



# Voices United II

**FOOD BANK CLIENTS SPEAK OUT,  
FOOD BANKS RESPOND**



**Raising the Profile of the Hungry in Stormont, Dundas,  
Glengarry and Leeds and Grenville Counties**

# About this Report

The first Voices United Report was published in 2020. At that time, Food bank client surveys painted a bleak picture of the most vulnerable in our community. As we surveyed our food bank clients for a second time in 2023, we were asked by some of our clients why we were doing this again- what had changed since our first report. A feeling of hopelessness was apparent; a reluctance to tell their realities once again. I wish that we could say that a lot has changed but the reality for those who are relying on food banks today is that their lives are even more vulnerable now than they were 4 years ago. What we can say is that Food Banks United presented their stories and their realities to all three levels of government. We participated in a province wide MPP gathering hosted by Feed Ontario and answered questions as to why Ontario Disability Support Program rates must rise. We participated in a Feed Ontario Conference and a Food Banks Canada Conference to encourage other food banks to gather data and advocate on behalf of their clients. Food Banks United members continue to use gathered data to be a strong, united voice in advocating for change for our food bank clients.

Voices United II was created using data obtained by surveying food bank clients at six Eastern Ontario food banks: The Agape Centre in Cornwall; Brockville and Area Food Bank; Community Food Share in Winchester, Morrisburg and Finch; House of Lazarus Food Bank in Mountain and Ingleside; Rideau Community Health Services Food Cupboard Program (Merrickville site); and South Grenville Food Bank in Prescott, Cardinal and Spencerville. St Vincent de Paul Society in Alexandria provided additional data to add to the report. Throughout Voices United II, food bank client testimonials are highlighted as Food Banks United feels that their voices need to be heard by people who are making decisions for their future. We are grateful to our clients for trusting us to share their stories once again.

This Voices United II report also shares data and information from Feed Ontario, Food Banks Canada and local health units. Several themes are consistent from all the data gathered. First, food bank usage has risen greatly since the pandemic. In Eastern Ontario, 54% of food bank clients started using a food bank during the pandemic. On average, Food Banks United members have seen 38% increase in new clients since 2022. The second theme is that income levels are not keeping up with cost of living increases. The majority of new food bank clients, 68% of them, stated that the increase in cost of living is their main reason for needing to use a food bank. In Ontario, although social assistance rates have not kept up with the cost of living increases for many years, it is encouraging that the provincial government has started to provide cost of living increases annually for ODSP recipients. The third consistent theme is that food banks are uncertain as to their ability to keep up to the increases in people needing their services. In fact, 88% of Food Bank United members are concerned that they will not have enough food to meet the demand; 72% of members are concerned that they will not have enough funding to meet the demand. In several cases, people who have been donors to the food bank are now using the service themselves. In this time of uncertainty, food banks now find themselves to be vulnerable.

# Summary of findings

**Food Insecurity:** Severe food insecurity is described as missing meals, reducing food intake and at the most extreme going full days without eating. 40% of survey respondents are personally hungry and do not have enough food. 38% are missing meals to pay their hydro, heat or rent instead. In Eastern Ontario, 33% of food bank clients are going whole days every month without eating. Our clients are surviving on pasta and potatoes to fill their bellies. It is no wonder that 55% state their health to be in fair to poor condition. A diet lacking protein, vegetables and fruits will lead to greater health problems. Food bank clients look for other sources of food within the community. 36% take advantage of community kitchens and meals, community gardens and good food box programs.

Food costs have risen over 10% in the past two years and are to rise yet again this year. The general population is finding it hard to keep up with rising food costs however this is harder to do if you are on a fixed income as most food bank clients are. Governments and health agencies agree that food insecurity is linked to the fact that people do not have adequate financial resources in which to buy the food that they need however, there is no agreement on solutions to the problem.

**Income:** Being employed in Eastern Ontario, is not a guarantee to being able to support yourself. Minimum wage in Ontario has risen to \$16.55 however, the living wage in Eastern Ontario is \$20.60. It is no wonder that although 24% of food bank clients are employed, they still need to use a food bank. Being paid a living wage, would equate to over \$42000 a year. 83% of food bank clients' annual income is under \$29988; 50% live on under \$17988 each year. Ontario social assistance rates are not in line with today's realities. Feed Ontario refers to Ontario social assistance rates as being "legislated poverty" as the rates keep people using these programs living well below the poverty level.<sup>1</sup>

Over 60% of survey respondents reported that their lives were very or extremely stressful. Finances were named as the main stressor by 51% of respondents. There is a constant battle to make ends meet-- borrowing money from family and friends, not paying one bill in order to pay another, using credit and selling their property. When asked what barriers prevent people from leaving poverty, 63% stated that low wages were a barrier.

**Housing Insecurity:** Affordable housing is defined as paying 30% of your income towards housing costs. 65% of survey respondents are paying more than 30% of their income towards housing. Only 19% are accessing subsidized housing as waiting lists for social housing in Eastern Ontario are over 5 years. Living below the poverty level, means less choices on where you live. 17% of food bank respondents are not living in a safe place. 30% report that they are living in places that need urgent housing repairs. Food banks are being creative when providing food to people who are living in tents, in their vehicles and in shelters that do not have electricity.

**"I feel worthless because I have no purpose and no way of finding one.**

**To be in a crowd of people and feel so alone."**

Food bank Client testimonial

# Food Insecurity

**33% of adults did not eat for a whole day because they could not afford food**

**68% of survey respondents who have started to use the food bank during the past six months deem cost of living increases as their primary reason why.**

**10% of children were hungry on a regular basis because there was no money to buy food**

## Food Insecurity

The federal government defines food insecurity as “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.”<sup>2</sup>

**Household food insecurity is often linked with the household's financial ability to access adequate food,” states the government of Canada<sup>3</sup>**

**“I have gone 3 days without eating so my kid can eat and this is sometimes a weekly thing.”**

Food bank client testimonial

**In Eastern Ontario 1 in 7 households are food insecure.<sup>4</sup>**

**“Cost of living is too high. My children can't afford to go out on their own.”**

Food bank client testimonial

**40% of food bank survey respondents stated that they did not have enough food.**



**Since 2022, food prices have risen over 10% and are expected to rise another 2.5-4.5% in 2024.<sup>5</sup>**



# Household Income Sources of People Accessing Food Banks in Eastern Ontario

7% state Ontario Works as their main income source.

39% are Ontario Disability Support Program recipients.



