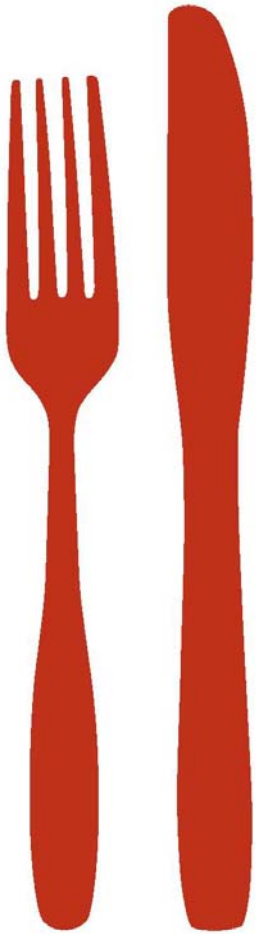




WHO'S HUNGRY?

2008 YOUTH GUIDE TO HUNGER IN THE GTA



**The fight
against
hunger
starts here.**

The first step to fighting hunger is understanding it.



Hunger can be a tough problem to get your head around. No one likes to think about people who have to skip meals because they cannot afford to buy food. Most of us know that hunger affects people in third world countries where resources are limited. Others automatically think of people they have seen who are homeless. But hunger doesn't just affect people who live in far off places or people who are homeless, it affects people who live right here in our community. To make our community the best place it can be we all have to make an effort to understand the problem so we can try to solve it together.

That's where this book comes in. *Who's Hungry? 2008 Youth Guide to Hunger in the GTA* provides information and statistics to answer the question: Who **IS** hungry? The information you will read about in this guide relates to people who use food banks in our city and will help you to understand the answer to that important question. The guide is jam packed with information, definitions and stories relating to hunger and poverty.

As you read through it, you'll begin to understand that hunger is a direct result of poverty and you will see that we have a serious problem in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The fact is more and more people are struggling to fill their fridges and cupboards with the nutritious food they need to lead happy and healthy lives. When you understand who is hungry and why, you can start thinking about what **you** can do to fight hunger.

You will see, terms bolded throughout this document, like **food bank** or **poverty** or **basic needs**. Be sure to check out the Glossary of Terms at the back for useful definitions of these and other new terms. Also, be sure to talk with an adult you trust, like a parent or teacher, if you have any questions. Read on to learn more!

HUNGER AT A GLANCE

2008

GTA FOOD BANK USE

People served by a neighbourhood food bank	952,883
People visiting a food bank every per month	79,407
Food bank clients who have a disability or serious illness	47%
Food bank clients who are immigrants, born outside Canada	46%
Food bank clients who are single parents	19%
Households using food banks who have at least 1 person working and can be characterized as "working poor"	28%
Food bank clients experiencing persistent poverty	29%
Food bank clients who are children	34%
Food bank clients who use a food banks for 1 year or less	57%
The percentage of income that food bank clients spend on rent	77%
The percentage that food bank use has increased since 1995	90%

Many people in the GTA are affected by hunger. It is very difficult to understand why so many adults and children go hungry in a city like Toronto and a country like Canada. In order to gain a better understanding, Daily Bread Food Bank conducts research because we believe the best way to solve a problem like hunger in our city is to get to the bottom of who experiences it and why.

One of our biggest research projects involves interviewing almost 2,000 people who use food banks – we call them clients. We ask them all kinds of questions about their living situation and what kind of income they earn. Once we have interviewed them, it becomes easier to see common trends or similarities in their experiences, aside from visiting food banks.

In our most recent research we divided food bank clients into five sub-populations, or groups, that need extra support to reduce or end their food bank use. The sub-populations are: **People with Disabilities, Immigrants, Single Parents, Working Poor and People Experiencing Persistent Poverty.** These groups represent people within our community. Some of the people we interviewed fit into more than one category (for example, a person with a disability may also be a single parent). Over the years we have noted that the numbers in some of the categories have risen, which means that more people in these groups are experiencing poverty. When you read on, you will see a key statistic about each of these groups and a description of who they are, along with an explanation of why they might need to rely on food banks.

FOOD BANK USE BY REGION



Overall, our research shows that food bank use in the GTA has increased by 90% since 1995. Since 2007, there has been a 5.2% increase. An extremely large number of people in the GTA experience hunger because they cannot afford food. This past year, 952,883 people across the GTA were served by a neighbourhood food bank. That's almost enough people to fill the Rogers Centre 19 times!

