MOMS FEEDING FAMILIES

On Low Incomes in Peterborough and the Support of Community-Based Food Initiatives

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Summary

This study examines the household foodwork of low-income mothers in Peterborough, Ontario and the ways in which community food initiatives (CFIs), such as community gardens and cooking workshops, can help these women ensure that their families are adequately fed. It specifically considers:

- **What influences shape the household food practices of low-income mothers in Peterborough City and County?**
- **What can CFIs learn to help them support this group of women?**
- **How can CFIs help to address more structural issues, like poverty and food insecurity, that low-income mothers face around foodwork?**

The study draws on interviews with representatives from seven Peterborough CFIs (Peterborough Community Gardens, A Taste of Nourish, Nourish Havelock, Peterborough Gleans, JustFood, Come Cook With Us, Collective Kitchens); interviews with and illustrations by 21 local low-income mothers; debrief sessions following participant mothers' tours of CFIs; and my own ongoing involvement with the Nourish Project and Peterborough Food Action Network.

Analysis of the results shows that mothers' foodwork is challenged by inadequate income, food insecurity, and not enough time, as well as high social standards around both motherhood and self-reliance. This work also requires significant practical, cognitive, and emotional effort. Specifically, the mothers experience pressure to be:

- **"good" at mothering by taking primary responsibility for children's well-being through food,**
- **"good" at consumerism by participating in society through purchase, choice, and thriftiness, and**
- **"good" at food program (both CFI and food bank) participation by showing gratitude and not seeming to rely too much on these programs.**

Terms

HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY: the "inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints."[1] Because lack of income is a central root of food insecurity, it can severely impede the quantity and quality of food available to members of low-income households.

HOUSEHOLD FOODWORK: All the labour performed by household members to ensure their families are adequately fed. It involves planning for, acquiring, preparing, serving, feeding, and storing food as well as cleaning up after meals. It involves hands-on, mental, and emotional work.

COMMUNITY FOOD INITIATIVES (CFIs): Programs including community gardens, collective kitchens, cooking workshops, good food box programs, and gleaning programs. In Peterborough, CFIs emphasize access to food, empowerment, social inclusion, food literacy, dignity in programming, and strong connections with their communities.

These expectations all reflect a culture that promotes self-sufficiency and devalues what is seen as dependence.

On one level, CFI activities around growing, harvesting, cooking, and eating food are designed to build food access, skills, and knowledge. On another level, CFIs like those in Peterborough are also organized to build belonging and community and to influence systems that affect the ability of people to feed themselves. Towards these goals, Peterborough CFIs use a collaborative, advocacy-focused approach that incorporates social inclusion, universality, democratic processes, and broadening ideas about food and society.

This study shows the restrictive impacts that a culture of consumerism and self-sufficiency has on low-income mothers, on CFIs, and on the connection between these two groups. Beyond mothers' and CFIs' extensive efforts, there is an urgent need for political action and public dialogue regarding poverty, dependence, caring labour, and the role of the state in ensuring that households can adequately feed themselves. To this end, Peterborough CFIs are cultivating democracy, something that starts with bringing people to the table through care.

Peterborough CFIs Explored in the Study
(more information in Appendix A)

Peterborough Community Gardens: coordinates and supports a network of several dozen gardens throughout Peterborough that develop out of needs identified by their neighbourhoods.

A Taste of Nourish: the Nourish Project's first pilot project. It offered workshops for individuals to come together to learn skills for preparing healthy food with dignity.

Nourish Havelock: a Nourish Project site which hosts an annual community dinner and coordinates two community gardens.

Peterborough Gleans: organizes trips to farms where people can, at no cost, harvest (glean) produce that they can use, share or donate.

JustFood: offers the opportunity for people to order boxes of produce or healthy non-perishables each month at a flexible cost.

Come Cook With Us: provides workshops to help people learn food skills, try different recipes, cook meals together, and take home a food voucher and food for their families.

Collective Kitchens: monthly sessions where participants can jointly plan and prepare enough food for several meals to take home for their households.

Networks to Which the CFIs Belong

The Nourish Project: a collaborative designed to create a network of places across Peterborough City and County to foster healthy food access, food skills (growing and cooking food), advocacy, and community building.

Peterborough Food Action Network (PFAN): a working group of the Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network with a goal to, "Ensure that everyone in Peterborough has enough healthy food to eat as part of a long-term food security strategy"[2]

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Background: Three perplexing gaps

Over the past few decades, government cuts to public social supports and an emphasis on citizens' self-sufficiency have increased pressure on individuals, households, and community groups to address the most basic of needs, people's ability to feed themselves. *Household food insecurity*, the "inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints" [3] can severely hamper the ability of the members of low-income households to eat. To see what is required to transform food access into meals, however, I look beyond food insecurity to *household foodwork*, all the labour performed by household members to ensure that their families are adequately fed.

In looking at the context of mothers' foodwork and food supports in Peterborough, I find three surprising gaps.

1. Mothers and Foodwork

Foodwork can be an expression of love, creativity, and resistance, as well as a source of joy and satisfaction. It is also a form of labour that continues to be divided by gender. Although men's involvement in household foodwork in Canada has increased, [4] today women in Canada continue to do the bulk of household foodwork [5] even though most mothers participate in paid employment. In fact, over two-thirds of lone mothers and three-quarters of mothers in coupled families are employed.[6]

Mothers are exposed to a range of challenging foodwork expectations from sources like health promotion, [7] popular food literature, [8] and consumer culture.[9] These involve standards around using nutritious food and food practices, making food appealing, making the "right" food choices, and cooking from scratch. Women who parent, however, can find it especially difficult to have the money, time, and food access necessary to meet these expectations for several reasons. For example:

> Mind the gap: between high expectations on mothers for feeding families and limited food access, income, and time for meeting them

- female parents in Ontario are more likely than male parents to raise children on their own and more likely to live in poverty when they do.[10]
- women in Canada working on a full year, fulltime basis continue to earn only about three-quarters of what their male counterparts do.[11]
- there is a much higher level of food insecurity in Canada among households with children under 18, especially among female lone parent households, than other household types.[12]