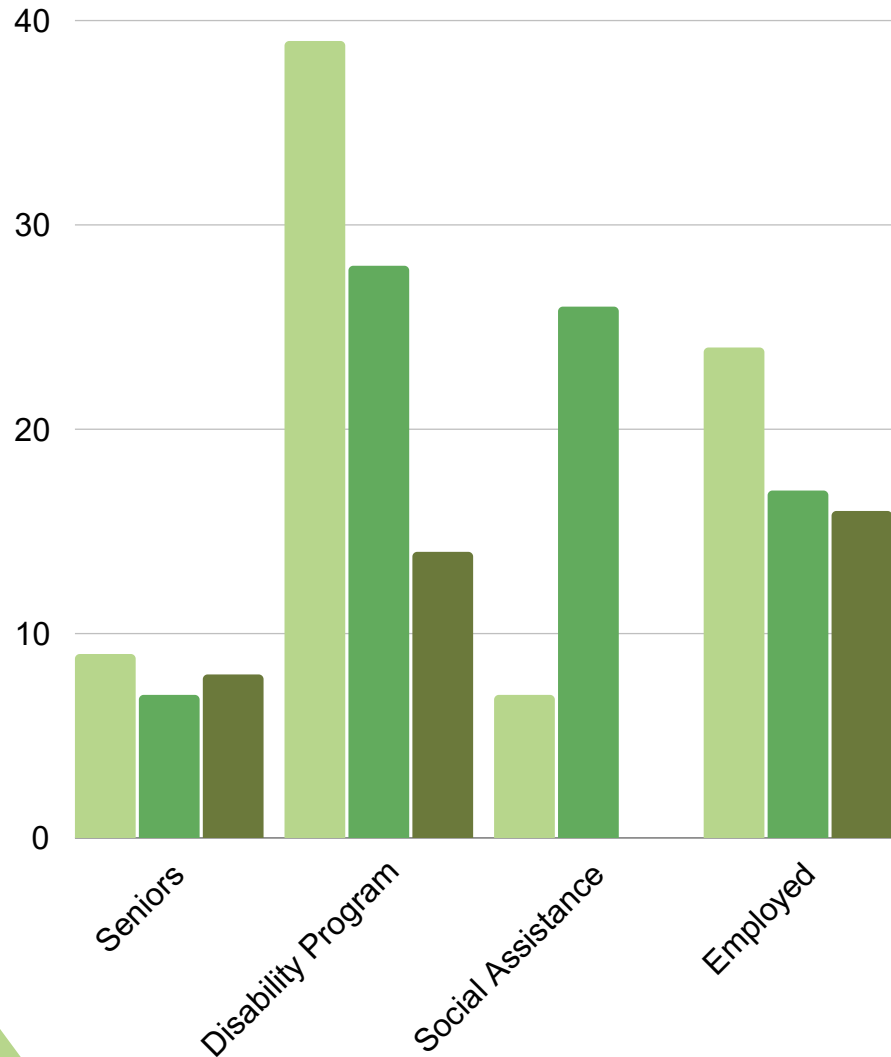
1 in 4 are employed

83% of survey respondents have a household income of \$29988 or less; 50% of survey respondents have a household income of \$17988 or less

## How do we compare?

This graphic compares data between Food Banks United, Feed Ontario and Food Banks Canada.

The numbers of seniors and employed food bank clients reported in Eastern Ontario is inline with provincial and national trends. There is a much higher rate of people on ODSP using food banks in Eastern Ontario than reported provincially and nationally. It is interesting that there is a much lower number of food bank clients accessing Ontario Works locally than reported by Feed Ontario.



**“Can’t afford anything at this point. On ODSP you don’t get a lot and barely survive and now that gap is even larger.”**

*Food Bank Client testimonial*

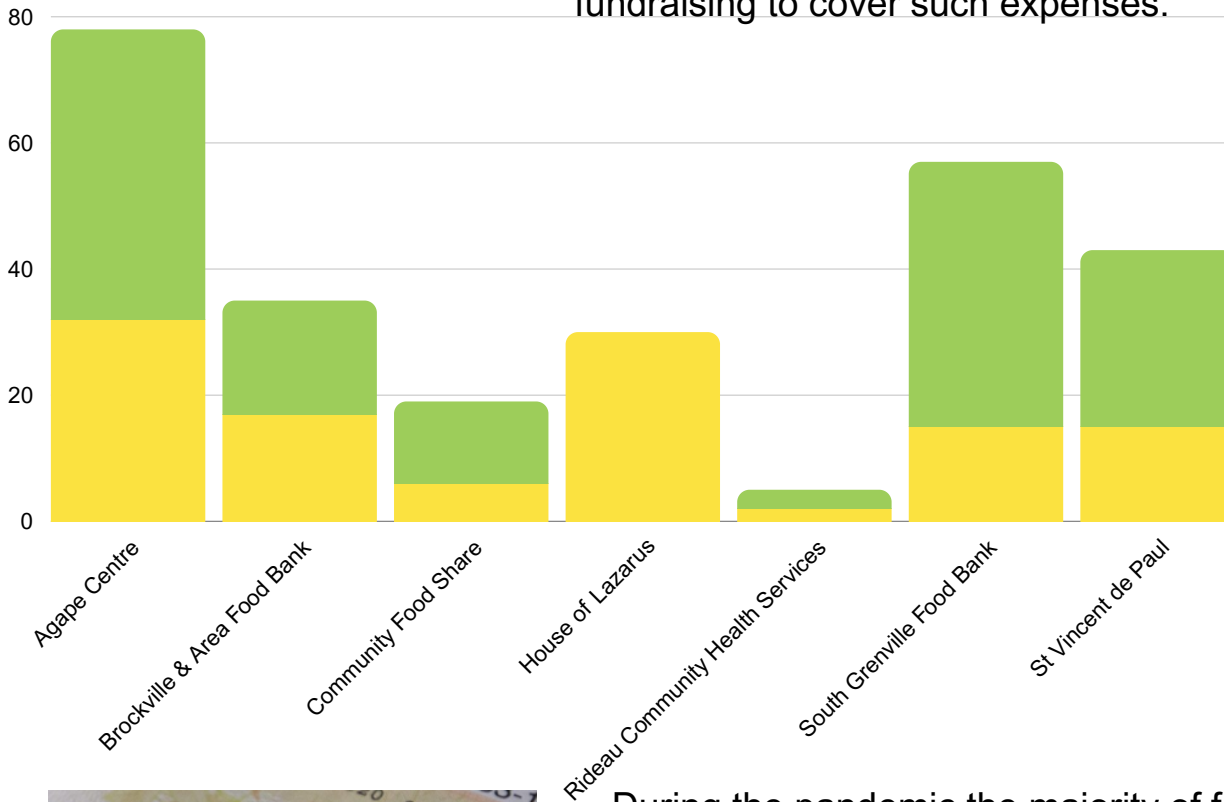
**“I am working 8-15 hours a day for very little money and still struggling to pay bills and buy food.”**

*Food Bank Client testimonial*

# How has the pandemic impacted food banks?

**54% of survey respondents started using the food bank during the pandemic**

The pandemic had a direct impact on food banks and food bank usage. For the first time, food banks were able to access government grants to help build their capacity in order to better meet their clients' needs. Food banks were able to purchase generators, freezers, refrigeration units through grants instead of spending many hours of fundraising to cover such expenses.



**% increase in food bank use 2022**

**% increase in food bank use 2023**

**\*In 2023, House of Lazarus suffered a major fire at its food bank that impacted client growth**



**46% of food banks survey respondents receive significantly less than the \$2000 per month that was offered by the federal government during the pandemic.**

During the pandemic the majority of food bank users were not able to access government CERB supports as they were already receiving government assistance such as Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program. It is interesting to note that the federal government decided that \$2000 per month was what most Canadians needed to cover their basic needs. As Ontario Works recipients receive \$733 per month and ODSP recipients receive \$1205 per month from the provincial government, there seems to be an ongoing injustice happening. In Feed Ontario's Hunger Report, they refer to these inadequate social assistance rates as being "legislated poverty." "We use the term "legislated poverty" because keeping rates far lower than the poverty line is a choice that successive provincial governments continue to make."<sup>6</sup>

# Living in Poverty affects a Person's Health

**51% of survey responders stated finances as their main stressor.**

**48% of survey responders have a physical disability, mental health condition or both**

**55% of survey responders rate their health as fair- poor**

## **Social Prescribing: A New Approach**

The Health Promotion team at the Rideau Community Health Services strives to continually meet the changing needs of the community, and thus we are piloting a Social Prescribing Program. Social Prescribing builds up communities and fosters connections for its residents. This practice involves listening to what clients feel will improve their quality of life and wellbeing, and then engaging community connections to build community-based supports based on our client's interests, goals, and gifts.

Rideau Community Health Services is a non-profit, fully accredited organization that offers primary health care with an emphasis on illness prevention, health promotion, health education and community development.

