



Agenda 2030: Edmonton Food Security Report

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BACKGROUND



The 2030 Agenda focuses on building capacity, education and action across the Prairie provinces in order to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the grassroots up. It is an effort to foster connections between individuals, initiatives, agencies and networks doing food security, anti-poverty, anti-racism and gender equity work across the Prairies.

Throughout November 2021 - February 2022, the West Hub of Righting Relations (constituted by partner agencies and individuals from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) brought together teams of agencies and individuals who have been working to support the food security needs of vulnerable members in each of the three provinces. Participants came together to reflect on their learnings and identify strategies to strengthen food security. In Edmonton, a number of these partners had worked together over the past two years to respond to food needs throughout the pandemic as part of the Edmonton COVID19 Rapid Response Collaborative.

The following report articulates the priorities that these hands-on agencies feel are important for Edmonton to consider as we move forward beyond the pandemic and into what all feel are even

more challenging times. Our approach is to use the participants' language and narrative as much as possible while translating the larger trends and ideas. This report provides insight into practical strategies and solutions that need to be at the center of efforts to strengthen food sovereignty, respond to climate change and achieve the SDGs.

The West Hub of Righting Relations is facilitated by the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, a nonprofit charitable organization based out of Edmonton (Alberta) that works to advance dignity, freedom, justice, and security through collaborative relationships and transformative education on peace and human rights. Righting Relations Canada (RRC) is a heart-centred, national network of adult educators, community organizers and Indigenous Peoples of the world working for radical social change through decolonization and popular education to bring about a just society in Canada.

SNAPSHOT OF FOOD SECURITY IN EDMONTON

Food Insecurity has long been an issue that spurred the opening of the first Food Bank in Canada, located right here in Edmonton, Alberta in 1981. Yet after 40 years, we are no closer to ending food insecurity and hunger despite exhaustive campaigns and events throughout the year with the constant ask for donations of money, food and time. One begs the question of why it seems things have only gotten worse in recent years - inflation, increasing levels of poverty and the cascading effects of the pandemic would be some of the common answers you would likely hear from agencies and volunteers. However, the issues stem deeper than that - systemic ideals, policies and barriers collide to create a worsening situation for many with no actions to alleviate these barriers. It is increasingly evident that the level of food insecurity in Alberta, and really, across all of Canada, is deepening without effective actions being taken. The time is to get bold and innovative in our work to recognize the fundamental right to food and eliminate poverty.

Canada, and all levels of government within Canada, are responsible for promoting and protecting human rights for all as enshrined within the International Bill of Rights passed in 1966 at the United Nations and forms the basis of international law and the commitments of states to citizens. This Bill includes two Covenants; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). **When looking at poverty, we must take a rights based approach but we must also use these international documents to remind and educate our government and citizens on our obligations to human rights.**

According to Article 11 of the ICESCR ; *“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.”*

Policy needs to emphasize and focus on the importance that food is a basic human right for survival and well-being. If you don't address basic needs first, this creates a ripple effect with huge impacts. The positive effects of ensuring access and security for all is overall well-being of an individual, family, household, community, economy and society; the negative is that this as a whole suffers, leading to decreased productivity, revenue, investment and more strain on agencies, healthcare system and individuals and families as they continue to struggle and their well-being deteriorates. Lack of basic needs is one of the root causes of poverty - so by creating opportunities and accessibility to affordable, nutritious food, you can address other issues.

We call for a commitment to the right to food by all levels of government. The federal government must provide leadership and push for a rights based approach within federal policy. The federal government must refocus efforts and build and invest in a new narrative around food.

If you don't take care of food first; health and nutrition, you have sicker people, an overwhelmed health system and it goes right down the line and ricochets. Then people have to provide care to take care of others, [they] also can't afford medications. This is the ROOT cause. Food first. Food keeps people healthy and then you can address the other issues.

The Depth and Longer Term Realities

Many organizations and advocates are seeing poverty really deepening in the community. The depth of poverty and the depth of our collective grief and trauma, not only from COVID but also from our history of colonization, presents us with major challenges that **require a spectrum of food efforts; from emergency response to building self-reliance.**

With food support, there's always need for food but I feel with my humble experience in the community is that need to have advanced reconciliation with everyone to eliminate racism, to have livable incomes, affordable transportation, affordable quality childcare, affordable access to mental health services and addiction supports, and recently there has been a lot of need for mental health support. We've experienced this directly in the community...with many suicidal attempts or suicides happening. And that's because of these different challenges that people were facing. Really like reinforce the support side of not just food needs. There's other needs that are underlying with this.

Food is getting so expensive, the working class people can't afford that. I feel that every week when we [the providers] go out, buy some stuff. We have people...even working class people, they're coming because they are not getting enough income to buy the food because food prices are very expensive. My peanut butter is up 24% and is a basic. We don't know how we can tackle the system, because they are strong, they have big companies, big money, power, politicians, everything they have they're important.

Inflation and food shortages are happening. The trend with food overall is that things are increasing in costs and accessibility is harder.

The living wage estimate has increased in the past two years. It is around \$18.40 per hour. This is what one needs to make to live now. We need a liveable wage just to afford to live with the basics.

One of the things that I've learned the most is just how food insecurity is a symptom of larger economic insecurity and mental health issues. It's just the thing that gets pushed to the margins and I think one thing I really realized is how much food insecurity is related to mental health and how food security can really affect mental health.