Such restrictions, along with high mothering expectations, suggest that mothers, particularly low-income mothers, may need greater supports around income, time, and food access for ensuring their families can eat adequately. Although struggles to feed families are commonly viewed as resulting from a lack of skills, some research suggests that food insecure individuals may, in fact, not lack necessary food skills more than food secure people do.[13]

2. Community Food Initiatives (CFIs)

CFIs, including community gardens, collective kitchens, cooking workshops, good food box programs, and gleaning programs, have spread across Canada in recent decades. They offer people in their communities the opportunity to come together to grow, harvest, cook, and eat food. Many CFIs use food to bring people together to cultivate more inclusive communities. The Peterborough CFIs in this study strive to offer programs that emphasize, not only access to food and food literacy,[14] but also empowerment, social inclusion, dignity in programming, and strong connections with their communities. Working together, they attempt to influence policy and common perceptions to help all households be able to feed themselves adequately on the long term. Researchers, however, have debated the capacity of such *food*-focused programs to address household food insecurity, a problem centred in inadequate *income*.

Although CFIs and food banks both attempt to address the struggles of people living with food insecurity, I chose not to include food banks as a focus of study. I see them as different from CFIs because their efforts to address food insecurity do not generally extend past the provision of charitable food donations. Unlike CFIs, food banks do not typically focus on skills development, community development, or political advocacy. Because food banks often came up in the mothers' stories, however, I include them in this document when I speak of "food programs."

> Mind the gap: between *food*-focused program approaches and the *income*-based problem of food insecurity

3. The Peterborough Context

In addition to the CFIs explored in this study (see Appendix A), Peterborough has a complex system of food-related resources including a range of food banks, emergency meal programs, food advocacy initiatives, a community food charter,[15] a dynamic multi-stakeholder food action network, and strong involvement of Peterborough Public Health. It also has the most community gardens per capita among Canadian cities.[16] The vibrancy and comprehensiveness of community food networks in Peterborough has been recognized by

researchers outside the region.[17] The Nourish Project in particular has been recognized by Community Food Centres Canada,[18] and staff from the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy Office.[19]

At the same time, Peterborough City-County has the highest household food insecurity level (16.5%) among all Ontario's health units.[20] Among families with children 0-17 years old in Peterborough, 24% experience food insecurity as opposed to 9% in Ontario, with lone mother families experiencing the highest level of food insecurity. [21] Peterborough clearly experiences significant struggles that suggest a need for greater supports.

> Mind the gap: between Peterborough's extensive food initiatives and its high level of household food insecurity

The Study

This study recognizes the gaps outlined above: between mothers' foodwork expectations and available resources, between the income-based problem of food insecurity and food-based solutions, and between Peterborough's extensive food initiatives and its high level of household food insecurity. With these gaps in mind, the study explores the questions:

1. *What influences shape the household food practices of low-income mothers in Peterborough City and County?*
2. *What can community food initiatives in this region learn to help them support this group of women?*
3. *How and to what extent can CFIs help address the structural issues contributing to low-income mothers' challenges around foodwork?*

Information for this Study Came from:

- Interviews with representatives of local CFIs (*JustFood box program, Come Cook with Us, Collective Kitchens, Peterborough Gleans, A Taste of Nourish, Peterborough Community Gardens, and Nourish Havelock*). They were asked about the general focus and operations of their CFI, the extent to which low-income mothers engage with the CFI, benefits of and barriers to such engagement, and any strategies used to encourage the participation of low-income mothers.

- Interviews with 21 mothers living on low incomes regarding all forms of foodwork for their households and any supports around it

- Illustrations completed during the interviews by the mothers, who were asked to draw what a week of food looks like in their homes

- Tours of CFIs so that mothers could learn about those programs and then share their thoughts about them with each other and me

- **Community participation which included my own ongoing participation in the Nourish Project and Peterborough Food Action Network**

About the 21 Moms…

The criteria for participation in the study was women who were:

- **living in Peterborough City or County**
- **parenting at least one child under 16 years old**
- **and identifying as living on a low income**

There were no criteria regarding relationship status or food program involvement.

The Mother Participants as They Self-Identified

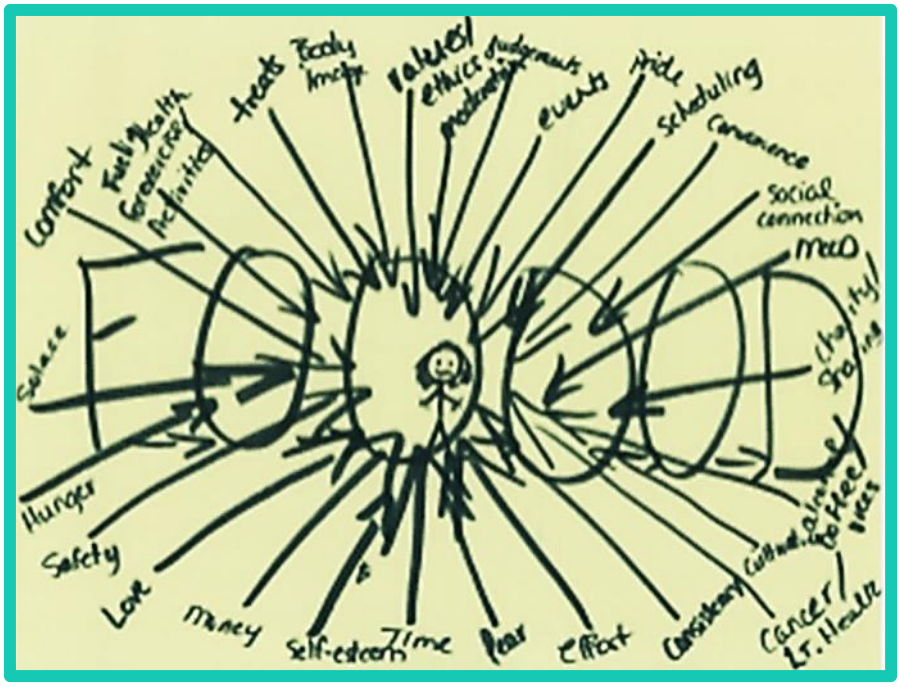
Age	**from 19 to 47 (Most were in their thirties)**
Education	**from some high school to Bachelor's degrees. (Over half had some post-secondary education.)**
Number of children living at home	**from one to six. (Most mothers had one or two.)**
Children's ages	**from 4 and a half months to 26 years old (All moms had at least one child under 16.)**
Ethno-racial identification	**Most identified as Canadian, White and/or European-descended. One woman identified as Métis, one as First Nation, one as part-Jewish, and one as "mixed race"**
Sexual orientation	**When asked on the interview form, no participant identified as other than heterosexual.**
Disability	**Five of the women disclosed that they were living with a disability or injury.**
Household composition	**Eight lived with a partner (and possibly other adults), five lived with adults other than a partner, and eight did not live with any other adults.**
Income level	**Almost all monthly household incomes were below $3000 and eight were below $2000.**

