ADDRESSING HUNGER IN OXFORD COUNTY

Exploring Needs, Strengths, and Next Steps

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Message from the Executive Director

Addressing Hunger in Oxford County: Exploring Needs, Strengths, and Next Steps is a study of the food system in Oxford County, specifically focusing on how it supports individuals in our community who lack consistent access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food that meets people's dietary and cultural needs, as well as their food preferences. This study ran from December 2015 to July 2016. The process involved compiling data from existing sources, and hosting and analyzing community conversations and key informant interviews. All of this information is included in this report.

This project was possible because of funding from the County of Oxford, and United Way Oxford. This report is being shared with the community for use as a strategy for a collaborative response to hunger continues to develop.

My sincere thanks to those who have contributed to this report in a variety of ways. Many agencies have been supportive, participating in interviews and community discussions, and committing to action moving forward.

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Executive Director
Social Planning Council Oxford

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Executive Summary

Hunger is linked to poorer health outcomes and academic performance. In contrast, individuals who have consistent access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary and cultural needs, and food preferences report improved mental health, and an increased sense of belonging. Despite this, many Canadians, including Oxford County residents, still lack sufficient access to food.

The root causes of hunger are known to be precarious employment, income inequality, housing costs, and social assistance rates. With this knowledge, the Social Planning Council Oxford hosted various community conversations and key informant interviews to better understand our community's needs and strengths in addressing hunger, and to provide recommendations on next steps.

Community members living on low income who currently access emergency food providers talked about wanting more food, more often, in welcoming spaces that feel safe and combine food with social visits. They want to reduce their experiences of loneliness and see food as a way to meet that goal.

Service agencies want to better address the root causes of hunger and offer more dignity-based programs (instead of charity-based programs) in order to better meet the needs of our community.

An overwhelming theme that came out in our community conversations and key informant interviews is the need to shift ownership of addressing hunger from agencies to our community. It is recognized that our community has some work to do in order to create the awareness and empowerment required in order to make this shift successful.

An area that our community expressed interest in exploring, and that aligns well with the needs and strengths described by our community, is a Community Food Centre (CFC). There is an opportunity to explore various models for bringing a CFC to Oxford County in order to develop a community space where food builds health, skills, and community.

Introduction

The Social Planning Council Oxford (SPCO) initiated this study to evaluate Oxford County's strengths and needs within our food system, specifically focusing on how it supports individuals in our community who lack consistent access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food that meets people's dietary and cultural needs, as well as their food preferences.

The goal of this report is to provide recommendations on the next steps our community can take to increase dignified access to food and decrease hunger within our community. This study also assessed the readiness of our community for taking these steps.

Food Insecurity

Food Security exists *"when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."* (World Food Summit, 1996). In this report, we will use terms such as access to food and hunger to describe food insecurity. These terms will be used as our community has identified that terms like food access and hunger have more meaning to them than the term food security. However, it is important to note that food security goes beyond access to food and the experience of hunger. In the majority of this report, access to food will be used as a replacement for food security, to describe access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food that meets people's dietary and cultural needs, as well as their food preferences.

✓ ADEQUATE
✓ SAFE
✓ NUTRITIOUS
✓ MEETS DIETARY NEEDS
✓ MEETS CULTURAL NEEDS
✓ MEETS FOOD PREFERENCES

Canadian adults in who live in homes with inconsistent access to food eat fewer servings of milk products, fruits and vegetables, and, in some cases, meat and meat alternatives (Kirkpatrick, Sharon & Tarasuk, 2008). As incomes drop, high calorie foods that are low in nutrients provide people with their daily calories, at a lower cost (Drewnowski, 2009). Additionally, low income single mothers tend to sacrifice the quality of their own diets for their children (McIntyre et al., 2003).

Adults who lack consistent access to food are more likely to report poor health, less physical activity, live with multiple chronic health conditions (such as major depression, heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and food allergies), and have less social support than adults who do have consistent access to food (Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003, Tarasuk, 2012). Similarly, children and youth in Canada who experience hunger are more likely to have poorer health outcomes even when baseline health and household markers of disadvantage are accounted for. The health outcomes worsen with repeated exposures to hunger (Kirkpatrick, et al., 2010). Hunger also has a negative impact on children's academic performance (Florence, Asbridge & Veugelers, 2008).

The problems associated with hunger worsen for groups of people who are managing chronic diseases. For example, a Nova Scotia study showed that children with diabetes whose families lack consistent access to food have higher hospitalization rates than children with diabetes who have adequate access to food. Access to food was the only independent predictor for these higher rates of hospitalization (Marjerrison et al., 2011).

Overview of Oxford County

Oxford County is a regional municipality located in Southwestern Ontario at the crossroads of Highways 401 and 403. It covers a large geographic area of 2,039 square kilometers where 96% of the land is rural. The total population of Oxford County is 105,719, a 2.9% increase since 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2011 Census). The County is comprised of eight area municipalities: Zorra, East Zorra-Tavistock, Blandford-Blenheim, Norwich, South-West Oxford, Tillsonburg, Ingersoll, and Woodstock.

Results from a 2012 report by Oxford County Public Health and Emergency Services shows that hunger is continuing to increase in Oxford County, with **9.3%** of residents reporting "feeling food insecure" from 2009-2010. This is a **4.6% increase** from the 2008-2009 results (Bryan-Pulham, 2012). Caution is advised that this number may be underestimated due to the sensitive nature of responding to the Community Health Survey. A report published by the SPCO that outlines the usage of emergency food providers in our community shows that there is turnover in those who access these services with **30%** considered new users, and that approximately **30-37%** of users are under the age of 18 (2013). However, it should be noted that this report also does not tell the full story, underrepresenting those in our community who are hungry (PROOF, 2016).

The Nutritious Food Basket is prepared by Public Health units across Ontario, to help monitor the cost and affordability of healthy eating. The cost of the Nutritious Food Basket is most often cited as the cost per week for an average family of four, known as the "reference family of four," to buy the basic food items that allow them to eat healthy meals and meet their minimum nutrition recommendations. The reference family of four includes a man and a woman, each 31-50 years of age, a male 14-18 years of age, and a female 4-8 years of age.

From 2009 to 2015, Oxford County saw an increase of **23%** in the cost of a nutritious food basket (Oxford County Public Health & Emergency Services, 2016). This represents a significant increase in cost, which is not accounted for fully by inflation (Bank of Canada, 2016). This increase is especially challenging for those with low incomes.

Why are People Hungry in Oxford County?

Precarious Employment

A 2013 report, *It's More than Poverty,* describes employment precarity, which is characterized by lack of job security or benefits, lower incomes, income variability, unpredictable work schedules, limited career prospects, anticipated future reductions in hours, less unionization, and fear of raising an issue of employment rights. The report states that *"...precarious employment relationships are becoming the 'new normal' for our workforce."* This type of employment has increased by nearly 50% in the last 20 years (McMaster University & United Way Toronto, 2013). Similarly, the 2009 Senate Report, *In from the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*, identifies that the increase in precarious employment means that employment is now failing to lead people out of poverty (The standing senate committee on social affairs, science, and technology, 2009).