Stretched Agency Capacity

Those on the front line working closest to the community carry a significant amount of weight and responsibility which generally goes unrecognized and without funding support. Staff and volunteers have experienced higher levels of stress and burnout from the emotional toll of the work they do. Often when agencies set boundaries in order to find better balance, it is met with anger which creates guilt. Participants discussed how heavy the weight is on some agencies and those involved and how inequitable the distribution of resources are. **We call for a commitment to supports to ensure agency staff have space to debrief on their work and ensure our helpers are cared for.** Recognizing and valuing those who do this frontline food work is important.

I learned that there are people who are truly grateful for what you give them. But on the other side there are people that expect it, and that's hard for me to deal with. That's part of the reason why I knew I needed a break because I was becoming somewhat judgmental and frustrated with people with their attitudes and stuff and that this is just something that they were entitled to.

I've learned my own limitations and that I can't do it all. I've learned how to read people. Because of the amount of deliveries that we have, I tell people, it can take up to five days to get it out to them but I can read the tone in their voice if they have nothing. And then I know to ask that question. When was the last time you ate? Are you in a situation that you have nothing because we will get it out to you right away.

People bring in so many experiences with them and they project these experiences on to you. It's part of the process.

As we've seen so far in 2022, inflation levels are reaching the highest levels in 30 years. In Alberta alone, utility prices skyrocketed in January & February, leaving many families to choose between utilities and groceries. Those choosing food will deal with the repercussions of falling behind on bills for months, and those choosing utilities will have to buy significantly lower amounts of or less nutritious food. We are seeing increased instability and many are at their breaking point as the pandemic moves into the two-year mark. **Agencies urge action as there is fear we will see an increase in people seeking help as poverty worsens and agencies involved are already having a hard time keeping up with demand.**

I found myself in a pretty big burnout. Right now I just needed some time away. I've had to put in some processes to not take less than the weekends and evenings and not have my phone going off 100 times a day. This work has really opened my eyes into a whole different part of Edmonton and the struggles that people have.

I'm only one person running this program, without any (experience in) promotion or nonprofit organization or some kind of organization (funding).

I'm working an eight hour shift almost every day [with my day job] so that's very tough for us and we have a very small group. Only able to help if people want to come and pick up their food. I think if people are hungry, they can make a little bit of effort too because all we did right, last one and half year, we were out in the parking lots. We were not in the office, we were outside, it didn't matter if it was minus 35 or +35. That's why we limited only for pick up.

I have a lot of people that have become dependent on us. I'm not really sure what to do about that, like how to handle that. I know you try and, you know, connect them with other agencies, and they, it's almost like they become so connected with you that they don't want to deal with anybody else - they just want you and, and we do the best we can, but you can't do it all. That's where we find ourselves right now.

Strategies for Change

Let's make our city a city of no poverty. Let's shake those people who are making decisions. We are people who have to give our voice for people who have no voice. (Participant)

Government Investment in Food Efforts

Second Harvest, Community Food Centre Canada, Food Banks – agencies such as these are starting to **allocate 30% of their budgets to specifically focus on ethnocultural communities and vulnerable groups**. The City should use these types of budget guidelines to support grassroots organizations to have more capacity and ensure more equitable distribution of resources. There is not a need to create new funding schemes but in fact **build equity and investment into existing mechanisms such as the Community Investment Operating Grant**. There needs to be more efforts from municipal and provincial governments to follow this model in providing support.

We've witnessed different levels of government advocating for this but the funding is just not there or it has restrictions on how it can be used. Advocacy to city council and government is needed to secure funding for collaborative partnerships and an ease of restrictions for funding.

*The City needs to evaluate where money is best spent rather than projects that currently have little to no sustained value in the near future. Excessive funding was put into developing the Ice District. A pandemic caused venues such as this to remain empty for the better part of two years, bringing in no revenue. If the same kind of funding went into addressing societal issues such as homelessness, spaces to house non-profit organizations to collaborate and community gardens, we might actually make improvements to food insecurity. **The City of Edmonton and provincial government need to invest into their citizens well-being to work through these hard times and build towards lasting change.** Shift our mentality away from infrastructure for job creation towards a care and food economies.*

Alberta Jobs Now was cited as a great idea but unrealistic for grassroots efforts. CANAVUA applied for three drivers. The organization would have to provide 75% of the positions' pay. So although they were successful with their application they cannot follow through as they were unable to come up with the additional funding needed. The provincial government does not allow more than one grant to support the position so there is no way for the organization to fill that gap despite the positive benefits that would bring to their programs. Programs that support wages and job creation need to take into account the unique barriers for grassroots and non-profit groups in meeting a portion of the costs.

Build more flexibility into community operating grants to accommodate grassroots organizations. Grassroots organizations are often praised for their good work but there is not any funding to support them because of inflexible guidelines or simple lack of resources. The City is willing to fund additional positions for personal safety of citizens, but where is the funding to improve wellbeing and tackle long term effects of food security.

We call for the City of Edmonton to take away some of the bureaucracy - example, the reliance on charitable organizations. If you don't have a charitable number but are doing charitable work, you face so many barriers.

Ensure Appropriate and Adequate Food and Necessities

Complaints around the usability and nutritional value of food hampers - lots of starches, carbs, sugars and low nutritional value. Individuals and families may also need further assistance to use these foods - lack of education on how to cook the foods provided, or lack of a can opener to open the food, all leads to food waste and inaccessibility.