47%

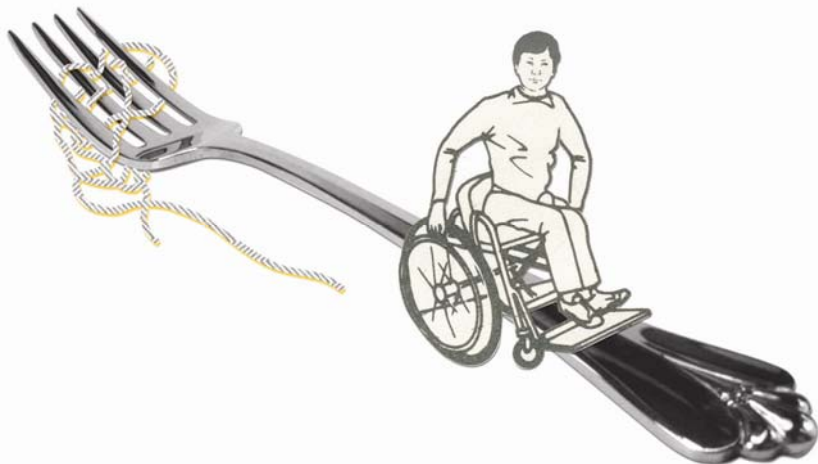
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

47% of people who use food banks have a disability or serious illness.

Having a disability or illness can affect multiple areas of a person's life. Sometimes, a disability or illness can be a trigger, or the cause, of **poverty**. There are times when people with disabilities or illnesses have trouble finding or keeping a job because health or emotional challenges prevent them from working. They may also not have access to financial support from family or friends, and may have difficulty making ends meet. If this becomes the case, people with disabilities or illnesses can turn to a government program called **Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)** to receive financial support. People who are eligible for ODSP will receive a cheque every month for their shelter and **basic needs**.

Unfortunately, the money people receive through ODSP is not usually enough to live on and cover all basic needs, so, many individuals on ODSP are forced to make critical decisions on what to spend their money on and what they will have to go without. When people's **income** can't cover all their basic needs, they will often turn to **food banks** for support.

It is important to know that not all people are born with their disability or illness; some disabilities may be the result of an accident or the onset of an illness later in life. A disability or illness can suddenly prevent a person from working or, if a disability or illness has been a lifelong diagnosis, it can prevent a person from entering the workforce once he or she is an adult. Unfortunately for some, disabilities can lead to experiencing poverty over a longer period of time.



JAMAL'S STORY

I used to have a full time job in a warehouse, where I worked hard and I was paid well. Then, a couple of years ago, I was in an accident that changed my life. I hurt my back badly, so I haven't been able to work since then. I spend a lot of time with physical therapists trying to get my body back into the condition it was in before the accident. I'm not sure that is ever going to happen, which means I'm not sure when I will be able to work again.

Without work, I have had to look at other options for income – I still have to support myself. I filled out all the forms for Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) so that I could receive the government benefits that someone in my situation is entitled to. But it hasn't been easy. Even though it is clear that I have a physical disability, my application was denied when I first applied. I went through an appeal process with legal aid and finally started receiving ODSP. The money I get helps, but it isn't enough to pay for everything I need. It's barely enough money to pay for my rent. Because I'm not working and most of the money I get from ODSP covers my rent, I rely on the food bank for help. It's not always easy for me to get there. Sometimes getting to and from the food bank will take me most of the day. Getting around the city when you have a physical disability can be very demanding and tiring too.

This was never a situation I thought I'd been in. I started volunteering at the food bank so I could give back to my community and meet some new friends, which has been good. I'm glad the food bank is there to help me and other people like me who need help.