In community conversations held in 2014 by the SPCO, residents spoke about challenges with employment, stating that they have observed an increase in precarious work (SPCO, 2014). Data shows that **4.1%** of working age individuals are classified as working poor in Oxford County, which means that despite working, they are not earning enough to bring them above the poverty line (Statistics Canada,

Income Statistics Division, 2011). We know that income received through working full-time, full-year at minimum wage is not enough to live on. As a result, food becomes a discretionary expense, and people go hungry or live off of inadequate diets.

Income Inequality

In their extensive review, the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario reported that the issue of rising income inequality needs to be examined. The gap between high and low income earners continues to grow (Lankin & Sheikh, 2012). Through various community conversations, low income earners in Oxford County continue to express to the SPCO that they feel medium-to-high earners do not have a good understanding of the struggles and barriers that they face on a daily basis. Developing a common understanding of what it is like living in poverty has been identified as being a high priority by low income earners in our community.

Housing Costs

The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines core housing needs as households whose housing falls below one of three standards: adequacy (major repair required), suitability (enough bedrooms based on National Occupancy Standards), or affordability (spending more than 30% of their income on shelter). In 2006, **one in fourteen** households in Oxford County were living in core housing need, and could not afford the median rent of alternative acceptable housing (Oxford County, 2013). In 2013, it was reported that an average, single, full-time worker earning minimum wage, renting a one-bedroom apartment, would have to spend **36%** of his or her income on rent (Oxford County Human Services). Similarly, **68%** of Oxford County residents receiving Ontario Works were spending more on shelter than what was covered by their shelter allowance (Oxford County Human Services, 2013). Community conversations in 2014 by the SPCO also demonstrate the housing need in our community:

"Access to affordable housing is non-existent"

"When you live in an apartment and can't keep up with rent, you can't afford groceries"

"A few years ago when the wait list [for rent geared-to-income housing in Oxford County] was only a year long we thought that was bad. Now we look back and say, 'wow, those were the good old days.' What does that say about our society? A wait list should be unacceptable."

Social Assistance Rates

The Health Canada Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion reports that in 2007-2008 **56%** of families who relied on social assistance did not have consistent access to food (Health Canada, 2012). The monthly allowances recipients receive is not sufficient to cover necessary expenses. Recipients usually pay for fixed expenses first, such as rent, heat, and hydro. When income is inadequate, food becomes a discretionary expense, which results in hunger and an inadequate diet of poor nutritional value (SPCO, 2015). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the social assistance system is designed so that

recipients decimate assets and savings, making it impossible for recipients to manage unavoidable expenses, and trapping them in the cycle of poverty.

The Situation is Getting Worse Not Better

Over the past 20 years, we have observed our social and economic safety net erode in Canada: entrenched inequality, stagnant wages, increasing cost of living (including housing costs), and inadequate social assistance rates. Neoliberalism (a modified form of liberalism that favours free-market capitalism) saw a global uptake – prioritizing economic needs over meeting human needs. While Canada saw some protection from this global movement through the 80s and 90s because of post-war social programs, changes in the mid-90s to funding of social programs accelerated inequality, and the gap between high and low income earners grew (Shaker, 2016).

- Conference Board of Canada ranks Canada's income inequality **12th** out of 17 peer countries (2016)
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identifies Canada as being **among the worst** developed countries for the widening income gap between the top earners and everyone else (2011)
- International Monetary Fund says that inequality **negatively impacts** growth and social mobility between generations, and undermines trust and social cohesion and lead to conflicts (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015)

Poverty is one of the most visible impacts of growing inequality. One in seven people in Canada live in poverty. In Oxford County, **9.5%** of residents live on low income (Statistics Canada, Income Statistics Division, 2009-2013). People living with disabilities, single mothers, First Nations, the elderly, and racialized communities are particularly vulnerable to living in poverty.

Employment has little impact on whether or not one lives in poverty. In Ontario, **40%** of kids living in poverty are in a household where at least one family member has full-time, full-year employment (Shaker, 2016).

- Women earn **68.5** cents on the dollar compared to men (Shaker, 2016)
- Racialized women earn an additional **19% less** than non-racialized women (Shaker, 2016)
- **1/3** of jobs in Ontario are temporary, part-time or contract, and those positions make **up to 40% less per hour** than their full-time counterparts (Shaker, 2016)

Primary Research

Community Conversations

From March to May of 2016, the SPCO attended various emergency food programs in Oxford County. During these visits, community members voluntarily spoke to us about their experiences with hunger.

Conversations were casual and driven by the community, however, there were five general areas that discussion was prompted:

1. Hopes and dreams for accessing food in our community
2. Feelings about the current state of food accessibility in our community
3. Barriers to improving access to food in our community

4. Ideas for how to increase access to food in our community
5. Who they trust in our community to work towards increasing access to food

Community members spoke most frequently about emergency food services, particularly programs that operate under a charity-based model. The charity-based system includes community meals, food banks, distribution of damaged grocery store items and end of day perishable food, and manufacturer dumping of failed products. The focus on the charity-based system reflects that while the dialogue in Oxford County around the limitations of charity-based programs continues (SPCO, 2015), the vast majority of our food emergency programs currently follow the charity-based model.
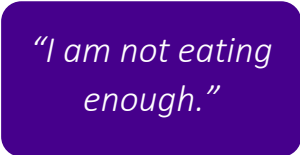
Additionally, as discussed later in this report, our community conversations revealed that the systems of oppression with which we all participate and live within, has had a profound impact on the way our community views and thinks about access to food. These systems of oppression are the same forces that have normalized and entrenched the charity-based model of food access across Canada, despite the well-documented limitations to this approach. When considering both the natural psychological response humans have when experiencing poverty, which is to focus on immediate needs (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013), and the impact that systems of oppression have on how we experience and participate in our community, it is not surprising that our community focused on emergency food programs, rather than the root causes of hunger.

Food Security

The information that the community shared with us fits within five areas that contribute to food security: **Availability**, **Accessibility**, **Adequacy**, **Acceptability**, and **Agency**. Created by Ryerson University's Centre for Studies in Food Security, and known as the "Five A's of Food Security," it is one of the most universally understood breakdown of the concept of food security.

Availability

Availability refers to whether or not there is *"sufficient food for all people at all times."* Community members identified several gaps in the availability of food within our community. There was general agreement that there needs to be **more places to access food**, specifically in the summertime, evenings, weekends, and holidays. As a result, community members talked about not having enough food to eat, "I AM NOT EATING ENOUGH." Food was reported to be the least available at the end of each month. Some community members receive help from family or friends at the end of the month in order to reduce their hunger.

> *"I am not eating enough."*

Accessibility

Accessibility is the *"physical and economic access to food for all."* Community members identified that access to food across the County varies. They spoke of areas being underserviced both in terms of access to grocery stores and markets, and emergency food programs.