There is a need to take a holistic look at the impact of food insecurity on an entire household. Jobs are precarious and insecure for many and what used to be the "middle class" has further devolved into the upper and lower as more people struggle to make ends meet. Parents will often choose to feed their children before themselves, leading to lack of productivity at work, uncertainty, and decreased overall well-being. Children who are not eating properly cannot focus or succeed at school or extra-curricular activities. Pets are also part of the family and being unable to provide them with proper nutrition may lead to costly vet bills, malnourishment, unintended neglect and increased anxiety/stress.

Accessibility and affordability of food means families can spend money on other needs, such as medications, extra-curricular activities, home repairs, and other purchases that stimulate the economy and strengthen well-being. The ripple effects, both positive and negative, ricochet from an individual level and can also benefit the economy and community as a whole.

Simple things like toilet paper or cat food, dog food, feminine hygiene products; all that kind of stuff are still very much in need... [There is] stress of not being able to have these basic items.

I noticed with making prepared foods, it's just like one less thing that people have to worry about especially like seniors, single parent families - there were people that were grandparents raising their kids and their grandkids [intergenerational households that utilized these meals because they were easy and already prepped].

When we're able to provide people a little bit more, it allows them to offset what resources they do have to other needs. There's always other needs like kids' medications and all those things which are always the last thing that people can afford, so when we actually provide enough people can think about prioritizing those other things [and providing better care and nurturance of children].

Providing food needs to tailor to the unique needs of each person. By doing so, we eliminate waste and create dignity.

There's often a lot of issues with culturally appropriate food, because the demographic is so diverse we would often get requests for certain things that we weren't able to provide. Sometimes the food we would get a lot of people wouldn't know how to make it. Why take that if you don't know what to do with it? Another thing that I think is really big to note is that in food work it's important to give ready to eat foods; things that may not need to be prepared, or need additional materials to actually be edible. Because some people don't have [means] to go cook the food.

We asked clients why they are not accessing other food support systems in place. Many expressed they just never felt it was culturally appropriate. They did not use the food or find it helpful for them. Equity in food is realizing that not everyone eats the same things and one food hamper does not fit all. There needs to be more sensitivity and education on cultural relevance and various dietary needs within agencies.

The Food Bank allows for clients to ask for THREE special requests in a hamper. A household can have a variety of needs - feminine hygiene products, laundry or cleaning products, infant needs, pet food. People are forced to choose.

As a community we need to find a way to ensure people have enough and can care for their families.

Collaborative and Connection Spaces for Agencies and Frontline

Given the breadth of groups and agencies doing food response work, collaboration is a critical piece to address food insecurity as well as bring in effectiveness and efficiencies for the betterment of our response efforts and resources.

*Collaboration is so critical in the food support sector in Edmonton, but it is also challenging because there's no kind of resources or weight given to any sort of agencies to do that work to really facilitate that collaboration. The Food Bank has individual partnerships but there is a role, for either them or another group, to play in terms of strengthening partnerships across agencies. Seeing that the Food Bank has partnerships in areas of the city and cultivating those relationships and collaboration. I have also learned however that there's a reluctance to collaborate as well and it comes to some people just being so stretched that collaboration just seems like another thing to do and it is not easy, it is hard. Thus why it **requires a dedicated agency or group doing that collaborative work.***

I also realized in this work that collaboration is really hard, because when you have situations like this when you have different partners brought in we did find that it got kind of tricky at times.

Building space for connection and direct service outreach among agencies strengthened our capacity to leverage each other's unique skills, talents and community connections grew through our emergency response work together.

It's hard but we need to find a way to bring a new solution. We need to put human beings first more than paper and so that way I think we would have a good society, and try to [achieve] equity. But it's a shame. If we fail, we fail together. To have success, we're going to have to work together.

Support agencies and group spaces to be able to share, vent and express when they have negative experiences with community members seeking support. Create a model that helps staff and volunteers build empathy and compassion to best help serve individuals that are working through trauma, stress and poverty and may project on others.

I have to spend a fair amount of time going over when they have a negative person or someone says something nasty and trying to not let them take it personally. We don't know what [people] are going through. We have to remember that. It's a big area working on staff and volunteers about empathy.

People bring so many experiences with them and they project these experiences on to you. It's part of the process.

Ensure organizations and community groups are able to continue to come together and try to build each other up and support one another.

I have learned that in Edmonton, there is a really big sense of community holding.

Collaborative work is so important - being able to collaborate and build up community hubs similar to the C5 pantry would be a great first step. The City should support intentional collaboration efforts such as this as it covers so many different areas.

Continuing the collaboration is absolutely essential. Need to sustain the work we are doing, the emergency response component and longer term work as well.

Strengthen Dignified Accessibility to Food and Wrap Around Services

Individuals and families need support to ensure dignity in accessing food for themselves and all in the household.

The last thing that's sitting with me is related to people with disabilities and seniors. I remember one of the very first cases that came in was a single senior lady in her home. She couldn't go out. She couldn't access anything. She couldn't cook for herself. It's not just about a food hamper sometimes. It's about giving people that dignity in what they eat, and I was really happy that we were able to push the Food Bank to do more dispatch through that partnership with Drive Happiness. I feel like there's so much more work to do to figure out how to make things accessible.

There needs to be an assessment of how we can ensure people have options for accessibility and increase delivery of hampers.

The families who aren't able to come pick up their food bank hampers... or have other things limiting that because unfortunately we don't have capabilities to deliver their hampers. So if they don't pick up their hamper, they just don't get it. Then they have to wait for the next week so then they're going another week without food. And that is so unfortunate that there's not really another alternative for those families.