Joanne Franey, Community Health Worker, Rideau Community Health Services

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, "Poverty has a devastating impact on quality of life and compromises one's ability to secure stabilizing resources needed to maintain positive mental health."<sup>7</sup>

"Evidence shows a nutritious food intake plays a positive role for healthy pregnancies and birth outcomes, healthy growth and development, and a risk reduction for chronic diseases later in life. Addressing food insecurity will likely also decrease use of the health care system." Lanark, Leeds & Grenville Health Unit<sup>8</sup>

**"Poverty affects me. I'm not eating properly, not living in good conditions."**

Food bank respondent testimonial

**"Very difficult to survive with health conditions."**

Food bank respondent testimonial

**"A lot of the poverty affect mental health, lack of nutritious food, can't afford radio or TV, no escapism from life. There is a lack of opportunity to do things."**

Food bank respondent testimonial

# Transportation Barriers

**Transportation is a barrier for 32% of food bank clients**



**21% of respondents rely on others to get to the food bank**



**20% of respondents walk or use a wheel chair to get to the food bank**

Transportation is a barrier to 32% of people accessing food banks. 21% rely on family and friends to take them to the food bank. These arrangements often fall through and clients need to reschedule. 20% of survey respondents walk or use a wheel chair to get to the food bank. Several food banks have arranged for food to be delivered to clients who cannot get to the foodbank. In Cornwall, the Agape Centre clients have access to a transportation company that will deliver food for a small cost of \$5-7. House of Lazarus has volunteers and employees who will deliver food to clients. Community Food Share has a food distribution service that is used in special circumstances.



**Consider that a single food bank client chooses approximately 71lbs of food when they go to the food bank and then may need to either walk or use a wheel chair to take the food home.**

# Food Bank Client's Dietary Barriers

**60%**

**of food bank respondents have a health condition that affect what they eat**

**30% diabetic  
11% food allergies  
4% gluten free  
6% low sodium  
4% celiac, colitis  
5% other: ulcer,  
Lyme disease,**

**“My child has 20 safe foods due to food intolerances. We make multiple trips to CHEO and Sick’s Kids.”  
Food bank client testimonial**

It makes sense that people who live in poverty and do not have the means to eat a balanced diet throughout the month and would have more health concerns. In fact, 60% of survey respondents stated that they had health conditions that affect what they are able to eat. 29% have diabetes. Other health conditions mentioned include food allergies including gluten allergies, and celiac disease. Food banks struggle to meet special dietary needs. These foods are not usually donated and food banks do not have the budgets to purchase specialty foods.

“One food bank client who is on Ontario Works, receiving \$733 each month, described the way he ate each month. He picks up a week’s worth of food from the food bank which he stretches as much as he can. He then goes to the dollar store and purchases ramen noodles for the rest of the month.

There is still one week a month that he needs to ration the ramen noodles. He doesn’t eat at all several whole days each month.”  
Food bank employee.





# Housing Barriers

Food Banks are serving more people who are experiencing homelessness than they have in the past. Special consideration is taken where serving unhoused clients. Clients who are living rough or living in their vehicles do not have access to appliances to heat food or keep food cold and they don't have access to running water. Food Banks allot smaller quantities of food and permit unhoused clients to access the food bank more often. Having appropriate food on hand can be a challenge for food banks. The Agape Centre has added showers to its foodbank and have extended its community kitchen hours to help people who are experiencing homelessness. House of Lazarus has opened a Community Hub and Warming Centre to provide meals, showers, laundry facilities and a safe place to sleep.



## House of Lazarus opens a Community Hub and Warming Centre



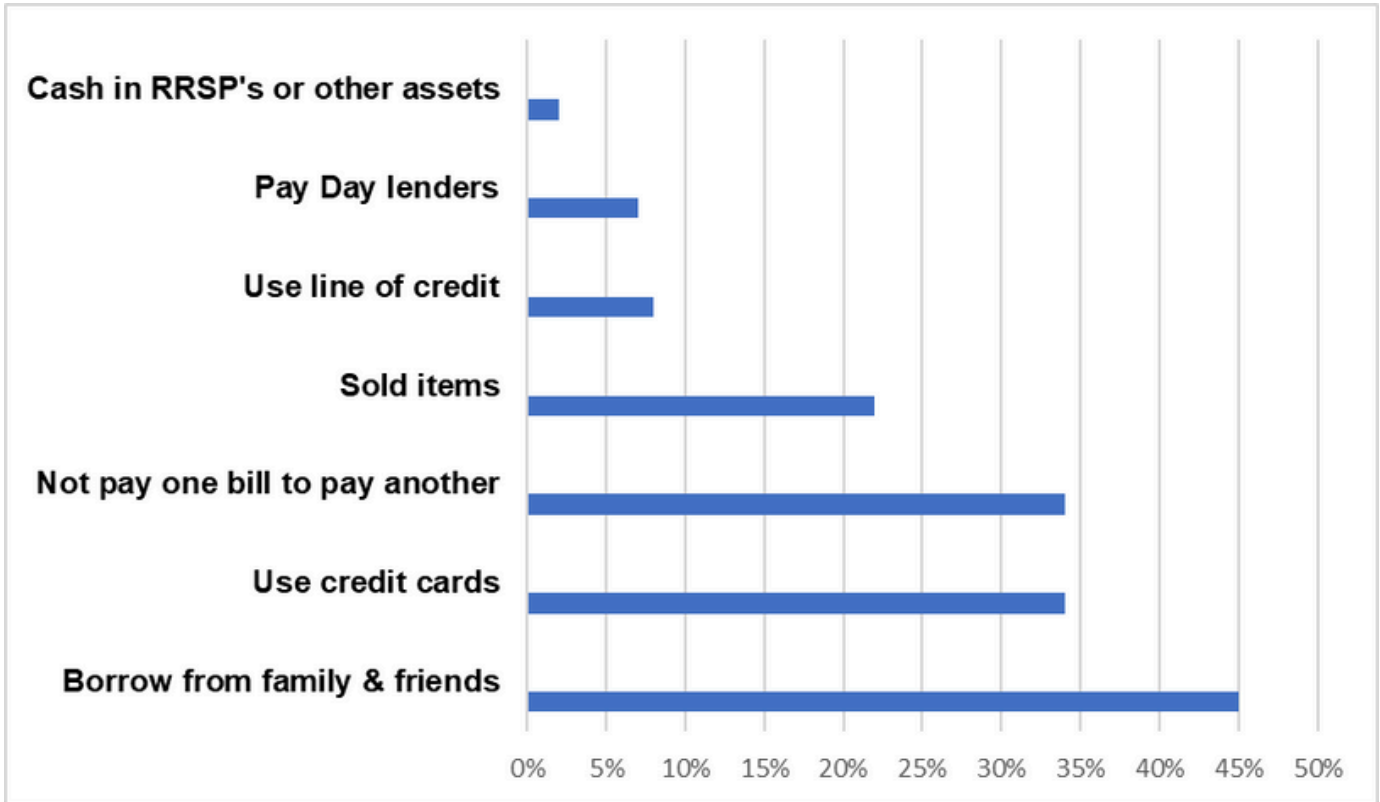
**The Community Hub and Warming Centre officially opened its doors in February of 2023. During the first year, there were 171 visits to the the Warming Centre and 1136 visits to programs and services in the Community Hub.**

The Community Hub and Warming Centre was created in partnership with the Anglican Parish of South Dundas, as well as the Roy McMurtry Legal Clinic, United Way SDG and Naomi's Family Resource Centre. The Community Hub and Warming Centre was created as a first step in providing a safe place for people who are homeless or living precariously housed in Dundas County.

With the lack of transitional and emergency housing in Dundas County, this provides those who are experiencing homelessness with a safe place to go, as well as the opportunity for human connection, a warm meal, hot showers, laundry facilities and the chance to work with agencies locally.