However, for those currently attending emergency food programs, there was a common preference that these programs be in downtown areas, some saying that the further from downtown that the programs are located, the more difficult they are to access. Difficulty accessing programs that are further from downtown was most often identified as a transportation challenge, "GETTING PLACES IS HARD WITHOUT A CAR." Placing emergency food programs downtown co-locates them with a variety of community and

> *"Getting places is hard without a car."*

social supports that also reside in the downtown core, which can be helpful for individuals in terms of time management and transportation.

Community members clearly identified that their economic access to food is limited. Transportation dictates where and when community members can shop for food, meaning that they are not always able to access stores with the lowest prices. That, in combination with lack of storage, also means that community members are not able to benefit from sales. One community member said, "YOU HAVE TO WORK MORE FOR FOOD IF YOU DON'T HAVE MONEY TO BUY IT," emphasizing, among other things, that **it's expensive to not have money** as it limits your choice to participate in money saving opportunities. Interestingly, community members referred to the price of food being too high, but not that their social assistance rates are too low. This phenomenon will be explored later in this report in the context of the normal psychological response to poverty and the systems of oppression that influence us all.

> *"You have to work more for food if you don't have money to buy it."*

Adequacy

Adequacy means *"access to food that is nutritious and safe, and produced in environmentally sustainable ways."* Community members shared that one of the ways that they survive on low income is by reducing their purchase of healthy foods, "I NEED TO CUT DOWN ON JUNK FOOD, BUT IT'S CHEAPER." They spoke of having feelings of **lack of control** over both their food choices, and the impact their food choices have on their weight. Their feelings of lack of control were often identified as both a cause and contributor to **low self-esteem**.

> *"I need to cut down on junk food, but it's cheaper."*

Some community members spoke about being mindful of where their food is grown, some preferring local, and others Ontario grown food. Despite the desire for local food, many identified barriers such as lack of transportation, inability to process and store food, and cost as limiting their choices when it comes to purchasing food. One person spoke about going to the Woodstock Farmers' Market, and appreciating items that are marked down towards the end of the market.

Acceptability

Acceptability refers to *"access to culturally acceptable food, which is produced and obtained in ways that do not compromise people's dignity, self-respect, or human rights."* Community members with dietary restrictions talked about struggling to find food that meets their dietary needs. Additionally, while for some community members the link between access to food and churches is either pleasant or a non-issue, there are some who find this problematic. Some community members identified this link as irritating or intimidating. "CHURCHES ARE SOMETIMES OK. SOMETIMES IT'S A COMFORTABLE WELCOMING SPACE, SOMETIMES IT'S NOT. HAVE TO PUT UP AND LISTEN TO RELIGIOUS STUFF. IT INTIMIDATES A LOT OF PEOPLE." The varying preferences of individuals is to be expected and is observed across socio-economic

> *"Churches are sometimes ok. Sometimes it's a comfortable welcoming space, sometimes it's not. Have to put up and listen to religious stuff. It intimidates a lot of people."*

lines. However, it is important to acknowledge that community members who are earning middle to high incomes have much more control over selecting their preferences without experiencing **feelings of threat of survival or hunger**.

Agency

Agency is *"the policies and processes that enable the achievement of food security."* For the most part, community members did not discuss the root causes of hunger. This will be described next in the report as a possible reflection of the system of oppression that we are all socialized to live within and accept.

Many shared their dreams of how they would like to access food. There was agreement that the biggest change they would like to see is for people to have more consistent access to healthy food, "I WANT FOR PEOPLE IN MY COMMUNITY TO HAVE ENOUGH FOOD TO EAT EVERY DAY AND TO BE HEALTHY." While community members identified specific programs that they feel are helping the community to achieve this goal, they also shared that they would prefer more cohesion and collaboration amongst providers, with the ultimate goal of having a **permanent spot** where you can access food **1-2 times every day**. One community member said, "STRATFORD HAS A FOOD

> *"I want for people in my community to have enough food to eat every day and to be healthy."*

CENTRE THAT ANYBODY CAN GO TO. WE SHOULD HAVE THAT HERE," while heads within listening distance nodded in agreement.

Community members consistently expressed a desire for more meaningful community connection and belonging. There were two ways in which community members spoke of this. First, in terms of having more places in spaces in which they can eat, and stay and "hangout". Community members showed a strong preference for spaces which stay open longer, and allow them to socialize after eating. One person said, "THESE SPACES ARE REJUVENATING. WE NEED MORE OF THEM." Another said, "WE NEED MORE PLACES WHERE YOU DON'T FEEL BADLY FOR COMING IN." The two most common ways that these spaces were

> *"We need more places where you don't feel badly for coming in."*

described were **safe** and **social**. Other descriptors included welcoming, comfortable, community, and hope.

> *"I like grocery shopping."*

Secondly, many spoke of being **tired of their separation from the rest of our community**. They are questioning why their access to food is separate and different from others. "I LIKE GROCERY SHOPPING," one person said. Community members want more spaces that are not divided by income. Community members said "I LIKE PLACES WHERE ANYBODY CAN COME," and "I WOULD LOVE TO HAVE TIMES WHERE THE COMMUNITY MAKES AND EATS A MEAL TOGETHER WHERE WE'RE NOT SPLIT BY INCOME." Community members could easily identify existing spaces that are welcoming to all regardless of income, or that allowed for their participation in the typical process of food purchasing and eating.

While the theme of **meaningful community connection** was persistent and pervasive, it was also stated by many that they will always choose food above safe, welcoming, and social spaces. "I WILL

ALWAYS PICK [WHERE TO GO] BASED ON THE FOOD." Placing oneself in spaces where respect and dignity are violated can have a tremendous impact on one's self-concept and can make it more difficult for individuals to challenge the oppressive system in which they are immersed. As a community, we need to be mindful of the power that emergency food providers hold over our hungry community members, and insist that access to food must maintain respect and dignity.

> *"I will always pick [where to go] based on the food."*

System of Oppression

The systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions, solely based on the person's membership in the social identity group.

The next section of this report will explore our community conversations within the context of a system of oppression. Built into the social fabric of our society are cultural values and tools which support the oppression of some groups of people (subordinate group), by other groups of people (dominant group). Social norms and ideas of superiority become ingrained in the dominant culture's consciousness, are reinforced through social institutions (such as media, education, workplace, and government) and create and maintain an imbalance of social and economic power in society by providing the dominant group unearned privileges, and unfair barriers and disadvantages to the subordinate groups. Both the dominant and subordinate groups begin to accept their status as deserved, natural, and inevitable (Griffin, 1997, p.76).

Internalized Oppression

It is common for oppressed groups to experience internalized oppression, which is **the acceptance of the opinion and prejudices that the dominant culture holds of them**. Freire (1970) described this as a result of all institutions and human interactions reflecting the dominant group's narrative. Internalized oppression can include a negative view of self, hiding of personal information, fear of violence, and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, and gratefulness for being allowed to survive. Internalized oppression is a mechanism that can keep oppressed groups from organizing and fighting for equality (Pheterson, 1990, p. 35), and can result in members of the oppressed group engaging in violence against their oppressed peers (Freire, P., 1970).