Winter is a whole other game vs. summer weather - the cold makes it harder in terms of accessibility and more stressful, it can be difficult getting transportation; cars not starting or buses being canceled. For those with disabilities or seniors, going out when there is so much ice on the sidewalks can be treacherous, so they stay home, becoming more vulnerable and isolated from basic needs.

We need to consider food waste and how unused items can be donated or given back.

A lot of folks don't have ways to carry food home - the way it is packed and hard to get home. When you get a box from the food bank, sometimes you can't give back things that you won't use or need (even if you are still on site). There must be an investment and growth of models like the C5 pantry to allow people to pick what is most helpful for them from the supply on hand. People pick items that they truly will use, reducing food waste. There needs to be assessment of these types of policies and push for change.

When people come for food, they don't necessarily want to be talking about other pieces - want to come and go. Others however do have needs and having someone with social work training or ability to help people connect to resources is useful.

We call for the investment into more community hubs in every community across the city.

This is the basis of the market with C5. 99% of families will have complexities and need for other services that they need connection to. Community hubs are critical and the reason why the market was built; to provide access to and integrating services together. It's a difficult and long process but it is worth doing. Meeting people where they live and creating that relationship allows people to be interconnected and create solutions.

Food insecurity and poverty are complex problems that take more than Band Aid solutions to fix. Just addressing the singular issue of food insecurity is not enough. There needs to be some sort of tie-in to other services and referral opportunities for families and community members to be empowered and find creative solutions to complex problems. This is a difficult but necessary process to be able to support families as they move along the continuum of service needs. Integration of services and providing referrals requires building relationships with community members, skilled staff to be able to navigate and triage community members as needed, buy-in from partners. There are a lot of moving parts but well worth it.

One thing I noticed was that food is just one of the issues that we saw. So, a lot of times people would come in for food but also would need additional support whether it's income or housing or just redirection or on who to talk to about certain things. So it was really nice actually having a social worker right there because they were able to point people in the right direction to the best of their ability.

I feel like we've all done a really good job of connecting people together and finding this person/agency can do this and we've had just such incredible volunteers. I really think that a major solution moving forward is just creating more community food hubs and working with volunteers and people to take the pressure off of some of the agencies that are already doing the work.

Another key element is the need for referrals and directly connecting people into services. At Bethel pantry it became more than just a pantry and ended up including community based advocates, the Primary Care Network and Edmonton Police Service. We tried to bring people into that space so it acted like a bit of a hub for folks when they came in. People need support on things like income support applications. It is so, so complex but it really pointed out to me the need to not only the coordination of food but also the coordination of these intersecting basic rights that people have that connect to the bigger picture of poverty.

I see places like the C5 pantry and it would be just amazing if people could have places like that where they can come in, have dignity and pick up things that are useful to them and know it's a safe space, and have accessibility like that. And have places that are [accessible] when maybe other places are closed or you can't go during the day. I really hope down the road that I can be involved in something important like that.

When parents are in a state of addiction or having other struggles to provide food for family, kids get foods from other sources (schools) - with closures due to COVID it was difficult for them to still access these resources. **Bring forward opportunities for schools to help kids be able to access food or “shop” for their family.** Work with programs like Big Brothers, Big Sisters, allowing youth to be able to help their families.

Access to exercise programs - people need something else to do. Promote good health and monthly passes as it is good for mental health as well.

Care for and Celebrate the Helpers in Our Community

There is incredible power in the community. Mobilizing it and putting it to work can have impactful results as we saw with groups like CANAVUA, We Together and YEG Community Response to COVID19.

Civil society here in Edmonton is vibrant. We have an idea about what we want to achieve, we know the need in our community. We need more resources and some people in the government are not thinking about civil society. COVID-19 happened suddenly. We need to have another approach to give a solution in a proper manner.

Facebook became a huge connection point for collaboration but also a fundamental connection point for folks in the community struggling.

The City needs to support agencies and organizations that are grassroots. It is a lot cheaper all around in fact. If the city understood all that is happening and supported the smaller initiatives; that needs to be the new model. It can be beneficial for both clients and is cost-effective. **Grassroot agencies need to be given more value for our voices.** We are on the front line and have the most insight and thus able to suggest and implement the most relevant and appropriate solutions.

Voice and choice are also essential elements to community members' dignity in accessing services. This puts them at the center of their decision making with us service providers as guides.

Wonder about increasing the value of our voice. We are undermined by decision makers - they don't see the value of what we bring to the table. If we were listened to, we could bolster. Rather than new committees etc in the City, create a powerful unified voice.

Smaller grassroots organizations have tried to bring together partners or apply for funding but they require a charitable organization #. This adds another level of bureaucracy and barriers as all these things take time and effort when some of these people are running these initiatives alongside another full-time job or out of their homes.

We call for an audit and review of the barriers that are created in fulfilling the right to food by grassroots groups.

There is unnecessary bureaucracy and push back from community-led initiatives. For example, the LoveGood Boxes in Edmonton. There has been significant pushback from the City around permits, food safety and accessibility. The LoveGood Food Exchange boxes engaged with community partners such as the Edmonton Police Service; building relationships. These boxes helped vulnerable groups including unhoused, seniors, single parents and those with disabilities. Yet they've faced huge barriers that have led to being shut down or inability to expand, destroying opportunities for this community-led program to create positive impacts on food accessibility. Proper guidance and support should be given to allow these community led programs to be successful.