I did not inquire about violence, but four women disclosed that they had experienced violence in past intimate relationships, something that affected the support they could rely on going forward.

What the Moms Said….

Foodwork is complicated

As indicated in Alicia's drawing,[22] a wide range of considerations affect the women's foodwork. These include transportation, location of food sources, housing costs, and childcare availability. Most importantly, however, almost all the women spoke about needing to be able to afford food, to ensure family members' health through food, and to meet their family members' specific food needs and their preferences. Most of the mothers also spoke of trying to manage their children during foodwork or helping their children become more independent through foodwork.



-Alicia, 29

Insufficient resources added to the complexity of foodwork so that it involved more:

- **practical labour (e.g. carrying food home from stores or programs, going to a variety of stores and programs to keep costs down)**
- **cognitive labour (e.g. comparing prices, remembering food bank hours and bus schedules, strategizing around bringing children to grocery stores or food programs)**
- **emotional labour (e.g. using food to help their children fit in with their peers, dealing with shame in asking for help)**

Foodwork requires a lot of effort

Almost all the women spoke of:

- **accessing food through community-based food programs such as CFIs and food banks**
- **buying in bulk, selecting the right grocery store(s), or other forms of "smart" shopping**
- **and accessing help, food, or other support from other adults in their lives.**

In this process, several women had to juggle expenses, make constant

Well ya, my girlfriend. She lives up the street but sometimes, you know, if she has a worse day than I have or a worse week than I'm having, or whatever and sometimes it's just easier to get together and then we share everything. Share the buying of the food, share the cooking, share the cleaning up and the kids are fed and we all have leftovers. . . . We're happy.

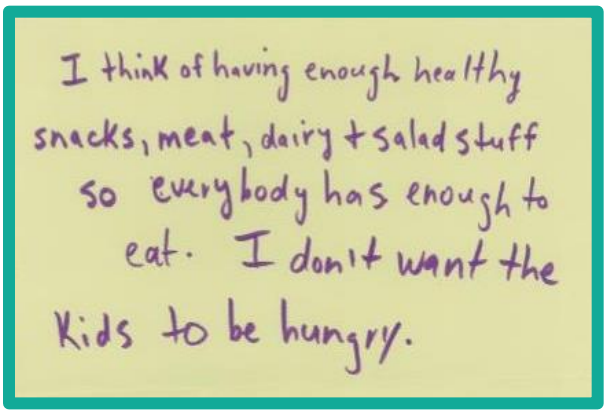
-Hannah, 31

calculations, or find alternative ways of acquiring food or the money to buy it. As seen in Hannah's quote, one strategy that some women spoke positively about was trading or pooling resources (such as meal ingredients, food labour, child minding, or meals) with others.

Overall the women's approaches showed how much extra effort living on low incomes can demand as well as the range of skills required. In particular, the women's stories highlighted their exertion, resourcefulness, and thriftiness.

Sometimes foodwork is not enough

Difficulties in being able to feed their families adequately led to many challenges for the mothers. Some, like Simone, went without food so others in their families could have more. The women also described experiencing a wide range of difficult emotions (e.g. worry, stress, anxiety, embarrassment, shame, guilt, depression, exhaustion, obsessiveness, and being overwhelmed). Some also spoke of feeling judged or under surveillance. In addition, limited income, food access, and time often posed challenges to meeting foodwork goals in personally or socially acceptable ways. Finding and keeping adequate employment was challenging for the women, many of whom were already students, employed, had recently lost their jobs, or were exploring educational and employment options. Some women disclosed needing to shoplift or work in adult entertainment in order to feed their families. More frequently, however, these challenges compelled women to turn to friends, relatives, and community programs. Despite this, being perceived as dependent was frequently raised as difficult. For example, Penny, 33, stated about going to a food bank, "*It was really hard (…) to be like, 'hi, I need to ask for help*.'" Overall, the women's stories show that living on low incomes adds considerably to the practical, mental, and emotional work of feeding their families.



-Simone, 47

Trying to be "good"

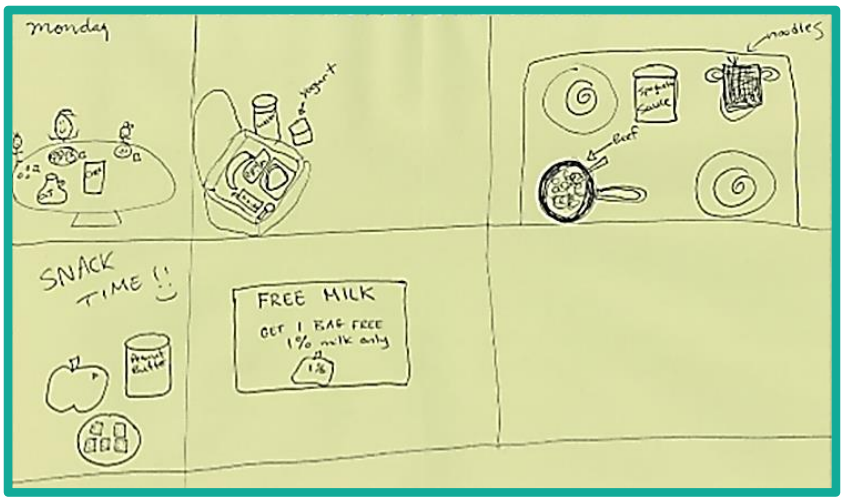
The women's stories demonstrate the strong ties between foodwork and the ways that the mothers *see themselves* in their families and in their communities. In particular, the women showed their attempts to meet prevalent standards around motherhood, consumer culture, and food program participation (see Figure A).

