but I am on OW and would like more food."

"I like prepared meal but don't like to stand in line on a Friday with lots of other people."

Other comments related to how we distributed food during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how Neighbours preferred in person shopping model. Fortunately, as of June 2022, we have opened up our Mino'Weesini Grocery Program for in-person shopping, multiple times per week:

"Come more often each month or get enough food for one month"

This and other suggestions are helping us in an ongoing effort to engage in human-centred design and accountable practice. One of the ways we are doing this is by inviting Neighbours to join our Advocacy Committee to work towards food security and economic justice both within and outside of the PFC:

"If you don't already do so already, maybe participants in your program could be a part of the input and decision making, when you're developing new operating models, so that you could get the perspective of someone receiving the services."

⁹ As of September, 2022 PFC has extended Fresh Eats to 3 markets every Friday and in person meal programs twice weekly.



WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

Just as 2021 data revealed, the data collected in 2022, reveal that food banking does not have a significant impact on food security in urban areas such as the City of Ottawa. Neighbours were generally satisfied with the amount, choice and quality of food they received, as well as the general services provided by PFC's regular food and community programming. However, approximately half had to regularly go without food because they did not have enough money to buy more. This speaks to the fact that, though valuable, community-based approaches to food provision are insufficient to significantly impact the food insecurity of low-income households in a city like Ottawa.

Households surveyed reported using a variety of methods to stretch their limited incomes to meet the needs of themselves and their families. In addition to visiting food banks multiple times per month, most months of the year, Neighbours also visited support services in the community such as; markets and meals, received food from family and friends, shopped for food at discount stores, prepared a large amount of food from scratch while avoiding purchasing meals from restaurants. The results of this survey indicated that households surveyed spent nearly three times more of their income on food as compared to the average spending in the Canadian population, despite their various strategies to reduce the cost of food spending. Despite their efforts, nearly all Neighbours were classified as being food insecure. A large number of households reported that at least one member lived with a disability, and our survey found that rates of food insecurity were even higher amongst these households compared to those who did not report disabilities. This is noteworthy as the income provided by ODSP is far below what is needed to even meet the most basic needs, such as adequate and appropriate food and housing, among other necessary regular household expenses.

“An increase in ODSP and subsidized housing would make a big difference.”

Although the sample of this study is limited in size and was not randomly selected, we can make broad comparisons of Neighbours who access food services against those of the general population. Specifically, according to the 2020 Canadian Community Health

Survey (CCHC), 1.7% of Canadians (aged 12 years or older) were severely food insecure. When contrasting this against the 63% of households in our survey that were severely food insecure, we can see that there is nothing ‘normal’ about the severity of food insecurity experienced by our Neighbours.

Ultimately, food insecurity in urban centres like Ottawa is the result of poverty. Sadly, this is not new information; income inequality remains a product of structural and political systems that fail to provide a sufficient social safety net for all citizens to, at the very least, meet their basic needs. It is important to note that the cost of these basic needs and the bare minimum income to support them is regularly calculated by Statistics Canada. Indeed, the \$2,000 monthly payment under the Federal Government's Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) that was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic was based on this benchmark. The CERB aimed to help Canadians make ends meet during a particularly challenging time. This contrasts with a housed individual on OW who receives \$733 a month, and with individuals on ODSP that receive \$1169 monthly. It is no surprise that these individuals are unable to meet

“People on ODSP didn't get the perks that everyone else got while in lockdown. I think we should get some assistance for the last two years.”

their basic needs and must resort to using a food bank. There is nothing temporary about poverty!

What is needed is political will, an achievable and actionable plan, and true collaboration and accountability to ensure that all Ottawans, Ontarians and Canadians have the means to meet their basic needs. Adequate and nutritious food that is available and accessible in a dignified way is not a privilege; it is a Human Right.



CALLS TO ACTION

With growing economic and social inequality, it is becoming increasingly critical for community groups, both organizational and citizen-based, to work together to support policy change at different levels of government. What is needed is political will, an achievable and actionable plan, and true collaboration and accountability to ensure that all Ottawans, Ontarians and Canadians have the means to rise above the poverty line, have an adequate standard of living, and live with dignity. Food insecurity is ultimately a result of poverty, which is the outcome of public policy that favours the privileged. Adequate and nutritious food that is available and accessible in a dignified way is not a privilege; it is a Human Right. We need transformative solutions to the unjust systems that cause food insecurity and ill health. Based on our survey, we are advocating for the following:

- Ensure that access to nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate food is a Human Right, as was ratified in the 1976 UN International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, and was recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- We need to centre the voices of those who are most impacted by food injustice and the oppressive burden of poverty.
- That governments work together to create an official realistic poverty reduction plan
- Raising the rates of social assistance to \$2000/month minimum, and ensure that they increase with inflation.
- Increasing minimum wages so that they reflect a living wage in the respective city.
- Improve transit services and decrease cost of riding, at least for those living in poverty.
- Affordable childcare for all.
- Increase availability of deeply affordable urban rental housing and establish rent control.
- Better financial and social supports for marginalized populations, such as racialized persons, persons living with disabilities, single parents and seniors.
- Promoting equity amongst marginalized communities by using an anti-oppressive lens when developing policies, like involving members of different cultural and social groups on decisions that impact their communities, and promoting Indigenous food sovereignty.
- Citizens can support candidates in elections that have these values in mind, and hold current governments accountable to human centred promises. Contact your city councillor, mayor, MPP and MPs to let them know you want to see a more equitable society!



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all of those who helped to make the Knowing Our Neighbours II project possible. Firstly, to the Neighbours who responded to our extensive survey, which we recognize was at times intrusive and required much time and energy to complete. The insight and wisdom our Neighbours shared informs our programs and services, and shapes how we do what we do. Secondly, we would like to thank our partners, including the City of Ottawa, for facilitating the preparation and distribution of this survey. Finally, we would like to thank the dedicated staff and volunteers who helped to organize, distribute and analyze the survey data, and to share the results with the community. Everyone who contributed in some way to the information we are sharing here is a key player in helping increase understanding of the realities of those who are food insecure and, ultimately, in helping PFC in its efforts to advocate for adequate income and food security for all Neighbours, near and far.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We understand that the Parkdale Food Centre exists on unceded and unsurrendered Algonquin Anishinaabe land. Among other colonial systems that impact Indigenous Neighbours, we recognize that food banking is a colonial practice which, rather than positively impacting the food security status of Indigenous peoples, is incredibly problematic and does not respect traditional ways of growing, eating and celebrating food and community. The Parkdale Food Centre is committed to working with Indigenous Neighbours and Knowledge Keepers as well as other partners to move away from food banking and towards true food sovereignty, food security, and lasting economic equality.

“Grateful for all your work and making our community safe and cared for!”





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