The City of Edmonton and Province needs to take another look at risk aversion - let's work at finding solutions rather than denying projects that are feeding people. People are willing to work to find solutions rather than just be shut down.

Grassroots organizations and community agencies want to get involved to help support their community but find barriers that delay or stop them entirely.

Tried to get a LoveGood Food Box put on property (city-owned), it would have taken up a square of cement. City denied due to it being park land and stated that there are other agencies doing food support in the city so it was unnecessary.

Grassroots are relying more on volunteers because they cannot get funding for paid staff and it is not easy for them to manage. **There is a need for more assistance creating, organizing and recruiting volunteers to help - we've seen that volunteer recruitment and retention has been an ongoing issue for the non-profit sector.**

Help fund food initiatives to employ people who face barriers in employment and help with real work that impacts the community!

Many of those leading these initiatives work full time to support their own households, then do this additional work for free. Employing those who face barriers to employment or are underemployed shows investment in citizens and promotes a community of care.

Grassroots organizations who currently collaborate with larger agencies can feel undervalued or increased pressure to be recognized as legitimate. Some also feel they need to be discreet or tread carefully for fear of losing these partnerships. If these organizations could be given funding to operate independently there would be less struggle with power and behaviors that don't create safe spaces of collaboration.

Decolonizing Major Agencies and Approaches

There is a need for intentional efforts to apply anti-oppression and anti-racism lenses to the work of the larger food agencies in our community.

*I attended the AGM for the Food Bank and remember looking at the Board and the governance and the representation. While it's such an important agency in our community, I think my learnings from that is we really need to decolonize it. We need people on the food bank board who are representative; we need more staff that are representative. I love the food bank, I think they play such an important role but **how do we shift them a little bit to think about some of these things and challenge the approaches so that we can make food accessible to all.***

There are a lot of issues with a lot of agencies and the food bank but I think us coming together and trying to fix those and trying so we can make these systemic changes but right now people need to eat. We need to figure out now how to do that while working on the systemic changes. Food security is a human right yet I think it's almost the opposite at times.

There is a mentality that if you are hungry enough, you will eat anything given to you so you should be thankful. But often the complaints we see around food hampers is that they have food that is foreign to that household and they will not eat it or have no idea how to prepare it, so it goes to food waste - how is that helpful?

Anti-oppression and anti-racism work comes through action together.

There's so much stigma around being food insecure that needs to be understood. I had some experiences at the beginning, interacting with some agencies and they just were not trauma informed at all. People are reaching out and [we need] understanding for where they're coming from, and giving people less hoops to jump through in order to secure healthy food for their families, and be flexible and trauma informed. We want to be efficient and we want everyone to get food but you have to understand where people are coming from, and the trauma that they've experienced from the systems and government - particularly Indigenous peoples. Especially the role of the church and people interacting with churches and how they have experiences where they just don't trust those systems and we have to understand that. I'm really proud of the work that we've done in the way of being flexible with people.

There must be a commitment made by stakeholders to ensure voices are heard in decision-making processes and informed policy change.

Larger scale agencies need to ensure they are promoting accessibility. We have heard of multiple cases of individuals and families being banned from accessing the Food Bank due to lack of ID or being unable to pick up their hampers – that is not a dignified approach, it is a blaming approach and does not seek to “understand” the person or challenges they face; multiple challenges including work schedule, transportation, houselessness are just a few that must be taken into account.

One of the other barriers that we were finding really challenging was a lot of people, especially single moms, who if they couldn't get to the food bank to pick up their hamper at the right time they actually got banned from the food bank. And it's one thing to be able to pick up your food hamper but it's [another] to get the transportation, taking a bunch of munchkins with you to go get the food, and how much energy that takes. My friends with disabilities always talk about the Spoon Theory and how much energy it takes them to do one thing compared to somebody like me who's fully able bodied - I think about a single mom with three kids. And how much energy that would take just to go pick up that hamper and get it home.

We call for trauma informed and rights based approaches within all major agencies. There should be requirements for this connected to funding. We must recognize that everyone has their trauma. We need to show how things escalate and ensure there are people that can respond to them. Education on trauma informed approaches and mental health first aid for major agencies is a must. We call for an assessment of training that is happening with agencies and mandate this.

Barriers of Identification

I can see how you're all operating and just letting people come to get food and not asking people for all these levels of red tape or information. We found early on that people who were Two Spirit or Trans in particular did not feel comfortable asking for food due to the ask for identification. It may not be required, but its asked for. How do we unpeel the layers and create access to food with dignity?

There's this language of the abuse of the system which kept coming up which I really struggled with because I felt like let's just make sure people have enough. The idea of a once a month food hamper for example, I honestly can't imagine how a family gets through on that. To me it is about dignity. How do we create that dignity, how do we work through the red tape.

*COVID gave us a lot of chances to push for innovation because we were in emergency but my fear is we're going we're going back to like all the layers of information that's needed which I understand, but **it's those layers of information that we require that put up so many barriers to those that are really marginalized.***

Our experience with a food bank has been really positive. I do have to [work with them] because the food bank is the primary supporter of our food hamper program. I do have to ask for all that information - address, birthdates ID, phone numbers, all of that. Some people are really hesitant to give out so I have to really emphasize that it's only for record keeping, it's not shared with anybody. But that will [potentially] be a deterrent for some people asking if I have to ask for that information.