46%

IMMIGRANTS

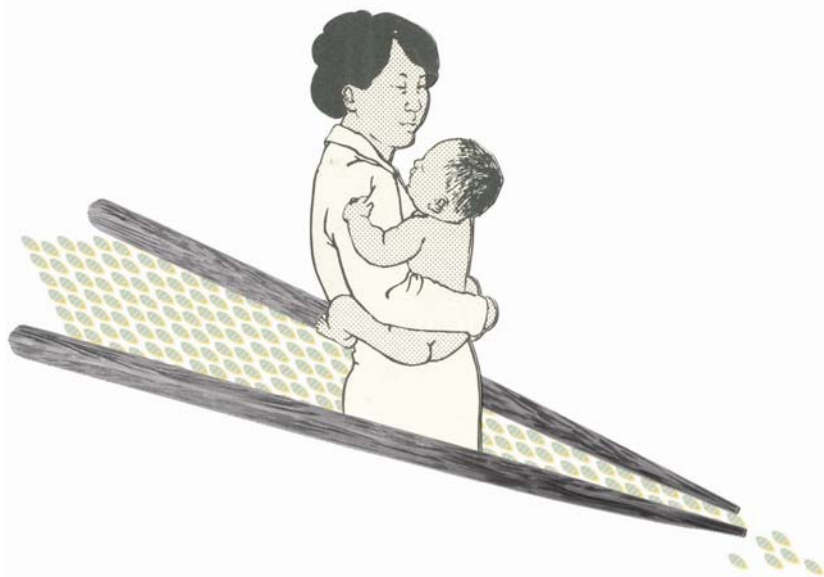
People who are not born in Canada represent 46% of all food bank clients.

Canada has a very diverse and dynamic population, which welcomes people from all over the world. Immigrants come to Canada in search of new and exciting opportunities for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, many of Canada's new immigrants experience multiple **barriers** when they arrive in the country.

The barriers some new immigrants experience vary, but all seem to limit the types of employment and income these individuals can earn. Many new immigrants are highly-educated, extremely motivated and have a great deal of experience in the workforce of their country of origin. When they arrive in Canada they have to overcome stumbling blocks relating to language barriers, lack of a social network, and sometimes discrimination. Also, despite having education and experience in certain fields, their foreign credentials are not always recognized in Canada.

Having to start from scratch and set up a new life in a new country, newcomers need to find employment immediately. At times they may take lower paying positions or receive support from the government through **Ontario Works (OW)**, to support their families. Often newcomers must live on lower incomes than they may have expected. In order to get by while they settle in Canada, they may need to use a **food bank**.

Reducing **poverty** among immigrants requires not only improving programs to recognize foreign credentials, but also providing greater support in areas like English as a Second Language (ESL) training and speeding up the immigration process to make sure newcomers thrive in the Canadian work force.



SANJAY'S STORY

I studied hard to become an engineer. From the moment I graduated from university, I worked even harder to get experience in my field. A couple of years ago, I decided to move my family to Canada because of the many opportunities I thought would open to us. My wife, daughter and I came to Canada from India. Of course, life is different there; you can get by with very little. We saved money for our big move. I knew we would need something to live off of while I looked for a job and we started our new life.

I have the skills, training and work experience to be an engineer. My English is pretty good too, but I cannot manage to find a job in my field because I don't have Canadian work experience. How am I supposed to get Canadian work experience when no one will give me a chance? We are struggling here in Canada, things are very tough. Our life savings are gone and I am working in the stock room of a furniture store, which doesn't pay as well as an engineering job would. My wife has enrolled in an English class so that she can get a job too. Thankfully, our daughter is doing well in school. But we are isolated. We do not know many people here and without the support from family and friends it seems like I'm never going to make the connections I need to find a good job. It is expensive to live in Toronto, so these days we have to go to the food bank for extra food. I thought things would be so different.

19%

SINGLE PARENTS

19% of food bank clients live in single parent families.

Among the households with children, single parent households are the most vulnerable to **food bank** use. A household with one parent caring for children means that only one adult is earning money to pay for the whole family's **basic needs**.

There is generally a limited amount of money available to spend on all the basic items that families need regularly, like clothing and toiletries. With the **cost of living** being so high, this can be overwhelming for a single parent. For that reason, some households headed by single-parents are at a greater risk of experiencing **poverty**.

Many single parents who visit food banks have trouble entering the workforce because they need someone to care for their children while they are at work. So, some single parents have to sacrifice work to care for children and end up either working part-time or accessing a government program called **Ontario Works (OW)**, for **income**. In both cases, single parents may not access enough income to cover their families' basic needs. As a result, some single parent families rely on the help of food banks to get by and feed their families. When times are really tight, parents may even have to skip meals so that their children are fed. The lack of food and other resources certainly affect the family unit, especially young children who are in their growing years. Sadly, research shows that 34% of food bank clients are children.



ROSITA'S STORY

I am a single mother with two boys, they are 4 and 6. My youngest child goes to school for half a day and is home each afternoon. Both my kids need me at home when they arrive from school, because they are still pretty young and can't be on their own. I have only been able to work part-time jobs for the last few years. Working part-time and caring for two young children is tough — there's lots of scheduling to do. I would love to work full-time as a graphic designer, because that is what I am trained in. The hours at an advertising agency can be quite demanding though, especially when you are just getting started. For now I have to work two part-time jobs, one is in a coffee shop and one is at a store in the mall. The hours are never guaranteed. I do okay, but the pay isn't great, sometimes I have to cut things out. Right now we eat a lot of pasta because it is inexpensive and filling. Sometimes, I only eat at dinner time, to save the food for the growing boys. I am going to end up disconnecting my phone, because it is just getting too expensive.