Our community conversations with marginalized community members who live on low income, and do not have consistent access to food, revealed feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, and gratefulness for being allowed to survive that often go along with internalized oppression. Some community members said that it makes them feel badly to have to access emergency food services, while another stated, "I FEEL SELF-CONSCIOUS AND EMBARRASSED TO GO OUT IN PUBLIC." Some community members shared the challenges that they have in reaching out to help others. They identified that these **feelings of inferiority and resignation** contribute to a cycle of not knowing how to navigate the system, but being reluctant for asking for help. "IT CAN BE HARD TO GET [OTHERS] THROUGH THE DOOR. HOW DO YOU KEEP TABS ON SOMEONE WHEN THEY GIVE UP ON THEMSELVES?" People also stated that negative experiences within the system, or connection to certain agencies who have power to disrupt their life in a significant way can also keep people from reaching out. This fear is particularly true

> *"I feel self-conscious and embarrassed to go out in public."*

for parents who are unable to provide school lunches for their children that are deemed appropriate by society.

Community members also expressed gratitude to members of the dominant group for helping them. "IT HELPS WHEN OTHERS HELP ME." Many community members were very pleased with the services they accessed and could not identify changes that they thought would improve their situation. Some expressed dissatisfaction in the services they access, or the lack of total services available through anger and despair. Several expressed concerns about how services are generally provided, and indicated that they feel the dominant group misuses their power. However, even in anger, these community members simultaneously expressed a deep, sincere thankfulness, reminiscent of the **gratefulness for being allowed to survive** that is often a part of internalized oppression.

> *"It helps when others help me."*

> *"The problem is that people try to take advantage of things and it ruins it for everyone."*

Throughout our community conversations, we also observed members of the oppressed group engaging in violence against their oppressed peers, otherwise known as **horizontal violence**. Peers were often identified as the cause of continuing hunger, or lack of available resources. "THE PROBLEM IS THAT PEOPLE TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THINGS AND IT RUINS IT FOR EVERYONE." Another community member said, "PEOPLE WHO SPONSOR FOOD DON'T DONATE AS MUCH BECAUSE PEOPLE [WHO ARE RECEIVING THE DONATIONS] COMPLAIN." After one community member commented that, "PEOPLE WILL TAKE FOOD AND THEN THROW IT OUT" and another admitted to throwing out food that did not taste good, the group expressed general consensus that this is one of the reasons that there is a lack of services.

There was no discussion or comments about why there is a general perception that people living in poverty should be grateful to eat anything that is presented to them, regardless of how it tastes, or whether it fits into an individual's food preferences, in any of our community conversations. Additionally, there was little discussion of other factors that may contribute to lack of services, such as underfunding or lack of progressive policies to address the root causes of hunger.

When considering the barriers to accessing food while living on low income, community members often identified themselves and their peers as the primary problem. The two most common responses included that people "NEED TO KNOW BETTER WAYS TO MAKE DO WITH LESS," and that people need to do a better job of knowing what is available to them and how to access the services. These identified barriers are very individualized and focus on changing the people living in poverty, rather than changing the system that creates the poverty, and keeps people and families entrenched in it. This individualized approach takes the focus away from the structural causes of hunger: **income inequality**, **low social assistance rates**, **housing costs**, and **precarious employment**.

> *"Need to know better ways to make do with less."*

Internalized Dominance

The dominant group also has a comparable experience to internalized oppression, called internalized dominance, which is **the adoption and acceptance of prejudices against others**. Internalized dominance often includes feelings of superiority, normalcy, self-righteousness, guilt, fear, projection, denial of reality, and distancing oneself from their own feelings and behaviour. The impact of this experience is that it can erode the dominant group's empathy, trust, love, and openness to others (Pheterson, 1990, p. 35). Internalized dominance was described by community members living in poverty as our community "TURN[ING] A BLIND EYE" to the suffering of others. They believe that this reduces the community's involvement in working towards change, limits the money put into services, and reduces the volunteer pools.

> *"Everybody has access to fresh fruits, veggies, and meat. Like at a food bank or something."*

Internalized dominance is displayed by the normalcy and acceptance of our reliance on food banks, and the reluctance to work towards their elimination or support initiatives that move beyond the charity model, including policy changes that address the root causes of hunger. One community member spoke very succinctly of the denial of reality, and the acceptance of the status quo that those in the dominant culture can experience, saying, "EVERYBODY HAS ACCESS TO FRESH FRUITS, VEGGIES, AND MEAT. LIKE AT A FOOD BANK OR SOMETHING." The stark reality is that many do not have access to enough food, including fresh fruits, vegetables, or meat to sustain a healthy diet. Furthermore, the belief that accessing these items through a food bank is a normal experience is telling of the acceptance we have for the fact that there are people in our community who cannot afford food. The question we need to be asking ourselves is **why have we accepted that poverty and hunger is a normal part of the human experience and something that is unchangeable?**

Sociocultural Lens

It can be easy to interpret both the reaction of the oppressed group to oppression, and the dominant culture's prejudices as psychological shortcomings. However, we are constantly bombarded with oppressive messages from a variety of sources including jokes, books, television, radio, images, and common phrases. Instead of taking the individual view of psychological shortcomings, Tappan (2006) argued that they should be viewed as sociocultural phenomena.

Taking a sociocultural lens encourages looking at interventions that focus on the systemic, structural, and institutionalized forces that create and reproduce oppression. This is in stark contrast to the individual level interventions we are often exposed to and that are perpetuated through a system of oppression (Tappan, M., 2006, p. 2117). During our community conversations, despite the acknowledgement of the complexity of poverty, it was challenging for community members to think beyond the individual-level solutions that are the current norm. This also presented as identifying changes within agencies that people believed would decrease the number of hungry people in our community. These solutions often propagate the oppression and ignore the root causes of hunger.

Additionally, as briefly mentioned earlier in this report, individuals living in poverty often focus on the present, and struggle to think long-term. While this is a normal psychological response to what some refer to as scarcity (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013), our system is also currently designed to keep community members who are living in poverty so focused on meeting their most immediate needs (e.g.

a place to sleep, food to fill a hungry belly), and jumping through agency hoops, that we tax their cognitive resources so heavily that they do not have the chance to think beyond the immediate moment. This cognitive bandwidth is something all humans have, and is not a personal deficit. Any person, in the same situation, would have the same challenges with focusing on long-term solutions. This significantly contributes to the difficulty in exploring solutions that address the root causes of hunger.

The solutions that our community focused on were ways in which to increase the effectiveness of our existing band aid solutions to hunger. They include:

- Donations of leftover food
- Communication and promotion of services (between agencies and agency-to-community)
- Education on how to get by with less
- Changes in non-profits and emergency food providers that increase access to emergency food
  - Example, non-profits accepting more donations for tax receipts
- Changes in the price of food
- Increased collaboration

While these solutions may be useful for some who are trying to survive within the current system, they certainly should not be considered the solutions to hunger in our community. There is nothing inherently wrong in practicing good communication, learning how to budget, or practicing effective collaboration. However, we should be careful that we do not attribute the problem of hunger to poor communication, poor money management skills, and ineffective collaboration. The most effective communication, best budgeting, and most effective collaboration cannot eliminate hunger, simply because it is not the cause of hunger. As described earlier in this report the causes of hunger in our community are: **income inequality**, **low social assistance rates**, **housing costs**, and **precarious employment**.

Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group

From March to June of 2016, the SPCO interviewed individuals within Oxford County to explore the ways in which our community can improve access to food for individuals living on low income. While we specifically explored the potential for a community food centre, we kept our options broad to include a variety of ideas. Models of collaboration were suggested and defined by key informants, and were not limited by the SPCO.

Using a semi-structured interview, key informants were asked six questions:

1. Assets: How is your organization/are you currently involved in contributing to food security in Oxford County?
2. Needs: What do you see as missing in the area of food security services in Oxford County?
3. Network Analysis/Existing Relationships
   a. Who are your closest organizational allies or most important resources in the area of food security? Who do you work closely with?
   b. Who do you overlap with?
4. Working Together: How do you see our two groups working together?
5. Opportunities: What opportunities do you see in the area of food security in Oxford County?

6. Advice:
   a. Do you have any advice to leave us with?
   b. Are there any potential obstacles that you see us crossing down the road?
   c. Do you have any ideas for how we can make this a great success?

Face-to-face or phone interviews were conducted with representatives from the following organizations:

- Food Secure Oxford
- Oxford County Public Health & Emergency Services (2)
- South Central Ontario Region (SCOR) (3)
- South Gate Centre
- Stronger Together Ingersoll Community Harvest (STICH)
- UNIFOR Local 2163
- Woodstock & Area Community Health Centre
- Woodstock & District Developmental Services

An additional six organizations/individuals were invited but not able to participate as a key informant.

Also included in this section of the report is information gathered from a Lunch and Dialogue held at South Gate Centre on February 26, 2016. Hosted by the Food Security Committee of the SPCO, 17 community members and agency representatives gathered to discuss community gaps and opportunities related to food access within our community.

Community Assets

Key informants were able to identify many strengths in Oxford County that improve access to healthy food. People identified assets that fell within three broad categories: the general climate of our community, immediate short-term relief, and capacity building.

When speaking broadly about the **climate in our community**, people identified that we live in a generous community where individuals, families, organizations, businesses, and farmers give graciously. People also spoke about the benefits of living in an agricultural area, where local food is plentiful.

The Oxford County Food Charter, created by Food Secure Oxford, a network of community organizations and individuals, was also identified as a strength, providing a unifying vision for the County. The Food Charter is a statement of values and principles to guide our community's food policy. The vision in Oxford County's Food Charter states:

Oxford will be a food secure community where all residents have sufficient access to healthy food to meet their dietary needs

Oxford's Food Charter Commitments are:

1. **TO SUPPORT, PARTICIPATE IN, AND ADVOCATE FOR POLICIES AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES THAT INCREASE FOOD SECURITY AND SUPPORT A SOCIALLY JUST AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM.**
2. **TO UNDERSTAND THE MUNICIPAL, PROVINCIAL, FEDERAL, AND GLOBAL BACKGROUNDS CONTRIBUTING TO FOOD INSECURITY AND TO CREATE MOVEMENT TOWARDS A FAIR AND DEMOCRATIC FOOD SYSTEM.**

Key informants also identified that the availability of **immediate, short-term relief**, while not perfect, was a strength. The vast majority of those interviewed focused on programs that use a dignity-based model. This focus shows the shift in the way the service providers in our community are thinking about emergency food, from traditionally charity-based models, such as food banks, to models that do not erode the self-esteem and dignity of the recipient. Identified programs included, but were not limited to: low cost meals available both through South Gate Centre and Operation Sharing's Bullwinkles Eatery, low cost freezer meals available through South Gate Centre, the Student Nutrition Program provided by Oxford County Public Health & Emergency Services, which is provided universally, regardless of need, and community kitchen models such as Stronger Together Ingersoll Community Harvest (STICH), and the River of Life evening meal.

Dignity-based programs that build **individual and community capacity** were also identified as a key strength. These included but were not limited to cooking classes and mentoring (e.g. Woodstock and Area Community Health Centre), access to one-on-one support through various professionals (e.g. dietician or an outreach worker), community kitchens and meals where food preparation and clean-up is shared amongst participants (e.g. River of Life) and programs that increase access to healthy foods such as the Oxford Garden Fresh Box.

Community Needs

Analysis of the needs discussed by key informants resulted in the identification of four themes: gaps in access to immediate, short-term relief, challenges in moving the community from charity-based responses to dignity-based responses to hunger, gaps in addressing the root causes of hunger, and barriers to moving forward.

> *"It is ridiculous that we're one of the best growing food places on the globe and people have no food to eat."*

There was general consensus among key informants that the fact that there are hungry people in our community is incredibly troubling. One individual said, "It is ridiculous that we're one of the best growing food places on the globe and people have no food to eat." Another very simply stated that there is "a lack of access to fresh and healthy food for those with an economic need." The three largest gaps in access to **immediate, short-term relief** was consistently identified by key informants as dinner or evening access, weekends, and summer months. Young people during the summer months was a particular concern. One individual said, "Kids in the summer. What happens to them? The [school] nutrition programs are over and all of a sudden the [community] supports drop off as well. This scares me. Kids need food." Another identified that there is variability across day camps and summer programs as to whether or not food is provided.

While it is evident that our community is undergoing a **shift from charity-based models to dignity-based models**, key informants described the transition as uneven and a work in progress. Individuals expressed that our community still needs to work towards developing a common understanding of the benefits of dignity-based approaches through more education and dialogue. The hope is that as the mindset of the community shifts, our programs and services will also continue to shift. A specific need identified in this theme, identified both in our community conversations and our key informant interviews, is the lack of purchasing power that people in poverty hold. Some groups expressed that collaborating with the community to address this gap was in their future plans, as it empowers individuals to purchase food based on their own needs and preferences.

The lack of solutions that address the **root causes of hunger** was also identified as a community gap. "Nothing will change until people make more money. We can teach people and show them good food sources, and expose them to good food, but do they really take this and move forward? Do they have an oven? Do they have a way to store the food? Do they have transportation to get to the store to buy things?" People living on low income simply do not have enough money to afford the cost of both rent and food, let alone other expenses like transportation. It has nothing to do with budgeting or money management. Individuals expressed the need for our community to better understand this reality.

> *"Nothing will change until people make more money…."*

There was also a lot of discussion around the **barriers** that are preventing our community from moving forward on this issue: lack of funding and resources, lack of trust, elimination and prevention of duplication, needing a shift towards community ownership, and a lack of coordination. Some individuals expressed that traditional funding models are no longer effective, and can create competition and barriers between organizations. "The biggest gap is the need to be the one [organization] being the lead so that you can get the funding." Others spoke of negative experiences in collaborative projects where funding dollars are not distributed in accordance to the amount of work each agency contributes. Funding challenges present in many ways in organizations working to reduce hunger, including but not limited to: inability to afford the appropriate tools for storage, inability to afford existing services in our community that would enhance their programs (for example, agencies not able to access a food distributer and needing to go directly to producers), and not enough human resources (including both volunteers and paid staff) to increase services. "We are currently finding it difficult to find more resources." Logistics, coordination, wrap around services, and meaningful collaboration was described as being challenging in the current non-profit climate of underfunding. While organizations have many innovative ideas that might increase access to food, they struggle to locate the resources that they need to explore these ideas in a meaningful way. Some spoke of funding competition, whether real or perceived, as contributing to eroding trust between organizations in our community.