A big part I think of the food work is just making sure that it's done with a sense of dignity. In just communicating with people I know that having to provide all that information - I'm having to have their IDs and their children's IDs and their source/amount of income - that is not something that a lot of people are really comfortable with sharing.

We need to streamline the processes for accessing the food bank and other resources for people accessing the food bank but also for community groups that are trying to fill some of those gaps.

People have dignity and I found that by asking them too many questions they just felt very vulnerable. What I thought about is that you can communicate with someone that's a leader in their community, and have that neither share the names and then I will just put forward their names for food hampers and other supports that he was able to do. And that's helped a lot, because this way they don't feel vulnerable with me they don't know who I am. They don't know who the other team member is but they know their leader in the community so it really helped kind of process that communication.

It became easier for us to just separate ourselves from the food bank in some ways and just serve people but in a way to me, that kind of defeats the purpose because we need to be bolstering and expanding the way the food bank works as they were such an important partner.

Think about how issues like this would affect mental health. Some would rather go without, rather than go through all the barriers and mental trauma and we have seen.

When we would give food to people and they would be crying or just so grateful I think that's great but I think it also kind of shows what they're used to coming up against all the time. They're used to having to jump through so many hoops to get their food or to get anything...they're so surprised or shocked, and I think that we need to get to a point where that isn't the case.

LoveGood Boxes are an example of good practises - people appreciate it because it is anonymous. People have pride or they come from a culture where there is a stigma if you are unable to provide food for your family, or need to ask for help. The anonymity of the boxes really drew people to those boxes so they can maintain dignity.

Put pressure on organizations who are not recognizing this culture of food sharing and human dignity by denying people access due to issues like lack of ID and putting up other barriers that lead to people being hesitant to access.

We call for the development of a city-wide “food library card” or database that agencies can collaborate on and have to work together on. At C5 hub, people's names are on a list. People are a “member” and you have a card for the family and

their information is on file. Then it is a quick and non-intrusive check in to get what you need. Methods such as these reduce barriers and ensure they don't have to go through such intrusive methods over and over. This could be modeled across the city and allow people to access foods at multiple points but also to monitor track and share data across these points. May help reduce stigma, barriers and allow for efficient referrals while ensuring we have protocols and agreements for data sharing.

There is a lot of shame and guilt associated with asking for food. There is a real need for balance and strengthened coordination. Food is cultural and food shame is cultural.

There is understanding about the need for balance, tracking and ensuring limited abuse of the system, but many of the agencies are unified in wanting to promote dignity and a holistic approach rather than demanding data.

My other really big learning is the piece around food dignity. We really saw early on how hard it is for people to access food and ask for help, and how people will often leave asking for help until [they are] in dire circumstances and then it's even more difficult for them. Creating these spaces of anonymity where people can access food without that shame was fundamental.

Strengthen Local Production and Distribution

There should be more advocacy and policy change to decrease barriers that prevent local producers and farmers from selling their products. As seen in countries such as India, globalization and monopolizing the food industry benefits larger chain producers but leaves small farmers at a disadvantage. Allowing farmers to sell their excess products would reduce food waste. We also need to provide connections and opportunities for farmers to donate to groups who could distribute to those who can not afford.

We call on Municipal and Provincial Governments to lead the way in creating specific parameters around the distribution of excess foods and establish clear rights based food strategies. These parameters should be built from recommendations made through community engagement with local agencies on what specific areas of focus and what groups could benefit or have most needs of food donations or funding.

We call for requirements that demand that urban landscapes incorporate food forest strategies that allow for more localized access to traditional foods.

Strengthen Food Rescue

We call for a collective approach to businesses and put some responsibility on them in terms of food rescue, donation and social responsibility. As a large group that is the only way to fill the shortage, funding dollars aren't enough. We need outreach to business and facilitation of connection and partnerships that ensures distribution of excess food. This effort can bolster the movements and efforts to "Support Local".

Access to quality food is vital, not just what we can get. Building collaborative partnerships and putting ownership on businesses directly in the food industry to take some social responsibility to give back as well (on a consistent and meaningful scale). There are many examples where this is taking place already but it needs to be a coordinated effort that way it can yield better results. With the cost of food continuing to rise families will only be experiencing more difficult situations going forward.

Returnable food/food waste - at depots, clients have been told by the food bank that they can not take back any fresh items that clients will not use. The food bank will only accept back non-perishables. Depots are told to throw out fresh produce, leading to food waste. We need to work with the local Food Bank and depots on how these excess items could be utilized in the community.

Access to Space

Due to lack of funding and expansion of efforts, many of our agencies have been fighting to find space. Many have to resort to renting or using personal space. An example brought up was that a large warehouse was converted north of downtown where multiple non-profits were given space to operate out of. Why are grassroots food and response agencies not included in this when we could most benefit from that?

We tried to rent out a cold storage unit but were told they would need a charitable organization to partner with them. It was suggested to use the Edmonton Food Bank, but the head office administration is in Ontario so we had to go through them to be accepted in Edmonton. It ended up that there was no possibility and it fell through. It has taken nearly a year to find appropriate storage space for food as programs expanded to feed more people. Many agencies working together, we need to think about this and strengthen our capacity. Maybe one big space and each organization has access in order to serve many clients.

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A gifted community subsidized space would make a huge impact on smaller grassroots operations such as Bear Clan and We Together. It would also bring our agencies together so we could collaborate in the work.