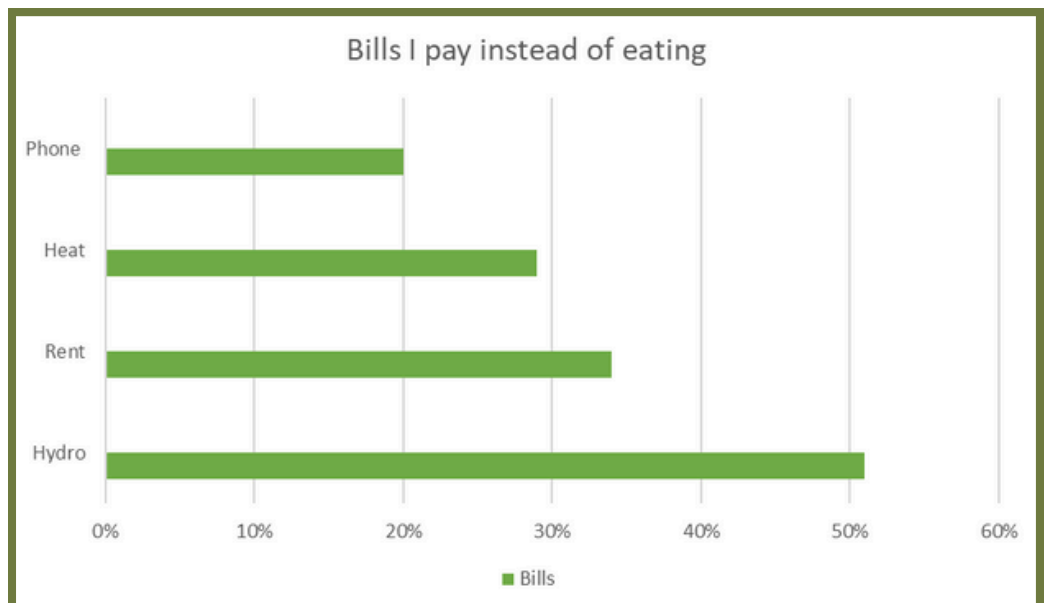
# Difficult Choices

What has your household done to be able to pay bills?



38% of food bank survey respondents missed a meal in order to pay for something else

Food bank clients make impossible choices on a regular basis. Do I eat today or keep the hydro on? Do I eat today or face eviction for not paying my rent? People on social assistance or working minimum wage jobs are not bringing in enough money to keep up with the rising cost of living.



# Children at the food bank

**34% of food bank clients in Eastern Ontario are children**

**Ontario's child poverty rate is 11.5%.**

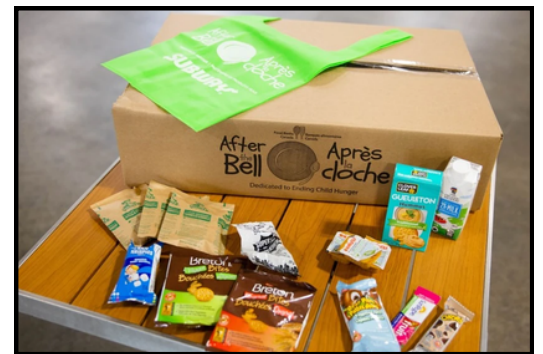
**Child poverty rates:**  
**Stormont Dundas S. Glengarry 15%**  
**Leeds & Grenville Thousand Island & Rideau Lakes 11%**  
**N Glengarry Prescott Russell 8%**

One third of food bank clients are children. Food Banks United members understand the importance of children eating nutritious food and the impact a healthy diet has on their health. For this reason, food banks often have special food programs for children. Children's healthy snack programs are available at several food banks. House of Lazarus and the Agape Centre offer Operation Backpack programs through area schools. This program adds a pack food in students' backpacks on Fridays, providing food to eat over the weekends. The Agape Centre offers children to drop by their community kitchen to eat breakfast and to pick up a bagged lunch for school.

Food Banks Canada's After the Bell program provides nutritious, child-friendly food packs throughout the summer when school-centered supports are not available so kids can soar on the swings and splash in the community pool with their friends.

Participating food banks receive packs that contain shelf-stable items such as milk, hummus, crackers, cereal, oatmeal and sunflower seeds. They also receive grant money to supplement the food packs with perishable items such as apples, sugar snap peas, cheese, and yogurt.

The Agape Centre, Community Food Share, House of Lazarus and South Grenville Food Bank all participate in the After the Bell program.



Children in food insecure homes are more likely to:

- have poor childhood mental health, including: hyperactivity & inattention, anxiety disorders, depression and suicidal ideation in adolescence and early adulthood
  - develop asthma
  - be at risk for poor nutrition, growth and development (infants)

Addressing Food Insecurity 2023 Lanark, Leeds & Grenville Health Unit<sup>9</sup>

# Single People Struggling

References #10, 11	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
**includes basic allowance, maximum shelter allowance, GST/HST credit, Ontario Trillium Benefit & Climate Action Incentive Payment	One person household, OW	One person household, ODSP	One person household, OAS/GIS	One person household, minimum wage (35 hrs a week)
<b>Total Monthly Income</b>	<b>\$868.00**</b>	<b>\$1372.00**</b>	<b>\$1996.00**</b>	<b>\$2310.00</b>
<b>Average Monthly Rent (may or may not include heat &amp; utilities)</b>	<b>1 bedroom \$1314.00</b>	<b>1 bedroom \$1314.00</b>	<b>1 bedroom \$1314.00</b>	<b>1 bedroom \$1314.00</b>
<b>Food</b>	<b>\$422.00</b>	<b>\$422.00</b>	<b>\$304.00</b>	<b>\$422.00</b>
<b>Funds Remaining</b> For hydro/heat, transportation, clothing, phone and everything else	<b>(\$868.00)</b>	<b>(\$364.00)</b>	<b>\$378.00</b>	<b>\$600.00</b>
<b>% of income required for rent</b>	<b>151%</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>57%</b>
<b>% of income required for food</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>18%</b>

**“I can't find housing due to income, I can't afford basic necessities.”**

Food bank survey respondent testimonial



**“I have worked very hard to raise 3 children on my own. Now that we live in (social) housing, life is more manageable.”** Food bank survey respondent testimonial

**“Living in housing is challenging with the inconsistency of other tenants and having to advocate for any issues to protect your rights.”**

Food bank survey respondent testimonial

# Families Feeling the Pinch

Reference #10, 11	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
**includes basic allowance, maximum shelter allowance, Canada Child Benefit, GST/HST credit, Ontario Trillium Benefit & Climate Action Incentive Payment, if they qualify	Family of 4, OW 2 adults ages 31-50 & 2 children age 8 & 14	Family of 4, Full time minimum wage earner 2 adults age 31-50 & 2 children age 8 & 14	Single parent household, OW 1 adult age 31-50 & 2 children age 8 & 14
	<b>\$2800.00**</b>	<b>\$4166.00**</b>	<b>\$2566.00**</b>
<b>Average Monthly Rent (may or may not include heat &amp; utilities)</b>	<b>3 bedroom \$2087.00</b>	<b>3 bedroom \$2087.00</b>	<b>2 bedroom \$1758.00</b>
<b>Food</b>	<b>\$1175.00</b>	<b>\$1175.00</b>	<b>\$864.00</b>
<b>Funds Remaining</b> For hydro/heat, transportation, clothing, phone and everything else	<b>(\$462.00)</b>	<b>(\$904.00)</b>	<b>(\$56.00)</b>
<b>% of income required for rent</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>% of income required for food</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>34%</b>

Food insecurity is an income issue, not a food issue. When money is tight there is less money in the budget for food. This can lead to skipped meals, poor mental, physical and oral health as well as put individuals at a greater risk of developing chronic diseases. <sup>12</sup> Lanark, Leeds & Grenville Health Unit

**“I am unable to make ends meet and pay for crucial work needed on my house.”**

Food Bank survey respondent testimonial

**“I am stuck. I am just surviving not living. My kids are the ones that suffer.”**

Food Bank survey respondent testimonial



# Singled Out: The Cost of Living Alone J's Story

Before I start, I need to acknowledge that I come from a place of privilege and have been afforded opportunities that allowed me to secure full-time employment, safe shelter and food in my cupboards, which not everyone in Cornwall has been given.