"Good" at mothering: **All the women referred to ensuring healthy food for their families and almost all of them spoke about trying to meet the food preferences and dietary needs of their family members. In general, the women found it important to be in charge of their households' foodwork. It was important to many of the women to play a central role in food for their families, a role that was tied to pride and showing love (as seen in Theresa's quote), and ideas about**

what mothers are "supposed" to do. The moms conducted and managed most of the foodwork in their households even when there were other adults present. If there were male partners in the home, they sometimes provided the women with help or support.

> *it makes me feel good that I'm making food for them. . . . It's made with love.*
>
> *-Theresa, 33*

"Good" at consumer culture: **It was particularly important to the women to have the means to buy and choose their own food and not to have to ask for help. This came through in the women's discomfort with using charity or asking loved ones for help, their emphasis on choice at food banks, their preference for food gift cards, their many stories of thriftiness, and their comfort with pooling or trading food/foodwork with people in their lives. Una's drawing speaks specifically to the value mothers found in receiving grocery gift cards from programs. Cards like this allow the women to acquire the kinds of food they want when they want in ways that are less susceptible to judgement than receiving food from other people or organizations.**



-Una, 35

"Good" at program participation: **The mothers showed a reluctance to use community food programs, especially food banks, if they felt they might be getting more than they thought they deserved. As shown in her quote, Alicia shared her struggle over not feeling entitled to participate in a program. Women also expressed concern that their participation would take away from someone whom they thought might need it more. Some of the women also stressed the importance of showing gratitude for any supports offered.**

> ***I tried to call but nobody ever called me back so rather than keep persistent about it, because that felt really needy and wrong, I just didn't call back cause if they didn't call me back, then they're probably full . . . and I don't really want to be a nuisance and I certainly don't want to look a gift horse in the mouth by being demanding, right?***
>
> **-Alicia about a first call to a local CFI**

Overall, I saw the women trying to handle what they felt they are "supposed" to do by simultaneously:
1) being in charge of using food to ensure the health and happiness of their children
2) trying to show self-sufficiency in the community by buying/choosing their families' food
3) and trying not to rely too much on community programs

Inadequate income, time, and food access meant that the women needed the help of others but that they then experienced judgement or a fear of judgement for seeming dependent. Overall,

the women's foodwork is complex, heavily centred on meeting their family members' needs and wants, and shaped by efforts to maintain dignity and avoid judgement.

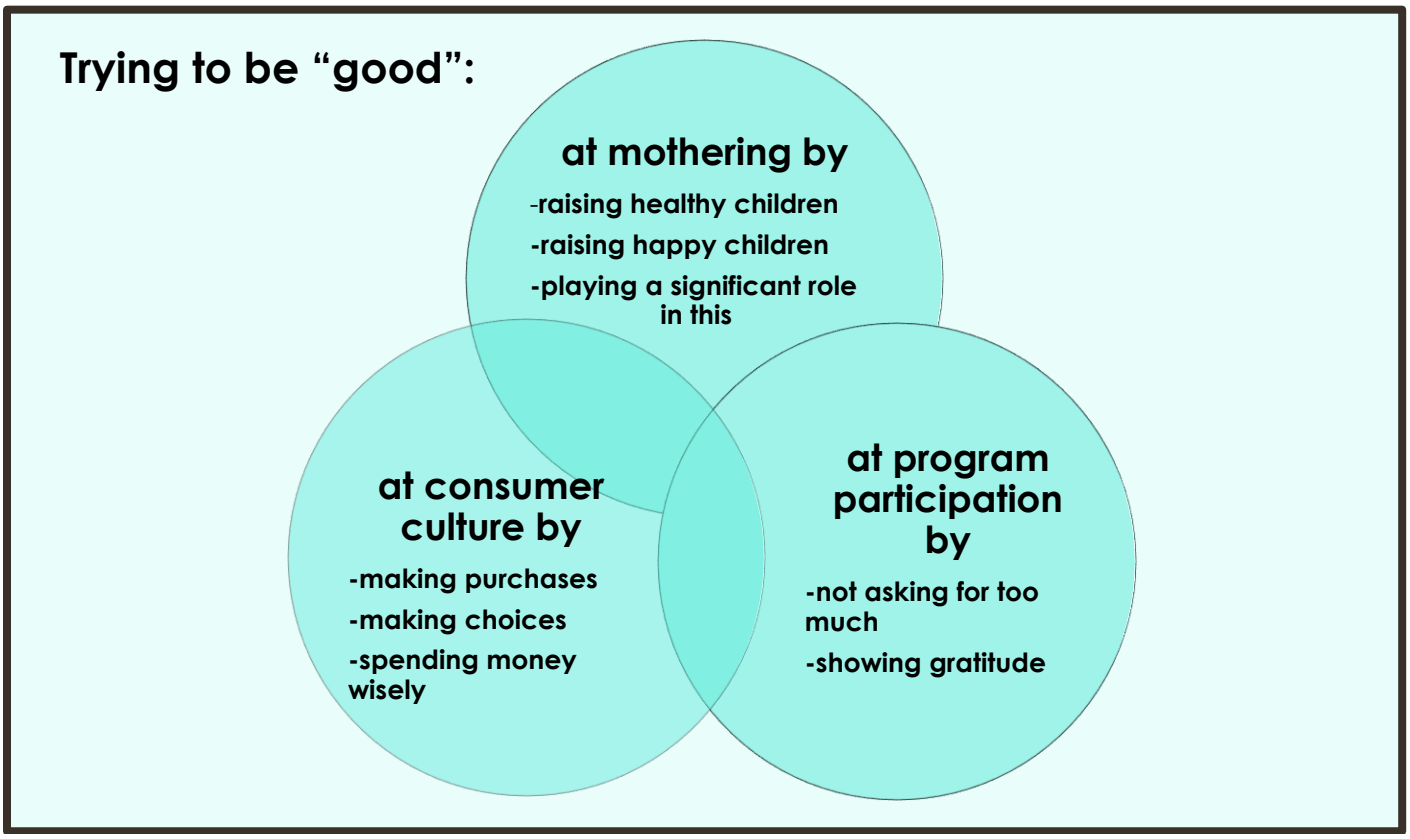


Figure A. **Three aspirations the mothers engaged with.**

Peterborough CFI Support: It's about being together at the table.