Collaboration with Farmers/Land Use

There must be strengthening of collaboration with rural communities, local farmers and efforts to advance land use opportunities. Many local farmers struggle to maintain their livelihood. Newcomers are looking for opportunities to work, learn and give back to their community. There are potential partnerships to foster relationships between agencies and local farmers to collaborate. There are also many areas, both urban and rural, where land is not being utilized effectively. **This land could be used for food production or community gardens, greenhouses or food forests.** We have seen that rural communities struggle due to lack of resources and accessibility in their area; solutions like this address that need. Resources: [Rock Soup Green House and Food Bank](#)

There needs to be a place where farmers can connect with agencies in order to be able to offload surplus produce and have it go to people who need it. We also need to enable and promote gleaning as a practice; to approach farmers and ask to glean their land of anything they will not use.

GLEANNING is an ancient practice that allows the collection of unharvested crops for distribution to needy populations, and was once recognized as a legal right for the poor in other countries. The practice continues today, and given the increasing attention focused on food waste, the movement is growing and can be utilized more to support local agencies and individuals/families. Resource: [Gleaning Handbook - Farm to Cafeteria Canada](#)

We also need to build a land sharing network in order for people to connect to land that is available to be cultivated. In the City, we also need to promote yard sharing.

Strengthen Growing, Processing and Storage of Food

Strengthen growing, processing and storing of food through collectives and at the individual level. When we focus on more locally produced and grown, it leads to less waste and less environmental impact. On the individual level we are creating autonomy and education for people to grow their own food.

- Edible Plants for Urban Foragers

Encourage and invest in community projects - neighborhoods can grow fruit trees for people to pick and share and use. Enable and support movements like fruit rescue or "grow a row" - help them to process food and then allow it to be used for food response efforts.

When these projects happen, it brings people together. This is healthy. When they come together, they work together, they help each other and it releases stress. People watering their lawn - grass grows, they cut it, fertilize, cut again. Use it for good purposes. This helps people save money on food and access nutritious food.

Ensure a commitment by the City of Edmonton to increasing community gardens, YardShare programs, urban farms and food forests. The City of Edmonton had a pilot project to address food deserts but it has been discontinued. This contributes so much to education, autonomy and community building.

- Examples:

- YardShare YEG
- Plant, Grow, Share a Row | Edmonton's Food Bank
- Grow-A-Row FAQ | Edmonton Meals on Wheels

Families who do not have land or space to grow food could be given access to some, children and families are brought together to learn how to grow food and agencies can profit as well if some is used to supplement food hampers or community cooking classes.

Plant plots that the public can access to deter them stealing from family plots. Many communities get discouraged from doing community gardens due to theft. We must accept that theft may be an issue but it's not a reason to not do gardens. Prioritize funding to support communities to buy seeds, dirt, compost, water or plant additional plots for the public to access would be helpful in supporting access.

We call for a policy change to increase the ability for citizens to house “backyard chicken coops.”

We call on City Council to encourage, and potentially mandate, local developers to incorporate food forests or edible landscaping into our communities. An example would be planting fruit trees, raspberry bushes, tomato plants and other edible pieces that the public could access

We call on the city to enable a pilot project among collaborating agencies to advance this work. A commercial point of view of that project can be applied and put everything together. Need it all to come together and encourage more people. Talk to the city and other community leagues - pick one area and work on it and cultivate a local economy/trading.

Need to encourage every household to grow something. Need to run projects to grow one's own food. A few potatoes from every home, can share with neighbors etc Will save fuel, energy and waste - food packaging is such a huge cost to the community. Self sufficiency - we need to look at that. Need a pilot project and talk to government about this and learn from it.

Public Education

Community and public education are a priority. Linking people to the long term resources as well as strengthening knowledge for sustainability. **We call for the investment in a public education campaign, not for donations, but in fact to raise awareness of the supports and services that exist in the community around food and how to navigate barriers of identification.**

A lot of people need long term resources. A lot of the food response work is either short term or midterm so for example for 20 months. Even in the past I know a lot of people do need additional resources. When an initiative ends, where do we direct people... we've got a lot of “how am I going to eat? What is going to happen? Where am I going to get food from?”

We did a general survey of all the food [work] we were doing and I know I heard a lot too that people don't really know what resources are out there, a lot of people just know the food bank and a lot of people can't access the food bank for different reasons or they cannot get to the food bank or pick the food up. Given the number of agencies that actually are involved in food work, I just sort of wonder why people don't know about it.

We need to change the narrative about food security and access to food security. There are some people in our community, they are leaders. Those leaders that are giving, sometimes they don't know they don't have too much knowledge about food security, and they're giving a certain narrative saying when you're going to the Food Bank it's expired, and it's not good stuff. Those people, they are pointing the community members in the wrong direction.

There needs to be education around best before dates and that this does not mean expiry. We need to create a narrative around food safety and help to alleviate nervousness/hesitation to still use that food. For dry goods, if they are stored properly they can be used for years. A good film to use for education is Rotten on Netflix: [Rotten \(TV Series 2018–2019\) - IMDb](#)

We try to build the capacities of people who come to us - foster their capacities on how to access the food support system through different areas. I have introduced them to [staff] at the food bank to meet with them and do intake. [They] would call them to help them get food that was culturally acceptable. Another is to have them volunteer at different organizations in the community to build capacity to know where to reach for resources. We want to help immediately but in the end, we can not keep on going this way. Need to look at different ways of being independent and trying to help people access resources on their own.