As a single person living in Cornwall, there are many instances where I am at a disadvantage simply because I live alone. Take for example shelter costs, many apartments that are safe are not affordable on a single income which leads to many people, including myself, to take on a second job. I am fortunate enough to make a living wage at both of my jobs, but after monthly expenses such as rent, utilities and groceries, I am left with little money to put towards personal costs like replacing clothing or putting savings into a rainy-day fund. When buying groceries, I am faced with the challenge of buying for a single person. Most savings found in grocery stores are on bulk items and a problem I face as a single person is having to buy a smaller portion, which is sometimes more expensive than bulk, because I don't have the space or use for the extra food. Trying to navigate meal planning for one while keeping costs low is a challenge I have yet to master. Many people are facing challenges with the cost of living crisis, but how does a single person afford to live their life when more than half their income is going towards having a place to live?

**Those with jobs have become a growing demographic of food bank visitors in Ontario. More than one in six food bank visitors now cite employment as their primary source of income, an 82 per cent increase over 2016-17 and a 37 per cent increase over the previous year. Reasons for this trend are poor-quality jobs, increase in gig workers and earnings that are not increasing as fast as expenses. Hunger Report 2023 <sup>13</sup>**

**70% of food bank survey respondents graduated high school; 35% have post secondary schooling**

**39% of food bank survey respondents are single**

**24% of food bank survey respondents are employed**

**The minimum wage in Ontario is has risen to \$16.55 per hour. The living wage in Eastern Ontario is \$20.60 per hour. <sup>14</sup>**

# Surviving on Ontario Works Testimony

Nobody surviving on \$733 a month is healthy, and yet this is the reality for single people like Mr. M who are on Ontario Works (OW). M worked his entire life, as a contractor and numerous other types of work until about 7 years ago when M's health declined and he was no longer able to work. He applied to OW with the hope that he would be able to recover and enter back into the workforce. Due to health reasons, this was not possible but he thought he would qualify for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Unfortunately, he did not, "I worked my whole life, and I would like to keep working but my age and health won't allow me to. I was diagnosed with arthritis at the age of 60, only getting worse, but ODSP doesn't consider me eligible for the program."



**"Even if I was able to work, I'm old and people don't want to hire older guys for the job when they can have someone young do it."**

M went on to explain that he is not eligible for Old Age Security due to his age, but his body is too old to be able to work. "I'm in this waiting period to be old enough to collect my OAS because I can't work and don't qualify for other programs [like ODSP]." M went on to share the realities of surviving on OW every month. "I got lucky and moved into a place 10 years ago that had low rent and I've been there since. I pay \$608 a month for my rent and my utilities and I know I'm very lucky to only pay that. There are other tenants in the building paying \$900 plus utilities. So if you're on OW, you can't afford to move in and they are basic units."

**Mr. M lives in a building that was built before 2018 which means there is a 2.5% yearly increase cap on his rent. His landlord recently gave him notice that his rent would be increasing and Mr. M explained that even though its only a \$15 increase, it still has a big impact on him. "That's \$15 less each month to spend on groceries and basic needs. It might not seem like a lot but when your counting your pennies at the store, \$15 is a big difference."**

Even on his limited income, Mr. M usually manages to eat 3 meals each day by using food supports like the food bank and community meals to stretch his limited income. "I usually walk to a local food program every week where they give out bread and I'll sit and have a meal."

# Surviving on Ontario Works Testimony

I try to only use the food bank and meals when I have to, I don't want to be greedy, I know there are lots of people struggling. It pisses me off when I see people take advantage of support, cause it makes others think everyone using the support is greedy and that's not the case. Most of us are just trying to survive and stay fed."

Mr. M shared some recommendations to help those who are struggling. He suggests raising the monthly OW payment amount for a single person from \$733 to match the rising cost of living. "I think for me [OW rates] would need to go up to at least \$1000. That way I could afford food every month and pay my bills instead of having to choose." Mr. M also suggested changing the requirements for ODSP to include health conditions that are out of people's control. "I'm old, and have arthritis that prevents me from working. Neither one of those things are my fault or something I can change. There should be a different program for this or changes to ODSP so I can qualify and not have to struggle just for being old."

"I'm clean and so are my clothes, but every so often, I get up at 5am to go picking through peoples' trash in search for booze cans or bottles, so I can buy bread or lunch meat or whatever I need. It's degrading, but once you pass the embarrassment it's not so bad. I know other men and women in there 50s and 60s doing the same. That's the reality of life in Cornwall on the 21st century."

**"I'm clean and so are my clothes, but every so often, I get up at 5am to go picking through peoples' trash in search for booze cans or bottles, so I can buy bread or lunch meat or whatever I need. It's degrading, but once you pass the embarrassment it's not so bad."**



**Mr. M pays \$608 for rent which includes utilities which is 83% of his income. He has \$125 left each month to live.**

**The income provided to social assistance recipients still remains far below the poverty line and does not provide enough financial support to afford even basic standard of living. Feed Ontario Hunger Report 2023<sup>15</sup>**

# Has the cost of living increase impacted you?

Food bank clients reply

**“I can’t find housing due to income. I can’t afford the basic necessities.”**

**“Hard to manage everyday life. Before I was barely getting by and now it is eve worse. Gas is insane.”**

**“Hasn’t really impacted me. I’m used to making do with almost nothing.”**

**“I can’t afford to buy all of the necessities and my kids cannot go out on their own so they are still living with me.”**

**“Trying to figure out what I can afford to buy and subsidizing what I buy with food from the food bank. Doing without fresh produce since cans keep longer.”**



**“I don’t get much, after my bills I don’t have much to spend on groceries. The price of groceries has gone up but my cheque amount has not.”**

**“No haircuts, no gas, no wood, no repairs, snow in the basement, rats, no attic insulation.”**

**“I find I need the food bank more; so glad they are here to help people.”**

**“Everything is no name products. I buy less for more.”**

**“Being unable to provide children with activities they would like to be part of. For example, missing my meals to buy my daughter a prom dress.”**

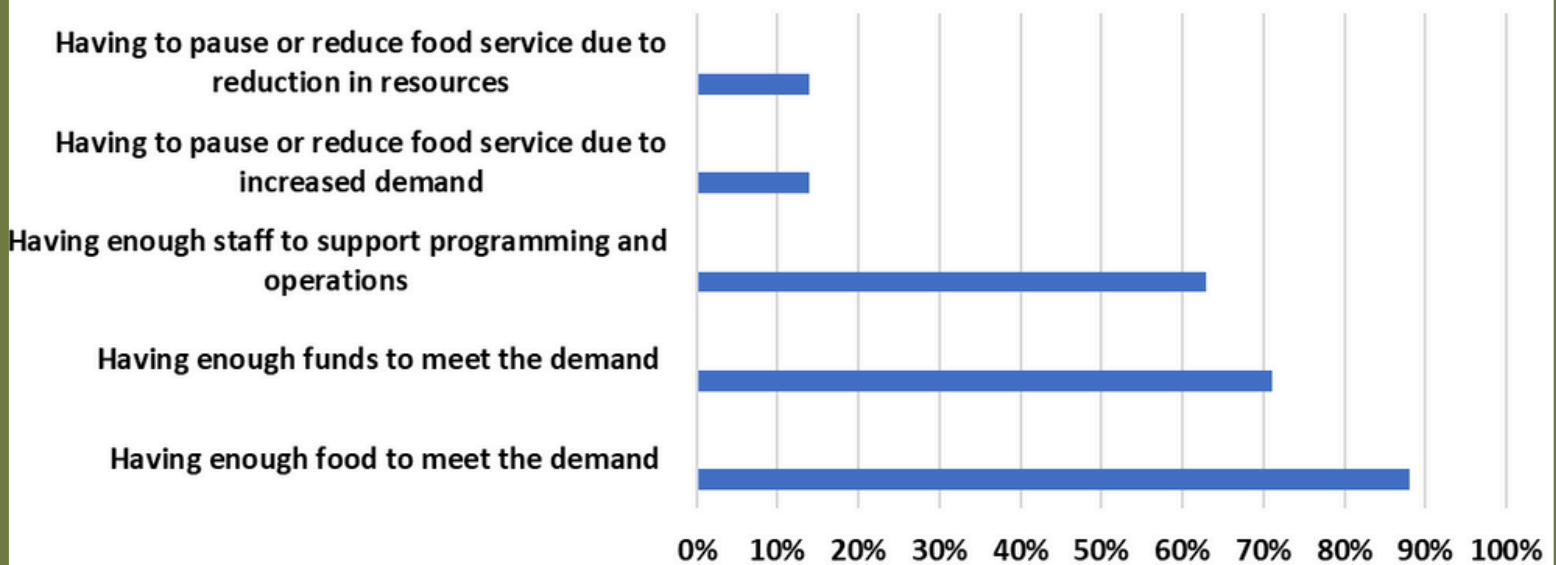




# Increase in Food Costs Affect Food Banks Buying Power

Since 2022, food costs in Canada increased over 10% and there is an anticipated 2.5-4.5% food costs increase in 2024. As these costs affect everyone and are sending more people to food banks, there is also an effect on food banks when they are purchasing food to stock their food bank shelves. As small- medium rural food banks in Eastern Ontario, we face barriers such as transportation, warehousing and the capacity to procure food from producers and manufacturers. As food bank usage continues to rise, Food Banks United members are looking to form new partnerships to secure additional food sources and to stretch their food buying power.