> *"The biggest gap is the need to be the one [organization] being the lead so that you can get the funding."*

Key informants spoke about a **lack of trust** between organizations that seriously impedes the potential for meaningful collaboration. This lack of trust was often linked to real or perceived funding competition, but others acknowledged that funding was not always the cause, "We are not in competition with other groups for local funding, yet trust is not there." In terms of working towards a more centralized, collaborative model for food access, individuals expressed that this lack of trust between agencies would be a large barrier, "Getting the clients to buy in is not the worry… it is the agencies." Several suggested that a person dedicated to assisting the process of building trust between agencies in our community would be beneficial.

> "We are not in competition with other groups for local funding, yet trust is not there."

> "We are all in the business of helping people eat. We may overlap, but basically we're filling a void that is not being addressed in the community."

There was a large focus in our interviews on **eliminating and preventing duplication**. While most expressed that they believe there is duplication within our community, when asked what organizations, services, or programs they overlap with, not a single key informant identified a true overlap. Of the couple of individuals who identified overlaps, they were identifying similar but unique programs. For example, low cost meals that are available in different locations, to different demographic groups. One individual said, "We are all in the business of helping people eat. We may overlap, but basically we're filling a void that is not being addressed in the community." In other words, if people are still hungry, more opportunities to access food are needed and should not be considered as negative duplication.

There may be several reasons why duplication was so prominent in our discussions, although, without further investigation, we cannot know for certain. It may be that individuals were speaking about duplication of the behind the scenes work, for example, in finding low-cost food for their programs, or the management of volunteers. It may be based in fear of future duplication, or fear of moving forward with a new program without a well-defined collaboration. This was suggested by one individual who said, "We need to continually bring people together so that we are not duplicating service." It may also be an expression of frustration, feeling as though there are walls between their programs and others in the community who they want to partner with. "Some people are doing the same things but are not communicating." Or, it may be a reflection of the common opinion that the non-profit sector is better served by fewer non-profits. As stated in Holmgren's 2014 essay, while **there is no real evidence that duplication is a significant problem in the non-profit sector**, or any more of an issue than in the private sector, there is a general societal belief that having dozens of different potato chip flavours to choose from is a good thing, but having numerous places to feed the hungry is unwarranted. Holmgren speculates that this imbalance may be related to the value we place on spending a consumer dollar versus a charitable dollar.

> "Some people are doing the same things but are not communicating."

As our community moves towards a more unified response to hunger, we must be mindful of how we frame our motivations. In the private sector, cost cutting and mergers are used as a pathway to increase profits and shareholder value. Neither of these are goals that non-profits seek. Furthermore, mergers do not necessarily lead to improved services or cost savings for the consumer. It is evident from our key informants that **improved services**, along with **improved wellbeing outcomes** for our community, are two of the main motivators local non-profits describe for wanting a more unified response to hunger. In some cases, collaboration is driven by persistent underfunding. Collaboration will not likely solve the underfunding concern, especially if the societal mindset that a successful non-profit is one who can do the most with the least persists. There is a genuine desire locally to work together to create a unified plan, and to ensure that our programs are working together to best meet the needs of the community. We should continue to frame our conversations around that goal, rather than eliminating duplication, as it appears to be more reflective of our community's motivations, and does not perpetuate the belief that non-profits should aim to have the lowest overhead as possible.

Some individuals feel as though a barrier to meaningful collaboration is that there is too much focus on agencies, and not enough focus on the community. In other words, they feel that the sense of ownership of increasing access to food in our community is currently being held by agencies, but they desire a shift towards community ownership. **Community ownership** can be extended to the concept of empowerment. Rappaport's (1984) definition states that *"Empowerment is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives."* The process increases one's assets and capacities in order to gain access, partners, networks, and/or a voice, in order to gain control. It encompasses community ownership and action that aims at social and political change (WHO, 2016). In this process, the agency role would be to catalyse, facilitate, or accompany the community in acquiring the power needed to increase control over their lives. However, in order to gain power, **others have to be willing to share their existing power** (Baum, 2008). This power transition is the shift that individuals spoke about as being necessary for improving access to food in our community. Many feel as though no meaningful improvements can be made unless they are owned and driven by the community.

Gutierrez (1990) described four necessary changes that must occur for a person to be fully empowered: **increased self-efficacy** (the power to produce and control the events of one's life), **developing group consciousness** ("a sense of shared fate [that] allows them to focus their energies on the causes of their problems"), **reducing self-blame in the face of problems**, and the **ability to assume personal responsibility for change** (an understanding that their decisions may result in future change). These changes can occur simultaneously, and may work to strengthen each other.

The desire for community ownership and empowerment by key informants is reinforced by our community conversations which demonstrated a lack of empowerment as a result of the system of oppression. This is an area that we will need to focus on in order for our community to be as successful as possible in addressing hunger.

Finally, **lack of coordination** was described by key informants as a major barrier to change.

"We need someone to take the role of coordinating other agencies so that we can all work together"

"Not one organization can have the answer"

"We want to work together but we need leadership to break things down"

"We are missing a coordinating body"

"There are pieces everywhere but no central hub to make things easier for the community"

"Someone needs to take the leadership role"

People spoke about how it is too expensive to try and do this work on their own, but that the logistics of facilitating collaboration is a challenge. It is often not included within any agency job roles, and becomes a side duty. Facilitating collaboration from the corner of a desk often does not provide enough support for initiatives to be successful. This challenge was discussed as existing despite the high numbers of committed and enthusiastic people who are engaged in this issue in our community. Coordination was described as a necessary component in order for unified work in this area to be successful in increasing access to food in a dignified way. Some felt that with joint effort, big pocket funding could be found that would support collaboration between agencies. However, in order for an individual or agency to be successful in coordinating a collaborative effort between each agencies, each partner must be willing to take the time to build trusting relationships, and contribute time and energy to the project. Successful collaborative efforts cannot rest solely on a single coordinating body.

Opportunities

Three main opportunities were discussed by our key informants: building a common community vision, utilizing existing resources within the non-profit sector to improve programs, and building multi-sector partnerships and collaboration.

While it was acknowledged that some work has been done to **build a common community vision**, many felt as though not all of the key players have been engaged in the process, and that our community vision is still a work in progress. This could be related to the barriers identified in our interviews, particularly lack of trust between agencies, and lack of coordination of these efforts. There was some discussion about the role of the Oxford Food Charter in fostering a common vision, and whether or not it needs to be reviewed and updated. Individuals also wondered if there are any next steps that could be taken to use the Food Charter to build a common community vision beyond those who participated in the process, including community members, agencies, agricultural sector, private sector, and municipal government.