There needs to be a devoted effort creating accessible methods of sharing information with individuals and communities - empowering people through education and information, free workshops (online or in person) and accessible free food spaces and community hubs that will connect people with resources.

Create collaboratives as a way to leverage individual assets - some have space, some have volunteers to offer. This could lead to projects like cooking classes, collective kitchens and community gardens.

There is a need for much more intensive work around education even for agencies to know where to refer people and go for information.

Give recipes with some of the hampers to help people who may not know how to cook that. Or recipes to utilize the food that is going close to expiry (milk close to best before can be utilized to yogurt, sour cream).

Educate Young People

There is an urgent need to educate young people to ensure the next generations are better informed and have resources to avoid food insecurity and navigate climate change. We call for food security integration into curriculum and capacity building for teachers to educate young people more critically around food security.

While we understand the provincial government has jurisdiction over the majority of education, we believe national governments must play a role and ensure there is a mandate and investment into curriculum development..

A children's version of a community garden, not just a community garden but look at that educational piece behind that for the kids so that they learn how to plant a garden and eventually getting them a garden box for their house or on their balcony or something.

Cultivate and support after school programs and community-led programs learning to cook and taking food home for the family.

Culinary programs at schools need to understand that some families may struggle with food insecurity and lend ways for the family to be involved or ensure budgets take into account those families' budgets. For example, virtual learning cooking classes, there must be awareness that ingredients for recipes needed to participate in class are not easily accessible or affordable for some families. Other meals being prepared may not be culturally sensitive and leads to food waste instead of being able to provide a meal for the family.

We recommend the provincial government invest in community centres to offer intergenerational programming to allow for the family to cook together, grow together and empower community hubs.

Snapshot of Community Stakeholders

- **CANAVUA** - Hot meals delivered to your home, you can register weekly at canavua.org/camion or canavua.org/foodbank; CANAVUA also has a mobile food truck that visits North and South Edmonton to provide free hot meals, and gives out fresh produce and bread from their headquarters at #116, 8627 Rue Marie-Anne Gaboury NW, Edmonton. Please follow their Facebook page for updates or email for more information: info@canavua.org

- **Multicultural Health Brokers**
 - Multicultural health brokers has also provided over 700 food hampers per week
 - Operates the “Khair for All” produce box which provides fresh, seasonal and affordable fruits and vegetables to community members; prices range from \$31-56 with delivery, are about 20-30% less than typical grocery store prices.
 - Donates excess produce to other grassroots organizations

- **John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights**
 - Operated a Facebook community “Yeg Community Response to COVID-19” for around a year during the pandemic, giving out food hampers with basic needs and frozen meals.
 - They were also a partner of an Emergency Response Collaborative called Edmonton COVID-19 Rapid Response Collaborative (ECRRC) who provided emergency food support to people who were isolating or tested positive for COVID-19.
 - Also facilitated the Bethel Pantry, which operates as a non-perishable pantry and community food hub for community members. They gave out food, resources, information and clothing.

Associated with Bear Clan Patrol, which serves Edmonton’s houseless population meeting them where they are on the streets and providing some meal items and snacks and advocating for their basic rights and needs.

- **Edmonton Postal Workers**
 - Providing food hampers in North and South Edmonton (2 locations) every Saturday; food hampers have some fresh produce, bread, cereal, peanut butter and other perishable or non-perishable items.
 - Grassroots organization that is volunteer run

- **Action for Healthy Communities**
 - Local organization that provides advocacy, resources, employment supports and additional resources, programs/workshops, and advocacy to the community; was a recent partner of the Edmonton COVID-19 Rapid Response Collaborative (ECRRC).
- **Glengarry Child Care Society Community Food Hamper Program**
 - A grassroots, community funded pantry that provides food hampers which consist mainly of non-perishable items; some fresh items or pet food may also be available
 - Hampers can be picked up from the North Side location or delivery can be arranged depending on circumstances. Delivery on Fridays.
- **Candora Society**
 - They do weekly free bread Mondays and a bagged lunch on Thursdays at the Abbottsfield Rec Centre (3006 119 Avenue) at NOON. They can also help with benefit applications, Alberta works/AISH, Renters Advocacy, Accessing Food Resources like WECAN, Family and Parenting supports and resources, finding health supports, additional supports or referrals.
- **LoveGood Food Box**
 - “Take what you need, leave what you can” type of service; volunteer run, grassroots community initiative. Red newspaper box that mainly has non-perishable donated items, sometimes might have garden items or bread.
 - Almost a dozen boxes located throughout the City of Edmonton, maintained by community members.
- **Dickinsfield Amity House**
 - Family resource centre that provides programs and services such as family support, community lunch, swap shop, outreach, job search assistance, support groups and more. Also is a WECAN food depot (\$25 food box that you can receive monthly that has meat, fruits and veg).
- **C5 Community Pantry**
 - Operates a Community Pantry in NE Edmonton (Belmont area); over 700 families access this per week. Range of fresh produce, bread, hygiene products and non-perishables.
- **Elizabeth Fry**
 - Operated an emergency food hamper program during the pandemic, offering basic needs food hampers; also assisted as a food partner with Edmonton COVID-19 Rapid Response Collaborative (ECRRC) food response efforts.

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The John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights (JHC) works to advance dignity, freedom, justice, and security through collaborative relationships and transformative education on peace and human rights. JHC prides itself on building spaces for courageous, challenging, and constructive dialogue on pressing human rights issues and using community based research to inform policy.

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