## Food bank concerns



## Agape Centre: Innovation is Key

We are experiencing unprecedented times for people living in poverty and at risk of being hungry and struggling to keep food on their tables. The Agape Centre has implemented new programs to alleviate every day expenses like free haircuts, the Kibble Cupboard, lunch programs for school aged children, back to school supplies, snow suits and Christmas gifts. Being innovative and expanding our services and program options to meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens is always our top priority. The new Kids Community Kitchen is open each school day to provide children an opportunity to enjoy a nutritious breakfast and pack a lunch for school. Our Community Kitchen has expanded to include Saturday lunches and our community fridge is stocked at the end of each day for those in need of a meal outside of our business hours.

Lisa Duprau Executive Director Agape Centre



# Community Food Share Uses Gardening as a Solution

Community Food Share can sum up its operation in three words – we feed people. Taking it a step further we offer our clients their choice of healthy items throughout the year using food we purchase or which is donated by our generous communities. To supplement those choices, we have three volunteer managed community gardens in Finch, Iroquois and Winchester providing our food banks with fresh produce from spring to fall. Grow-a-Row gardeners in our communities plant an extra row or donate extra vegetables to the CFS food banks. At the end of the season, Upper Canada Village gives our volunteers the opportunity to glean from their gardens and orchards. Through these partnerships we receive over three thousand pounds of fresh produce for clients.

Jane Schoones, Team Leader



**“I have found that I can’t buy all fresh produce anymore. Health wise my diet changed. The cost of meat is extremely high.”**

Food bank client testimonial

## Second Harvest Food Rescue Program

Local Food Banks are now accessing Second Harvest Food Rescue programs. Working with local food producers, food distributors, restaurants, grocery stores, food suppliers, Second Harvest collects surplus food and then connects that food to charities and non-profit organizations. Second Harvest keeps food safety at the forefront of their food rescue program ensuring that food donors and food banks comply with their donation and recovery guidelines. They insist that all facilities are adhering to local health unit requirements and provide safe food handling training as well. This program has made a difference to the 6 local food banks who use it. Meat, bread, and produce are being offered to the food banks thus providing an additional source of food.

## The Impact of Volunteers

The dictionary's definition of volunteering is "A person who does something, especially helping other people, willingly and without being forced or paid to do it. "

The real definition of volunteering is the "selfless act of kindness on making healthier and stronger communities without looking to get financial compensation". Without volunteers our organizations could not successfully operate and serve our clients.

Thousands of hours are volunteered at food banks across Eastern Ontario every year; tasks including but not limited to picking up food, serving clients, fundraising, and sitting on our board of directors and committees.

We truly appreciate the value of volunteers and the invaluable service they give.

Volunteers are local, kind, dedicated and hard-working community members who share their time and talents with our food banks.

For some, volunteering is an opportunity to give back to the community or make a difference in the lives of the people around them. For others, it's about developing new skills, building on existing knowledge and growing career opportunities and employment prospects.

Regardless of the motivation, what unites volunteers is that they find volunteering both challenging and rewarding.

Bonnie Pidgeon, Executive Director, South Grenville Food Bank

**"You saved my life. As I get older I feel the gap of not working anymore, and the food bank has really truly giving me purpose and value." Volunteer Ann**

**"Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless." – Volunteer Sherry Anderson**



**24% of food banks in Ontario are entirely volunteer run.**<sup>16</sup>

Feed Ontario's Hunger Report 2023



## Stormont-Dundas - South Glengarry

Population: 104,493

Data from Feed  
Ontario's Hunger in  
My Riding <sup>17</sup>

**13% Poverty  
Rate**

(Ontario has a 10%  
poverty rate)

**Food  
Bank  
Use**

5,609  
people  
used the  
food bank

36%  
visits are  
made by  
children

5 in 100  
residents  
use the  
food bank

**15% Child  
Poverty Rate**  
(Ontario has a  
11.5% child  
poverty rate)

Only 5 %  
are in  
social  
housing

31,084  
visits were  
made to  
food banks

36% of food  
bank clients rely  
on social  
assistance

## Leeds-Grenville- Thousand Islands & Rideau Lakes

Population: 104,070

Data from Feed  
Ontario's Hunger  
in My Riding <sup>17</sup>

**10% Poverty  
Rate**

(Ontario has a 10%  
poverty rate)

**Food  
Bank  
Use**

4197  
people  
used the  
food bank

32% of  
visits are  
made by  
children

4 in 100  
residents  
use the  
food bank

**11% Child  
Poverty Rate**  
(Ontario has a  
11.5% child  
poverty rate)

10% are in  
social  
housing

27090  
visits were  
made to  
food banks

67 % of food  
bank clients rely  
on social  
assistance

# Prescott -Russell & North Glengarry

Population: 109,980

Data from Feed Ontario's Hunger in My Riding <sup>17</sup>

**Food Bank Use**

**2,542 people used the food bank**

**33% of visits are made by children**

**8% Poverty Rate**

(Ontario has a 10% poverty rate)

**12,371 visits were made to food banks**

**2 in 100 residents use the food bank**

**7% Child Poverty Rate**  
(Ontario has a 11.5% child poverty rate)

**22% are renters**

**33% of food bank clients rely on social assistance**





# Reflections

- Food insecurity is a direct result of financial insecurity. The majority of food bank users are on fixed incomes that cannot meet the costs of their most basic needs: food and housing. People coming to food banks need more food than the supplemental amount they receive at food banks which is usually 7-10 days worth of food. The living wage in Eastern Ontario is \$20.60 per hour or \$40170 a year (based on a 37.5 hour per week of work). Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support program and Old Age Security fall far below this amount. We are encouraged that the Government of Ontario has started to raise ODSP benefits but realistically, the \$1308 benefit for a single person will not cover the cost of food and housing in Ontario. There is a special dietary benefit available for ODSP recipients who have special dietary requirements, perhaps as the cost of all food continues to rise, this food benefit should be available to all ODSP recipients. Being employed does not guarantee that a person will be able to pay for their basic needs. Many jobs are part time, pay minimum wage, have no benefits and are not secure in the present economic condition. Businesses in Eastern Ontario should be encouraged to work towards offering living wage jobs.
- Housing insecurity has become as much of an issue as food insecurity. The housing stock is limited for everyone, however for those living in poverty, housing stock is almost nonexistent. Wait lists average 5 years for social housing across Eastern Ontario. There is a need for emergency, transitional and supportive housing but there are very few of these housing types available. As a result, people experiencing or at risk of homelessness are being seen in encampments, sleeping in business doorways and on foot pushing carts that contain their belongings, or are living in sheds and camping trailers often without heat, hydro and running water. All levels of government as well as community stakeholders need to work together to take action in addressing the housing crisis.
- Food banks are experiencing unprecedented numbers of new clients needing their services. Food banks are concerned with their ability to continue to meet the needs in their community as the needs continue to rise. Food Banks United members commit to working together to better serve our community.