Many individuals spoke about how their programs could benefit from **using existing resources within the non-profit sector to improve programs**. Most often, individuals talked about the ways in which their organizations would like to partner more actively with other non-profits in the community. Many of our key informants were able to identify resources and strengths within their own agencies that they would be open to trading for the resources that other agencies have to offer. For example, trading volunteers or person-power for support with logistics and coordination.

Individuals spoke about the free community kitchen space at the Woodstock and Area Community Health Centre (WACHC) and ways our community could better utilize this space. Presently, one area that this kitchen is limited in is that they are not able to store and freeze food with the current public health approvals. Another kitchen that may have potential for community partnerships is South Gate Centre. There were many ideas for how these spaces could be used, all of which were rooted in allowing access to the kitchens by outside partners. For example, volunteers with the Student Nutrition Program could use the kitchens for baking in large quantities, to then distribute out to the schools.

There was discussion of how the WACHC could be an access point for a Community Food Centre. The building is already accessed by the community in many ways, including the community kitchen. With an addition in the future plans the building could incorporate much of what the community desires and needs in a collaborative format – spaces for growing food, preparing and enjoying meals together, space for social visiting, and learning opportunities that support community advocacy.

Beyond the non-profit sector, individuals also believe that **fostering multi-sector partnerships and collaboration** is essential. Key areas that individuals focused on included: partnerships that increase access to local food, the faith-based community, and the education sector.

It was clearly identified that we need to improve partnership between the non-profit sector and local producers. Building relationships and partnerships requires staff and time. Linking into programs such as Buy Local Oxford, Tourism Oxford's Oxford Fresh program, and the SCOR FoodHub, who focus on building relationships between community and producers, is a good way to utilize existing resources and improve services to our community.

Buy Local Oxford is a partnership that was established to support local farmers and the agricultural community by promoting farm-gate markets in Oxford County. They support the connection of community to farmer, and support the local economy through this link.

Oxford Fresh is a culinary program operated by Tourism Oxford that promotes Oxford County as a destination for local culinary experiences. They support the Oxford County Cheese Trail, Agri-tourism attractions, breweries, farm-gate stores, and restaurants featuring local food.

The SCOR FoodHub is "an online marketplace of locally grown and produced food for the institutional and food service buyer" (SCOR, 2016). As pointed out by key informants, there are many benefits to moving forward with developing a relationship between the non-profit sector and the SCOR FoodHub: distribution, software, and paid staff for logistics are already provided by the FoodHub, and the County of Oxford partly funds this project. Potential models for partnering with the SCOR FoodHub include sourcing food inventory, developing a "hub within a hub" to support the non-profit sector by increasing purchasing power, and building centralized community spaces that provide consistent dignified access

to nutritious, local food as a front end to the FoodHub. SCOR may also be able to access a different pocket of funding than is available to non-profits.

There are community groups who have either considered partnering with the SCOR FoodHub or who have utilized the FoodHub for their programs. Positive feedback about these partnerships include that the prices are good, where some report that even buying in bulk comes nowhere near the prices they can get from SCOR. However, non-government funded non-profits report that the prices from the SCOR FoodHub are still out of reach for their programs. This is a barrier that the SCOR FoodHub is aware of, and is interested in problem-solving. Additionally, due to the nature of all Food Hubs, supply can be unpredictable in terms of what products are available, which may pose a problem for certain kinds of programs. One of the ways that the SCOR FoodHub mitigates this issue, is by being a multi-County operation.

The faith-based community was also identified as a group where intentional relationships should be fostered. Many identified that the faith-based community has a desire to be more involved in improving the quality of life of Oxford County residents, but are unsure how they can best assist within our community, and need support in organizing and coordinating their efforts. It was suggested that the faith-based community could be involved in ways beyond the traditional soup kitchen. For example, one individual suggested that churches might be interested in developing and maintaining community gardens on their lots that both the community and non-profits could access. A formal partnership that explores the needs and capacities of both the non-profit sector and the faith-based community would assist in identifying the key role that the faith-based community could play.

Individuals also identified the education sector as a potential partner. Fanshawe College lists four full-time culinary programs on its website: Artisanal Culinary Arts, Culinary Management, Culinary Management – Apprentice, and Culinary Skills – Chef Training. In addition, located approximately 38km from Woodstock is the Stratford Chefs School. Ideas that were shared included: developing partnerships with existing immediate short-term relief programs to increase the number of meals available to the community, supporting community kitchen hours to increase availability to the community, and designing kids cooking classes that can be offered through summer programs that allow each child to bring home a family meal.

There is also an opportunity to develop stronger relationships with environmental groups in our community. For example, the Woodstock Environmental Advisory Committee is involved in the local seed library, hosted at the Woodstock Public Library. They also have interest in community gardens and edible planting, and exploring how these initiatives could be better linked to non-profit programs that increase access to food.

A variety of other programs were suggested by key informants and include:

- Weekend backpack program where students take home food for the weekend (based on Elgin County)
- Edible planting in community spaces (for example, fruit trees planted in parks)
- Community meal sponsorship opportunities (donate money and time to sponsor a community meal through an existing emergency food provider)
- Programs that create buying power for people living in poverty
- Wholesale cooking group

- Extreme couponing group
- Community Food Centre

Community Food Centres

"The Community Food Centre (CFC) model, based on work started at The Stop Community Food Centre, is a mix of programming, organizational culture, principles and values, and infrastructure." While all centres are tailored to local needs, they are all designed to be "thriving, welcoming spaces where food builds health, skills, and community" (Community Food Centres Canada, 2013).

All CFCs offer programming in three core areas: food access programs, food skills programs, and education and engagement programs. Additionally, all CFCs follow eight key principles and values: the power of food, multidimensional approach, integrated thinking, organizational capacity, relevance, respect, empowerment, and impact. For simplicity, we can think of the program areas as the "what" and the principles and the values as the "how" the programs are administered.

When comparing the needs and barriers identified in our community conversations and key informant interviews to the program areas and principles and values of CFCs, an interesting alignment presents. Community conversations aligned very closely to the "what." Individuals who currently lack consistent access to food are experts in their own needs. They know, better than anyone, what is working and what is not, and what is most likely to be effective. The analysis of key informant interviews touched on the "what," but aligned beautifully to the "how" of CFCs. Again, this makes sense. The vast majority of our key informants are experts in service delivery. The next section of this report will demonstrate the alignment of the CFC approach to the needs identified by our community.

Community Food Centre Program Areas: The "What"

Earlier in this report we analyzed community conversations using Ryerson University's Centre for Studies in Food Security's Five A's of Food Security framework. The Five A's, availability, accessibility, adequacy, acceptability, and agency also align with the three core programming areas offered at CFCs (Community Food Centres Canada, 2013).

Food access programs "provide emergency access to healthy food to those in need in a respectful and dignified manner." These programs increase the *availability* and *accessibility* of food. Our community conversations and key informant interviews suggest that Oxford County is currently in a transition stage for the way our emergency food programs are provided.