There is another young mother in my building who is in a similar situation, sometimes we help each other out. Everything would be different if child care was more affordable, then I would be able to work full-time and make decent money. When you are only making \$9.00 an hour and working part-time, it is impossible to afford everything you need to run a household. I can visit my neighbourhood food bank when money is really tight, but I am looking forward to the day when I won't have to consider that an option. Sometimes, though, I'm afraid about what the future holds for me and my boys.

28%

WORKING POOR

28% of all households using food banks have at least one person working.

Most people assume that when people have jobs, they are able to live comfortably, pay for all their necessary expenses and support their families. Unfortunately, this is not the case for many individuals.

Some people work at a job, or even a couple of jobs, and still do not make enough money to pay for their **basic needs**. People are considered “working poor” when they are working at a paying job, and cannot make ends meet without some extra support. These individuals experience **poverty** even though they may be working full time, part time or have more than one job. Often times, this means visiting a **food bank** to supplement the food they can afford with the money they earn at work.

The **cost of living** is high in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and the cost of essential items adds up. If someone is working and earning a **low income** or not getting enough hours at work to earn a liveable income, it becomes very difficult to afford everything they need, like housing, transportation and child care. Also, most people who work are not eligible for government assistance, so they must rely solely on the wages they earn to pay for everything.

Like all food bank clients, individuals who fall into the “working poor” **demographic** have to make critical decisions on what they will spend their limited money on. This pressure, along with the regular pressures of work and life, can be very overwhelming and represents some of the struggle experienced by the “working poor”.



GRETCHEN'S STORY

For the past few years, I've been working part-time. I work 32 hours a week and I don't get paid very much per hour. My boss doesn't want to give me a full-time position because that would mean I would be entitled to get health benefits, which would cost the company money. Health benefits would be really helpful, though, because I have diabetes and my medications are expensive. On top of medications, I have to pay for my rent, transportation and all my other needs. It all adds up and sometimes I don't have enough money to pay for food. I wish I had enough money to do more than just get by. I'm a hard worker, but fewer and fewer employers are offering full time jobs with benefits.

I always have to make choices; I ride my bike as much as possible because that's free. I have to take the TTC to work, though, because it would take me hours to bike there. I haven't bought myself new clothing in ages, but I've found some nice second-hand things at Value Village which keeps costs down. I go to the food bank once a month to get essentials like pasta and peanut butter and I can make those last for a while.

You wouldn't think that someone with a job would need to use a food bank. If I could find a full time job things would be different. My medications would be covered so I wouldn't have to make the little money I have left, after I pay my rent, stretch as far. The price of everything keeps going up and it seems as though I'll never be able to afford to live in the city and buy everything I need without some help.

29%

PERSISTENT POVERTY

29% of the individuals who use food banks in the GTA are experiencing persistent poverty.

Although many people use **food banks** for short periods to help them get by during financially difficult times, **poverty** isn't always a temporary situation. Sometimes food bank clients need to visit a food bank for a longer period. This usually happens when people are in a cycle of poverty that they can't get out of because of a lack of resources.

In the context of Daily Bread's research, "persistent poverty" is defined as needing a food bank for more than two years. As we have seen, poverty affects all sorts of populations, including people with disabilities, newcomers, children and adults of all ages. In any of these groups, people may face persistent poverty for a variety of reasons. **Income** is the most significant **barrier** people face in getting out of poverty. When people don't have enough money to pay for their needs, they will likely experience some form of poverty. Common reasons for this barrier include: finding adequate employment; lack of social or family support; needing further job and skills training; a disability that prevents a person from working; the high costs of housing, child care and transportation; insufficient government support through **Ontario Works (OW)** and **Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)**.

With all these obstacles, it is no surprise that when people experience poverty they have difficulty improving their circumstances. It is important to remember that most of the people who are accessing food banks because they experience poverty, are trying their very best to overcome many obstacles to live happy and healthy lives.