The study indicates that food programs are important to low-income mothers. CFI representatives stated that many women who parent and/or live on low incomes participate in CFIs. For example, they reported that most collective kitchen participants are mothers living on low incomes, many community garden participants are young mothers, about 90% of JustFood participants live on low incomes, and many children participate in community gardens both in the City and in Havelock. Among the mothers in this study, however, only about half of them, 11, spoke of having participated in one or more CFIs even though 18 expressed knowledge about at least one CFI. In comparison, 15 had participated in food banks. This section looks at ways that CFIs do and can help to meet mothers' needs.

On the face of it, CFI programs in Peterborough focus primarily on bringing people together to grow, harvest, cook, and eat food. However, together they are guided by the food security continuum (see Figure B), a framework created by the Peterborough Food Action Network, that extends from:

1. **ensuring people have access to food**
2. **to helping them build skills, knowledge, and social inclusion**
3. **to working to cultivate policies and perceptions that help everyone be able to feed themselves in dignity.**

Figure B. **The Community Food Security Continuum**

By incorporating this model, CFIs recognize that people will engage with food programs in different ways depending on their needs and that they are more likely to advocate for systems change once their basic needs are met. I see CFI efforts to engage with low-income mothers as reflecting this continuum model, as a progression of three broad strategies that revolve around social connection: bringing mothers to the table, helping them belong at the table, and building a sturdier table. Because the work of the CFIs has continued to evolve since the start of this study and the mothers whom I interviewed had not yet engaged with some of the newer collaborative and advocacy approaches, more study is needed regarding the ways that mothers may engage with these approaches and how they may benefit from them.

CFIs can bring moms to the table

When the women spoke about CFIs, they emphasized the importance of having awareness of and access to programs. This included issues like program advertising, location, transportation to and from[23] programs, childcare, and scheduling. CFIs try to accommodate these needs in various ways. For example, some of the programs advertise where low-income people are more likely to see. Also, systems of neighbourhood pick-ups and drop-offs exist for both JustFood (for the food boxes) and the Gleaning Program (for gleaning participants themselves) while Come Cook With Us, Collective Kitchens, and A Taste of Nourish provided transportation support for their participants. In addition, community gardens develop within neighbourhoods where interest is expressed. Some of the programs offer childcare or compensation for it. These logistical issues, however, need to be supported not only by CFIs but also by social policy that facilitates supports like affordable childcare and public transportation.

Shaping programs to be relevant to the women's priorities may also help bring mothers to the table. For both food banks and CFIs, the women focused on food quality, particularly the desire for fresh, local, and varied food, as well as food that met family members' dietary restrictions and preferences. Women also highlighted the costs and savings from program participation, as

well as basic access to food for their families. All the CFIs offer fresh and nutritious food at no cost (except JustFood, which offers nutritious food boxes on a sliding fee scale).

CFIs can help moms belong at the table

The following themes emerged in the mothers' discussions about CFIs: the women's own and their children's learning, building social connections (esp. through community gardens), and the opportunity to help others like local farmers and people in need. Notably, the women did not say they found such experiences at emergency food programs, nor that they were they looking for them there. It was clear that the mothers saw CFIs as a potential source of more than food and that they saw food not only as a goal itself, but also as a means to other ends.

◄ It was clear that the mothers saw CFIs as a potential source of more than food and that they saw food not only as a goal itself, but also as a means to other ends.

Learning: **The CFIs all provide opportunities to learn about growing, harvesting, cooking, or otherwise preparing food through, for example, hands-on experience, workshops, and JustFood newsletters. The mothers also saw opportunities for *their children* to gain more familiarity with healthy food through, for example, exploring the contents of a JustFood box at home with their mothers, growing produce in a community garden, and harvesting (and sampling) food on a gleaning trip. By bringing people together across differences such as age, ability, culture, and income level, CFIs offer the chance for their participants not only to learn from each other but to teach each other.**

By bringing people together► across differences such as age, ability, culture, and income level, CFIs offer the chance for their participants not only to learn from each other but to teach each other.

Connections with others: **The CFIs I interviewed generally prioritized social connections and belonging through involvement in their food programs, something that seems to be bearing fruit. In fact, the Nourish Project (see Appendix A) specifically measures its program outcomes around social inclusion. In 2015-16, it found that, "83% of gardeners surveyed said community gardening made them feel part of the community" and among Nourish Project cooking participants, that "85% of people surveyed said they made a new friend" (Nourish Project, 2016).**

Helping others: **By providing opportunities to grow, cook and eat food together, CFIs allow individuals not only to meet some of their own needs but also to identify and respond to the needs of others, a key dimension of caring. For example, community garden members often create what Jill Bishop, the network's coordinator, refers to as "informal distribution systems" where garden members share food and other garden items amongst themselves, with other neighbourhood members, and with food insecure people through local agencies. By prioritizing local food in programs, CFIs like JustFood also help their participants to help local farmers and demonstrate some of the interdependence between food growers, transporters, preparers and eaters.**

Connections between programs: **The ways in which Peterborough CFIs work together may also help mothers feel that they belong. Some mothers said they appreciated the connections between programs to grow or acquire food and workshops to learn how to prepare that food. By working together, Peterborough CFIs help to support the full spectrum of tasks involved in household foodwork.**

In the women's stories, dignity was a strong theme that emerged primarily with regard to food banks. Some of the principles that CFIs use to encourage dignified participation include:

Universality: **In general, the women wanted to know that programs were open to everyone, were not restricted to people living on low incomes, and that they did not have to worry about using limited resources that others might need more. Peterborough CFIs try especially to support people living with low incomes or other vulnerabilities, but they are open to all people. Such a universal approach is important for helping the mothers feel less dependent on programs and more like they belong.**

Interdependence: **CFIs try to highlight interdependence over dependence. For example, they encourage their participants to take on roles as growers, harvesters, and cooks, as well as advocates in their communities and leaders in their programs. Working together in networks, CFIs organize community dinners, talks, and other events that encourage people from a variety of backgrounds to come together to eat and share ideas. All these practices may help to blur lines between giving and taking, givers and takers, and help foster dignity through participation.**

◄All these practices may help to blur lines between giving and taking, givers and takers, and help foster dignity through participation.