## Put us out of business please!

Food Banks United members acknowledge that food banks are not the answer to food insecurity. While we assist in providing food that is needed immediately, we advocate for policy change that can provide people with the stability that they need.



# Glossary of Terms

**Bridges Out of Poverty:** is a framework designed to educate individuals from the middle or upper class on what it means to live in poverty, based on Dr. Ruby K. Payne's work.

**CFS:** Community Food Share

**CPP:** Canadian Pension Plan

**EOHU:** Eastern Ontario Health Unit

**Feed Ontario:** From securing fresh and healthy food sources, to driving change through policy research and innovative programming, Feed Ontario unites food banks, industry partners, and local communities in our work to end hunger and poverty.

**Food Banks Canada:** Food Banks Canada provides national leadership to relieve hunger today and prevent hunger tomorrow in collaboration with the food bank network in Canada.

**Food Banks United:** a collaborative of food banks from Stormont Dundas Glengarry and Grenville Counties.

**HOL:** House of Lazarus

**Hunger Count:** An annual report created by Food Banks Canada based on national data.

**Hunger Report:** An annual report created by Feed Ontario based on provincial data.

**ODSP:** Ontario Disability Support Program

**Ontario Market Basket Measure:** Based on concepts developed by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, the Market Basket Measure is a measure of low income based on the cost of a specified basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living.

**OW:** Ontario Works

**SGFB:** South Grenville Food Bank

**RCHS:** Rideau Community Health Services

## Acknowledgments

Voices United II was composed by Cathy Ashby, House of Lazarus

Report cover design by Justin Edwards, Agape Centre

with input from Lisa Duprau, Agape Centre

Amanda Petch, Brockville & Area Food Bank

Jane Schoones, Community Food Share

Joanne Franey, Rideau Community Health Services

Suzanne Gareau, St. Vincent de Paul Alexandria

Bonnie Pidgeon, South Grenville Food Bank

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# Food Banks United

In 2018, a group of food banks in SD&G and L&G started meeting on a regular basis. Our initial goal was to get to know each other: what do we do, who do we serve, how do we operate our food banks? Quickly we realized that we had resources and ideas that we could share, strengthening all of the food banks that we represent. Since its inception, Food Banks United has hosted several training opportunities for our collective volunteers; developed consistent messaging for our communities surrounding food bank use and people living in poverty; participated in the Grenville Plowing Match; written and presented provincially a report advocating for our clients needs; and hosted Feed Ontario's Road show for the 2022 Hunger Report. Voices United II our second report, is an example of the work that we continue to do collectively. Food Banks United is committed to our joint mission: Working together to address poverty; making real change in our communities.

## Vision Statement

Working together to address poverty; making real change in our communities.

## Mission Statement

People living in the Counties of Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, and Leeds & Grenville will have a better quality of life with equitable services.

Food Banks United has adopted the "Bridges Out of Poverty" definition of poverty: "The extent to which an individual does without resources." Lack of financial resources is the main reason that people access food banks— they simply cannot afford to feed their families. As with "Bridges Out of Poverty," Food Banks United also looks at a person's lack of resources in regards to their emotional needs, social needs, physical needs, relationship needs, support system needs, mental needs and spiritual needs.

**Food Banks United** is a collaborative of the following food banks:

**Agape Centre**, Cornwall;

**Brockville and Area Food Bank**, Brockville

**Community Food Share (CFS)**, Winchester, Morrisburg, & Finch;

**House of Lazarus (HOL)**, Mountain & Ingleside;

**Rideau Community Health Service's Food Cupboard (RCHS)**, Merrickville; and

**South Grenville Food Bank (SGFB)**, Prescott, Cardinal and Spencerville.

**St. Vincent De Paul Society**, Alexandria

# Introduction to Food Banks

Food banks in Canada began in the 1980's and were thought to be a temporary measure to help people access the food that they needed. Almost 40 years later, the need still exists. In Ontario, since 2019 the number of individuals accessing a food bank has grown by 57% to 800 822. In Eastern Ontario (Prescott & Russell Counties, Thousand Islands & Rideau Lakes, Leeds & Grenville Counties, Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry Counties) in 2022, local food banks fed 12348 individuals. In 2022, Food Banks United members saw a 25% increase in food bank usage.

Food Banks United's member agencies are each unique not-for-profit agencies. We are all governed by volunteer board of directors. All of our food banks are operated by a mix of staff and volunteers. Food given at a food bank is a supplemental supply of food, not all of the food that a person or family needs. The allotment of food given at each visit represents the amount of food needed for a period of 4-10 days, depending on the food bank. The food provided at our foodbanks is a combination of food that has been donated to the food bank and food purchased by the food bank.

A "client choice" model is followed whereby food bank users choose the items that they want; they are not handed prepared boxes/ bags of food. Food bank clients are limited as to the number of food items that they can take home each visit. Clients can visit a food bank only once a month. Some of our food banks offer emergency visits as well.

Several of Food Banks United's member agencies are members of the provincial food bank network, Feed Ontario and the national food bank network, Food Banks Canada.

Client dignity and confidentiality are extremely important to our food banks.

**"I find that I need help from the food bank more often,  
I'm so glad they are there to help me."**

Food bank client testimonial

**"Thank you for providing me with the means to feed and  
clothe my children & myself. It would not have happened  
without your support."**

- Food Bank client testimonial



# Agape Centre




The Agape Centre is Cornwall and area's largest Community Market (foodbank) and Community Kitchen program. We support over 3000 people monthly through our Community Market, 1100 of which are children. The Community Kitchen provides a hot lunch to an average of 150 people daily Monday to Saturday. We provide emergency food relief and clothing for those in crisis situations.

As a non-profit we rely 100% on donations of food, time and money from our donors and partners. Our social enterprise, the New For You thrift shoppe is our main source of revenue which is stocked thanks to donations from our generous community.

We partner with Foodbanks Canada, Feed Ontario, local grocery stores and wholesalers to address the issues of hunger and poverty, improve access to food and basic resources and to create awareness of the issues we have locally. Our team is focused on cultivating strong relationships with a network of agencies to ensure that our services are reaching as many people in need as possible. We are proud to say that in addition to our two main programs, we have two outdoor community fridge locations, a breakfast and lunch program for school aged children, a free income tax clinic and we are opening our city's first Community Shower program.

The Agape Centre - 40 Fifth St E, Cornwall

 613-938-9297

 [agapecentre.ca](http://agapecentre.ca)

 [receptionist@agapecentre.ca](mailto:receptionist@agapecentre.ca)

Community Market	Community Kitchen	Thrift Shoppe
613-938-9297 ext 126 <b>Monday - Friday</b> 8:00am-4:00pm	<b>Monday - Friday</b> 11:00am-1:00pm <b>Saturday</b> 11:00am-12:30pm	613-938-9297 ext 124 <b>Monday - Friday</b> 9:00am-3:30pm <b>Saturday</b> 9:30am-3:30pm

# Brockville and Area Food Bank



The Brockville & Area Food Bank has been helping feed people in our local community for over 30 years.

**Mission** - To provide emergency food support for persons in Brockville and surrounding area in a non-judgmental and accessible environment.


**Vision** - A hunger-free community.

We provide a five-day supply of emergency food to families and individuals in our community once a month and an additional supply once a year for a total of 13 food bank visits allowed annually

Our Food Bank helps other emergency food providers by donating food to support their operations. There are weekly donations to the Cooperative Care Center, Loaves and Fishes, Sunday Suppers, and local camps for at-risk youth.

Our food bank has deep roots in our local community. Every week we work with private donors and local businesses to stock our shelves and help feed people.