HENRY'S STORY

For years I've been living in a vicious cycle that I can't seem to get out of. I applied and went on Ontario Works (OW) five years ago when I realized I had to stop working because of my many health issues, including osteoarthritis, asthma and a heart defect. I shifted my government benefits to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) when my application was finally approved three years ago after two years of paper work. I've been visiting my neighbourhood food bank regularly for the last 4 years, otherwise I would go hungry. I feel like I can't remember a time when life was going smoothly for me. Life is hard enough with my health concerns, without having to worry about how or when I am going to get my next meal.

My medical appointments take up a lot of my time and transportation costs are always a huge worry, on top of rent. I also take multiple prescription medications and the cost of all of them adds up. This is not a lifestyle I chose for myself, I didn't choose to be sick. I'm without a job, and I can't really depend on my family to help me out. I would love to be able to go to work everyday and have an employer who could be flexible around my health issues, but that isn't realistic. Instead, I spend the time that I am not at the doctor's office worrying about my situation and not feeling well. I can't afford to get together with friends or even go to a movie to take my mind off of my stresses. As my emotional health worsens, with lack of sleep due to worry, my physical health gets worse too.

Where do YOU go from here?



Now that you have read *Who's Hungry?* you have a much clearer picture of **hunger** issues in the GTA and who those issues affect. And if you are like us at Daily Bread Food Bank, you want to do something about it **NOW**.

We use the statistics and information you've just read to educate people like you, your classmates and your parents. It's not just students in schools who need to understand what is going on, it is other members of the community too. To get people talking about **poverty** and fighting hunger, we share this important information with community groups, companies, the general public and the government.

When Daily Bread Food Bank talks to the public, we not only ask for volunteer support and donations of food and money, we also ask them to think about the bigger picture of hunger in the GTA. That is exactly what we are asking you to do. When we talk to government, we offer ideas and realistic solutions to reduce food bank use by improving our clients' **income security**. Everyone should have enough money to afford their **basic needs**. When this happens, it will improve lives and have a positive and lasting impact on our community.

So, what can you do in your community to make changes so that fewer people experience hunger? Take a look at the checklist on the right and start your fight against hunger!

Fighting Hunger checklist

- Ask your local food bank and/or their partner agencies what you can do to help fight hunger.
- Plan and promote a school-wide food drive – check out www.hungrycity.ca for more information.
- Visit your local library or check the Internet to learn more about the scope of hunger in your community, Canada and the world.
- Go on a field trip to a local food relief program, like a food bank or meal program, and find out how it operates and whom it serves.
- Save some of your allowance money to donate to your local food bank so they can continue fighting hunger.
- Invite a guest speaker to your school, someone who works to alleviate hunger, have them explain poverty and hunger to your classmates.
-



Fill in the blank (create your own activity to fight hunger)

Glossary of Terms

Poverty: The lack of essential items – such as food, clothing, water, and shelter – needed to live a healthy life.

Hunger: A condition in which a person does not get enough food to provide the necessary nutrients (carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals and water) to live fully productive and active lives.

Food bank: A food bank is a non-profit organization which distributes donated food items to people who require them. Food banks provide immediate hunger relief to individuals and families who are unable to afford food because of low-income.

Basic needs: The minimum resources necessary for well-being, such as food, clothing, shelter, water, sanitation, education and healthcare.

Cost of living: The average cost of the basic needs of life. This cost is associated with maintaining a certain standard of living.

Barrier: An obstacle that prohibits someone's ability to attain something.

Ontario Works (OW): This government program, sometimes referred to as 'welfare' or social assistance, provides temporary financial assistance towards the costs of housing and basic needs. People unable to find work or temporarily unable to work are eligible.

Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP): This government program provides financial support to help cover the costs of housing and basic needs for individuals who have a physical and/or mental health problem that is long-term and strongly limits their ability to care for themselves, to work or to carry out daily activities.

Income: The sum of all wages (money) received in a specific period of time. Money can be earned in a variety of ways, for example by working or receiving government benefits like OW & ODSP.

Income security: Knowing that you are going to have enough money to support yourself and your family, whether it is through employment, social assistance or tax benefits.

Demographic: A descriptive classification for a grouping of people, such as age, sex, income, education, household size or other defining characteristics.



Hungry City: Make Your Mark, is a Daily Bread Food Bank initiative that gives today's youth the opportunity to take action and be part of the fight against hunger in the GTA.

Our goal is to educate, engage and empower youth to explore the complex issues of hunger and poverty, dispel myths and stereotypes, and present information that encourages critical thinking.

Hungry City is about knowledge and action, so arm yourself with the facts and start making a difference in your community.

Check out hungrycity.ca for more information and tools for students and educators.



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