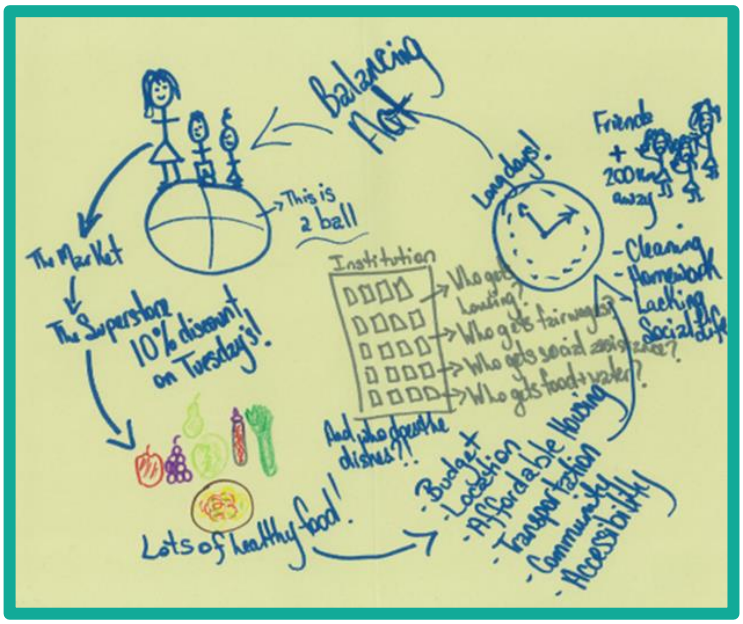
Other ways that CFIs can help participants to feel and show that they are contributing and acting like "good consumers" include more opportunities for program participants to contribute (e.g. a recipe, quote, ingredient, helping hand, or nominal/optional fee at some program sessions). This may also involve finding more ways to ask their participants (and encourage them to ask themselves), "What do you bring to the table?" and making it broadly visible that everyone brings something regardless of its form (e.g. labour, ideas, levity, stories, enthusiasm, listening). The purpose here would not be to make program access more conditional but to allow mothers to feel like and show that they are contributing- in ways that increase emotional resources and strengthen relationships.

A sense of interdependence could also be cultivated through more opportunities for informal exchange and the pooling of resources, something that seems to work well for some women with their friends, neighbours, and families. I found that such collective activities provided the women the material benefits of resource conservation, the psychological benefits of reciprocity and avoiding perceptions of dependence, and the social benefits of connecting and helping others. Much of this can already happen as people grow, cook, and eat food together in programs. Promoting a sense of interdependence might also involve encouraging social connections outside of programs through, for example, organizing bring-a-friend workshop sessions, hosting workshops within and for specific neighbourhoods, or providing information on how to host a neighbourhood potluck dinner. The Nourish Project has organized activities that do exactly this, by bringing people together in their own neighbourhoods and bringing parents and children together to engage with food.

In general, all these approaches help to de-emphasize individualism and re-emphasize care. Having said this, the normalization of private household meals along with household issues of scheduling, transportation, dietary needs, food preferences, and mothers' central role in foodwork may also mean that some mothers prefer to acquire, prepare, and serve food in conventional, less collective ways. The women's focus on self-sufficiency, consumer practices, and food access programs such as food banks and JustFood suggests that some of them may be looking for more opportunities to simply buy good quality, affordable food that they can

prepare and serve at home. JustFood boxes and the farmers' market dollars which are offered to some program participants are some examples of ways these opportunities are provided.

CFIs can help to build a sturdier table



-Leigh, 32

Overall, the women's foodwork challenges stemmed largely from inadequate income and food insecurity, difficulties that point to the need for improved public policy. Feeding families requires sufficient income and food, both of which are made more possible through adequate social assistance, employment, transportation, personal safety, and childcare. Although a few of the mothers made policy recommendations, only one, Leigh, recommended broad policy changes aimed at long-term income security. Nonetheless, the women's foodwork activities and struggles point to a need for policy improvement in affordable housing and public transit; universal affordable childcare access; employment standards legislation; child support regulations; and domestic violence prevention. Addressing mothers' concerns on the long-term requires attention to such structural issues.

In Peterborough, CFIs strive to go beyond short-term solutions largely by working together, often as part of the Nourish Project or the Peterborough Food Action Network. They promote social inclusion, consciousness-raising, civic engagement, and efforts towards policy change. One way that Peterborough CFIs are working together towards these longer-term goals is by organizing community dinners and speakers' events where people from diverse backgrounds come together over food to share ideas and learn about issues affecting the food system. In addition, participants in programs around growing, cooking, or eating can join the Nourish Project's peer advocacy program to develop advocacy skills, provide support to others in their community, and advocate for policy changes.

◄Peterborough CFIs promote social inclusion, consciousness-raising, civic engagement, and efforts towards policy change.

To date, CFIs through their networks have collectively advocated for policy interventions around an Ontario food security strategy, the City of Peterborough Official Plan, municipal water provision for community gardens, municipal backyard hen policy, and the Ontario Basic Income pilot project. In fact, members of the Nourish Project initiated the Basic Income Peterborough Network to educate and advocate around a basic income guarantee. Basic income is an income security policy initiative that might be particularly helpful to low-income mothers since it involves establishing a base-level income for all people regardless of employment status. In effect, it could help ensure that unpaid caring work responsibilities do not hamper mothers' ability to make ends meet.