Food skills programs "develop healthy food behaviours and skills, primarily in the areas of gardening and cooking." These programs work towards behaviour change around healthy food, and ensure that food is *adequate* and *acceptable* for all. Our community identified strengths in this area, while also indicating that there is an opportunity to expand access to these types of programs.

Education and engagement programs "work to give individuals and communities voice and agency on food and hunger issues." These programs increase knowledge of poverty and food systems issues and create new opportunities for effective action on systemic issues, in other words, they address *agency*, or the policies and processes that enable the achievement of food security. The results of our community conversations suggest that this is an area that our community needs to focus on in order to make long-term improvement in our community.

The three core programming areas offered at all CFCs together reduce social isolation and increase connections to various supports. Not only did our community conversations reveal the consistent theme of seeking more meaningful connection, this desire has been shared by community members for several years and has resulted in a collective community movement towards increasing sense of belonging in Oxford County (Smile and Say Hello Oxford County, 2014; Social Planning Council Oxford, 2014; United Way Oxford, 2014).

Community Food Centre Principles and Values: The "How"

The eight key principles and values that all CFCs follow include the power of food, multidimensional approach, integrated thinking, organizational capacity, relevance, respect, empowerment, and impact (Community Food Centres Canada, 2013). This section of the report will describe each of these in more detail, and show their alignment to the information shared by key informants. Generally, while it is evident that these values and principles are already incorporated in many of the service agencies and programs offered in Oxford County, there is a belief that we have the opportunity to strengthen these approaches in order to improve outcomes for community members.

The power of food recognizes that "good food has the power to build health and community." As a result, offering delicious, healthy, pleasurable food is a priority. Conversations with key informants indicated that in order to improve services and outcomes for our community members, healthy and delicious food had to be used in combination with community building efforts. This was also discussed during our community conversations, where it was stressed that spaces to connect with others was an important component to accessing food.

A **multidimensional approach** is used to create individual and community change. By offering a diverse set of programs in one building, multiple points of entry are created, and synergy, collaboration, and cross-pollination is encouraged. This specifically addresses concerns raised by key informants about the need for trust between potential partners, for more intentional, meaningful cross-sector collaboration, as well as a central hub or designated coordinating body.

Integrated thinking means "combining a united national voice with local grassroots action" in order to influence policies that create barriers for community members. CFCs focus specifically on income security, health issues, and sustainable agriculture. Key informants identified that a gap in our community is in addressing the root causes of hunger, and expressed a desire in working towards increasing these efforts.

Each CFC values **organizational capacity**, encompassing financial stability, sufficient staffing and resources, and an organizational culture that supports work satisfaction and work-life balance. Key informants identified that lack of capacity is currently a barrier to better addressing hunger in Oxford County. A solution that values organizational capacity would address this challenge.

Relevance means that people are met where they're at. Immediate needs are addressed first "as a precondition for being able to address more complex food-related needs." Practical supports are provided to help people be active in their community. Key informants identified that while immediate access to food is available during certain times of certain days, it is not consistent enough. People need these needs, as well as other urgent needs, met first before they can tackle more complex needs.

Respect grounds the work of all CFCs. A welcoming environment and activities and policies that respect diversity and the "inherent value, assets and potential to contribute of all people." A desire to continue the shift in our community towards dignity-based food programs was expressed by key informants.

Empowerment means that CFCs "believe in people's abilities to take care of their own needs" and support community leaders. Similarly, each CFC is provided the supports they need in order to be locally relevant and to have a voice in the national movement. Key informants identified the need for our community to become empowered and to shift the ownership of food programs from agencies to our community.

Efficient programs are developed and evaluated to ensure community **impact**. There is a genuine desire in our community to improve services and outcomes for residents living in poverty. Key informants believe that appropriate coordination, multi-sector collaboration, empowerment, and addressing both immediate needs and root causes of hunger can result in the desired impact of improved services and outcomes.

Community Food Centre-Community Health Centre Partnerships

Recently, there have been two Community Food Centre's (CFC) that have opened in partnership with Community Health Centres (CHC). In Winnipeg, the NorWest Co-Op Community Health Centre, who already offered food-related programming, identified food access as a key challenge for area residents. Launched in March 2015, the NorWest Co-Op Community Food Centre met this need. During a 2016 webinar, it was shared that 75% of the participants in the Food Centre reported an improvement in their mental health, and 92% felt that they belonged to a community while at the Centre.

The second CFC-CHC partnership comes out of Calgary, partnering with The Alex Community Health Centre. The partnership expands the Centre's existing programs by increasing access to healthy food, enhancing skills, building better physical and mental health, and empowering the community.

Our community has expressed interest in exploring a potential partnership between a Community Food Centre and the Woodstock and Area Community Health Centre. This approach also aligns closely with the needs and strengths identified during our community conversations and key informant interviews.

Conclusion

This study was initiated by the Social Planning Council Oxford in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of how Oxford County's food system is supporting low income community members in accessing adequate, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary and cultural needs, and their food preferences.

Community members who currently access emergency food providers talked about wanting more food, more often, in welcoming spaces that feel safe and combine food with social visits. Service agencies

want to better address the root causes of hunger and offer more dignity-based programs (as opposed to charity-based programs) in order to better meet the needs of our community.

A major need that was identified during this study is to develop more community empowerment and ownership in order to successfully address hunger. One of the solutions suggested by our community, a Community Food Centre, addresses this need in its core programming, in addition to creating a community space where food builds health, skills, and community. Our community holds all of the information it needs in order to take the next steps towards justice; beyond filling bellies and towards empowerment and belonging.

Recommendations

1. Continue to fill the gaps for immediate hunger needs (specifically evenings, weekends, and summer months), being mindful about shifting towards dignity-based models.
2. Reframe the discussion of agency collaboration from duplication prevention to focus on the intended outcomes of improved services and community wellbeing. We have been unable to uncover evidence for true duplication that does not reflect our community's collective interest in using civic duty to meet existing hunger needs.
3. Increase the sense of empowerment experienced by community members in order to facilitate the shift to from agency owned to community owned solutions to hunger.
   a. Ensure that all immediate needs are met, such as access to social services and benefits.
   b. Provide opportunities that increase self-sufficiency and self-worth through changing attitudes, beliefs, and values.
   c. Provide opportunities for validation through collective experience. Sharing common experiences can put experiences into perspective, alleviate loneliness and isolation, and motivate a group to pursue changes beyond the individual level.
   d. Provide opportunities to increase knowledge and strengthen critical thinking skills in order to enable individuals to analyse their situation independently and critically, ultimately reducing self-blame and feelings of helplessness. Opportunities might include developing an understanding of oppression, the ability to identify oppressive cultural tools and myths, and the ability to replace old myths with new liberating narratives.
   e. Encourage and support social and political actions to solve challenges, including those that advocate for policies that address the root causes of hunger (e.g. minimum wage, social assistance rates, living wage, fair employment practices, etc.).
4. Continue to build a common community understanding of poverty and hunger, and vision for dignity-based responses to these issues.
5. Establish a working group to explore the possibility of bringing a Community Food Centre to Oxford County, potentially via partnership with the Woodstock and Area Community Health Centre.

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