Brockville and Area Food Bank - 58 Buell St, Brockville

 613-342-0605

 [brockvilleandareafoodbank.ca](http://brockvilleandareafoodbank.ca)

## Food Bank

**Monday Closed**

**Tuesday 10am-3pm**

**Wednesday 10am-3pm**

**Thursday 10am-3pm**

**Friday 10am-3pm**

**2nd Monday each month**

**6pm-7:30pm**



# Community Food Share



Community Food Share serving Dundas and Stormont is a Healthy Choice, Client Choice food bank model with two locations in Dundas County (Morrisburg and Winchester) which are open three times a week.

We also have a one-day-a-week satellite in North Stormont (Finch) to serve residents who are unable to travel to our food bank locations.

CFS works with local partners to provide clients with additional support. CVITP Income Tax Program, Community Advocates Connect Clients to Social Services, Christmas Baskets, Back Packs for Homeless, Heat for the Holidays, Project Warmth and awareness of Linking Hands Programs.

Maintaining relationships with neighboring food banks through Food Banks United and community organizations is essential to furthering our mission. These partnerships help us collaborate, share resources, and provide services to people in need effectively.

The service provided by Community Food Share is direct assistance in combating hunger in our local community. It decreases dependence on the shrinking social services network and fulfills a persistent need in our rural communities.

613-898-0781  [communityfoodshare.ca](http://communityfoodshare.ca)  [admin@communityfoodshare.ca](mailto:admin@communityfoodshare.ca)

## Winchester

497 May Street  
613-774-0188

**Monday** 10am-12pm

**Wednesday** 7pm-9 pm

**Thursday** 1pm-3pm

To schedule an appointment  
Call 613-774-0188 Or  
Email: [winchester@communityfoodshare.ca](mailto:winchester@communityfoodshare.ca)

## Morrisburg

28 Ottawa Street  
613-543-0065

**Monday** 10am-12pm

**Wednesday** 7pm-9 pm

**Thursday** 1pm-3pm

To schedule an appointment  
Call 613-543-0065 Or  
Email: [morrisburg@communityfoodshare.ca](mailto:morrisburg@communityfoodshare.ca)

## Finch

**Thursday** 1pm-3pm  
By appointment

To reserve a hamper,  
schedule an appointment  
Call 613-774-0188 Or  
Email: [winchester@communityfoodshare.ca](mailto:winchester@communityfoodshare.ca)

# House of Lazarus



**Mission: Building Community Sharing Hope**

**Vision: House of Lazarus strives to be the first stop for resources and supports for those in need.**

House of Lazarus is an outreach mission which provides food, clothing and housing to those in need. House of Lazarus has two food bank locations, Mountain and Ingleside, and also provides a weekly community supper in Winchester, weekly breakfasts in Winchester and Morrisburg and a bi-weekly lunch in Morrisburg. Gift cards for our two thrift stores are available to our food bank clients as well as Community Food Share and South Grenville Food Bank clients. House of Lazarus has two family rental units, a warming centre and provides housing supports, such as rental arrears, heat arrears, hydro arrears and first and last month's rent, through the Last Resort Fund to people all across Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Counties. HOL is a partner in the Shalom Small Homes Kemptville affordable housing project.

House of Lazarus advocates for those living in poverty by providing data and stories of the needs in our community. HOL provides leadership with the Linking Hands Steering Committee the Dundas Housing Initiative.

House of Lazarus- 2245 Simms St Mountain

 613-989-3830  [hol.community](http://hol.community)  [cashby@housoflazarus.com](mailto:cashby@housoflazarus.com)

## Food Bank Hours: Mountain 10506 Clark Rd, Mountain

**Mondays** 9am-12pm  
**Tuesdays** 9am-12pm & 1pm-4pm  
**Wednesdays** 9am-12pm & 1pm-4pm  
**Thursdays** 10am-12pm & 1pm-6pm  
**Fridays** 9am-12pm

Please call 613-989-3830 or 613-612-3830 to make an appointment

## Food Bank Hours: Ingleside 15 Maple St, Ingleside

**Wednesdays** 9am-12pm & 1pm-4pm  
**Thursdays** 9am-12pm & 1pm-4pm  
**Fridays** 9am-12pm & 1pm - 4pm  
**Saturdays** 9am- 12pm & 1pm-4pm

Please call 613-989-3830 or 613-612-3830 to make an appointment



# Rideau Community Health Services Food Cupboard - Merrickville Site



Rideau Community  
Health Services

Your Community Health Centre

RIDEAU COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES (RCHS):  
RCHS' Food Cupboard Program (Merrickville site)

Rideau Community Health Services Food Cupboard Program (Merrickville site), is one of the many health promotion initiatives offered by RCHS. The Food Cupboard Program in Merrickville, formerly the “Emergency Food Cupboard” was renamed in 2022 to better reflect the services we are currently providing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, like other areas, the Food Cupboard Program in Merrickville saw our community’s needs greatly increase. Currently, the program supports 65 households and community members on a monthly basis monthly. Through donations to our Client in Need Fund, and donations of other non-perishable food and personal hygiene items, our extremely generous communities help the Food Cupboard Program meet the needs of our clients and community members.

Merrickville Food Cupboard - 354 Read St, Merrickville



613-269-3400 ext 247



[jfraney@rideauchs.ca](mailto:jfraney@rideauchs.ca)

## Merrickville

354 Read St, Merrickville

613-269-3400 ext 247

**Tuesday**

10am-2pm



# South Grenville Food Bank



South Grenville Food Bank opened its doors in 2002 with a vision and dream to help individuals, and families in need.

They serve three Townships: Augusta, Prescott and Edwardsburgh/Cardinal. Our head office is located in Prescott and additional outreach offices; one in Cardinal and one in Spencerville.

We also offer a delivery service to clients with barriers to accessing food. South Grenville Food Bank relies mainly on volunteers, donors, grants and the community for operation.

**Mission** - South Grenville Food Bank, a community based organization serving South Grenville, provides food to those in need. Everyone will be treated with respect, dignity and protection of privacy.

**Vision** - To eliminate hunger in South Grenville

**Our Objectives** - To relieve poverty by providing food and other supplies, by establishing, operating, and maintaining shelters for the homeless, and by providing counselling and other programs to relieve poverty.

South Grenville Food Bank - 136 Henry St West, Prescott

☎ 613-925-2444

🌐 [www.sdgfoodbank.ca](http://www.sdgfoodbank.ca)

✉ [foodforall@bellnet.ca](mailto:foodforall@bellnet.ca)

Prescott	Cardinal	Spencerville
136 Henry Street 613-925-2444 <b>Tues, Wed, and Thurs</b> 10am-1:30pm <b>Tuesday</b> 5pm-7pm <b>Friday</b> 10am-1:30pm	Cardinal Public Library 618 County Road 2 613-657-1967 <b>Wednesday</b> 10am-2pm and 5pm-7pm	Spencerville United Church 16 Centre Street 613-925-2444 <b>Thursday</b> 11am-1pm

# St Vincent De Paul Society - Alexandria



Saint-Vincent de Paul Alexandria Conference Sacré-Coeur, operates the Clothes, Thrift and Furniture store. Revenue generated from our store helps to finance the Food Bank. It could not survive without the generosity of donors throughout North and South Glengarry. Our business partners also play a big part in us being able to serve clients week after week.

The Food Bank provides North and South Glengarry residents who experience food insecurity with 7-10 days worth of food.

The Food Bank provides snacks and milk to families with young children. We aim to offer a variety of foods including dry and canned good, fresh and frozen as well as fresh vegetables in the summer time. We also provide hygienic products on demand.

The Food Bank is open on Tuesdays only. Hours of operation are 9:30-11:00am and 1:30-3:00pm. We are located at the back of the Sacré-Coeur Catholic Church in Alexandria. In 2023, the Food Bank gave out over 2000 baskets of food. At Christmas alone, it provided 250 baskets of food to families in need.

St Vincent De Paul Society - 162 Main St S, Alexandria

613-525-0941

[saintvincentalexandria@gmail.com](mailto:saintvincentalexandria@gmail.com)

## Food Bank Hours

613-525-0941

**Tuesdays**

9:30-11:00am

1:30-3:00pm