Apart from advocacy work, CFIs work to promote democratic practices in other ways. For example, JustFood participants are asked for feedback before changes are made to that program and collective kitchen participants collectively decide on the meals they will make together. Additionally, certain actions like deliberately including diverse people in programs, establishing community gardens in interested low-income neighbourhoods, and Nourish Project community dinner discussions about basic income promote democracy - even for those not directly involved - by visibly placing value on certain people, communities, and issues.

Overall, it seems that the work of ensuring adequate food on their tables each day took priority for the women over longer-term, systemic strategies. By incorporating the food security continuum, however, CFIs try to engage with people around more short-term needs for food access, skills, knowledge, and connection but also make opportunities available for adding their own voices to building a sturdier table. Whether low-income mothers will follow this path remains to be assessed.

Resources Needed for Extending Impact

The capacity of Peterborough CFIs to have an impact depends on adequate resources of various types including:

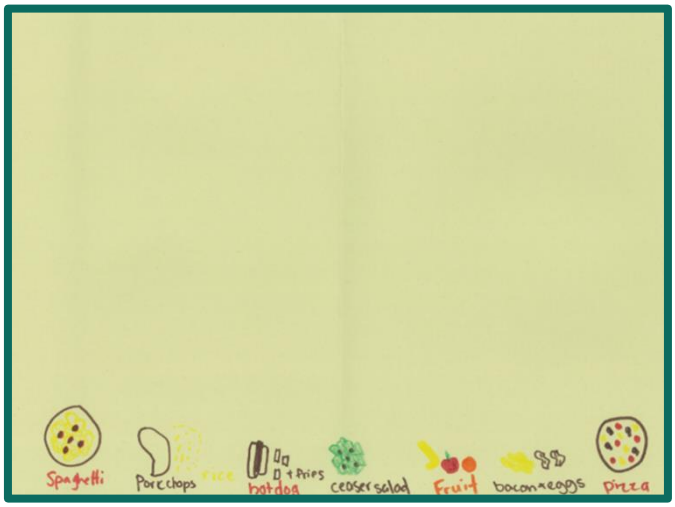
- **Funding: Most CFIs do not have long-term, adequate funding. For example, only programs funded by Peterborough Public Health (the only public funding body), have a budget for gift cards. Generally small budgets pose a challenge to staffing, food, programming, and professional development.**

- **Labour: Because of these restricted budgets, CFIs generally have few paid staff and rely heavily on unpaid labour. Like household foodwork, most of the work of CFIs and their networks is done by women.**

- **Supportive communities: CFIs also require communities that are supportive of community food security work, something that their networks, public agencies like Peterborough Public Health, social service organizations like the YWCA, and local post-secondary institutions like Trent University and Fleming College help to provide.**

- **Time: The work of building relationships, shifting attitudes, and impacting policy requires time, a resource often in short supply. In order to continue to provide the kinds of time-intensive supports that they do, CFIs require sufficient, long-term, and stable funding.**

Discussion and Conclusions



Norah, 38

This study emerged from three apparent contradictions. First, in Canada, women who parent are exposed to high expectations around foodwork but are also disproportionately likely to have limited resources, such as income, time, and food access, with which to meet them. Food insecurity, the restricted access to food because of limited funds, is only one challenge to low-income mothers' foodwork, but it is a central one. Second, community programs that focus on eating, growing, and cooking food have been critiqued by some researchers as having little ability to address this core challenge since food insecurity is so rooted in *income insecurity*. This can be seen through the third apparent contradiction: that, despite Peterborough's complex network of food initiatives, the local health unit area has the highest level of food insecurity in Ontario.[24]

To explore these contradictions, this study considered:

1) the influences that shape low-income mothers' household foodwork

2) what CFIs can learn to support these mothers

3) and how CFIs may help to address the structural challenges these women face around foodwork

Mothers involved in the study showed that their foodwork is complex, involving much strategizing and resourcefulness, especially around food access and the health and happiness of their families. The study showed that women who parent are still forgoing their own food needs, juggling necessary expenses, and expending great amounts of effort, time, and dignity to ensure their families have food on the table.

The study also showed that foodwork is strongly tied to women's identities, especially as they see themselves in their families and in their communities as mothers, consumers, and program participants. As the women tried to ensure their families could eat adequately, they also tried to exert choice as consumers and avoid perceptions of being dependent on programs or other people. These attempts fit within dominant ideas of how people are "supposed" to act: as independent and self-sufficient consumers. On the one hand, they suggest the importance of supporting mothers' choices and independence around foodwork. To foster the participation of low-income mothers, programs need to recognize the ways that these mothers see themselves in their environment. On the other hand, the women's stories also point to the need for collective action and new ways of seeing poverty, dependence, care, and the role of the state. The largely collective and advocacy-focused approaches of CFIs negotiate the line between challenging individualizing conditions and supporting some mothers' own focus on consumer transactions and self-sufficiency.

In Peterborough, CFIs provide growing, cooking, and eating programs intended to increase their participants' food access, skills, and social connections. Together, working with the Nourish

Project or Peterborough Food Action Network, they also attempt to address deeper challenges to all mothers' foodwork over the long-term. In doing so, they: recognize the necessity of sufficient income for food security; use communal foodwork supports to cultivate collective action; and use various means to advocate for policy change. For example, they offer community dinners and talks, educational materials, training for community peer advocates, and other opportunities for civic engagement.

Like household foodwork, the work of CFIs and the networks to which they belong is largely unpaid or underpaid, performed primarily by women, and conducted in a broader environment that prioritizes self-sufficiency and consumerism over interdependence and care. The CFIs and the mothers both show that foodwork is still feminized, under-resourced, and undervalued. It was apparent in the study that neither the mothers' foodwork efforts nor CFIs' efforts to support these women through programs are enough to ensure families can be adequately fed. The struggles of both, along with the stubbornly high level of food insecurity in Peterborough, indicate that food programming must be complemented by government action that addresses food insecurity and poverty. Beyond mothers' and CFIs' efforts, shifts in social discourse and state policy are crucial.

◄The CFIs and the mothers both showed that foodwork is still feminized, under-resourced, and undervalued. Food programming must be complemented by government action that addresses food insecurity and poverty.

CFIs show the close link between democracy and care. Overall, the necessity in communities for CFIs to provide food access, build strength in numbers, and advocate for food security and adequate incomes all reveal a failure of the state to ensure the care of its citizens. To ensure all people are cared for, Peterborough CFIs are cultivating democracy, something that starts with bringing people to the table through care.

Where to go from here?

The following suggestions, some of which CFIs may already be doing, are made with the understanding that CFIs are doing a tremendous amount of work all along the food security continuum with limited resources and that they are constantly evolving. A listing of the recommendations from all the participant mothers is available in Appendix B.

Short-term focus

- **Continue to address mothers' caretaking duties by, for example, making programs child-friendly or offering childcare, incorporating child-friendly recipes, bringing mothers together around common issues like making school lunches, and addressing the financial, time, physical, and logistical demands on caretakers for travelling to get food. In doing so, address the needs of specific groups of mothers by, for instance, finding ways to provide First Nations mothers with access to wild game for their families.**

- **Provide mothers with more opportunities for choice and purchase through, for example, more opportunities to buy good quality food at low cost that they can prepare and serve at home.**

- **Continue to offer mothers with opportunities for reciprocity and contribution in programs, as described earlier.**

- **Keep finding ways to build on connections outside of programs through, for example, organizing bring-a-friend sessions, continuing to host workshops within and for specific neighbourhoods, or providing information on how to host a neighbourhood potluck dinner.**

- **Continue to broadly advertise the universality of CFI programs so that they are seen to be available to anyone and potential stigma can be reduced.**

Medium-term focus

- **Challenging roles: Many of the pressures that the women experienced stemmed from widespread ideas about motherhood and self-sufficiency. CFIs can provide support by continuing to: help boys and men develop food skills and see themselves in caring capacities; helping mothers and people living in poverty to share their stories and to take on greater leadership roles; and modelling ways for people to meet their needs in ways that go beyond ideas of consumerism or dependence.**

- **Supporting roles: At the same time, it is important to recognize mothers' roles as they see them. For some, this includes the importance of self-sufficiency, their desire to pay/contribute, supports that are non-collective, and greater access to resources for ensuring healthy meals (e.g. gift cards, recipes/ideas they can use at home, direct access to healthy food or the means to acquire it).**

Longer-term focus

- **Broader networking: I would also suggest that food networks from different regions work together more and that the insights from Peterborough be shared more broadly outside this region. It is important for CFIs in communities more generally to balance locally-driven approaches while drawing on what works in other locations. Furthermore, to effect broad-based change, broad collaborative networks are required at the regional, provincial, and national level.**

- **Advocacy for social policy: Universal social programs are critical for helping to ensure that families can feed themselves without having to pay the price of dignity to do so. These include a Basic Income Guarantee; affordable housing and public transportation; universal affordable childcare access; and stronger employment standards, child support regulations, and violence prevention. The Government of Ontario has shown initiative here with their Basic Income pilot project, increases to minimum wage, a social assistance review and plans to develop a food security strategy but it is important to stay attentive to these as well as to the national food policy and poverty reduction strategy which our federal government has committed to develop, especially as political leaders change. It is important that CFIs, through their networks, continue to educate and provide advocacy opportunities around such policy initiatives.**

Further Research

While this study could indicate the need for many research paths, it particularly points to the need for research in the following areas:

- **Food security across Ontario and Canada. All provinces and territories should collect yearly household food insecurity data through the Canadian Community Health Survey to help provide better understandings of the causes, faces, and implications of food insecurity.**

- **The ways that specific populations of low-income mothers, such as young, immigrant, racialized and LGBTQ+ mothers, experience foodwork, engage with CFIs, and are impacted by them.**

- **Mothers' actual engagement with and the longer-term impacts of developing CFI approaches around social inclusion, networking, advocacy, and shifting perceptions.**

- **Fathers' household foodwork and the impact of CFI support of fathers.**

Peterborough Food Program Resources

- **Food Programs (The Nourish Project)**
  https://nourishproject.ca/programs

- **Food In Peterborough (Peterborough Food Action Network)**
  http://www.foodinpeterborough.ca/get-involved/

- **Community Services Map (Peterborough Social Services)**
  http://www.peterborough.ca/Living/City_Services/Social_Services/Community_Social_Plan/Community_Services_Map.htm

- **Emergency Food Program Calendar (Peterborough Social Services)**
  http://www.peterborough.ca/Living/City_Services/Social_Services/Food_Calendar.htm

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Appendix A: CFIs and their networks in Peterborough

The following are the CFIs explored in the study and two of the networks to which they belong.

Peterborough Community Gardens: began as the Peterborough Community Garden Network, a collaboration between the YWCA Peterborough Haliburton, Peterborough Public Health, GreenUP and Fleming College. In 2016, Nourish took over the coordination of community gardens in the region. Nourish coordinates and supports a network of several dozen gardens throughout Peterborough that develop out of needs identified by their neighbourhoods. Its focus is to provide the opportunity for neighbourhood members to come together to grow healthy, inexpensive food, teach and learn from each other, develop social connections, and enrich their communities.

A Taste of Nourish: the Nourish Project's first pilot project, it operated from spring of 2012 to the autumn of 2014. It offered individual workshops designed for participants, especially people living on low incomes, to learn food skills with dignity, make connections with others, decrease isolation and in all of this, improve health. The program prioritized the purchase of local food for its workshops. Today, the Nourish Project continues to offer individual food skills workshops as well as workshop series to encourage learning and social connections through growing and cooking.

Nourish Havelock: a Nourish Project site developed in the Township of Havelock. It hosts an annual community dinner and coordinates two community gardens. The dinner is intended to promote local food in a way that is financially accessible to all. Havelock's community garden program has 20 garden plots including 4 school plots for students to grow spring and autumn vegetables.

Peterborough Gleans: facilitates access to healthy, local food by organizing trips to farms where groups of individuals of all ages can, at no cost, harvest (glean) produce that can be taken home or donated to local organizations. Across Peterborough, about 20 groups (translating into about 300 to 400 individuals) are registered with the program. Part of the program, A Tree for the Picking, offers local residents the chance to gather to glean food from trees on local properties, often backyards. Today, Peterborough Gleans is coordinated by one staff and supported by Peterborough Public Health and the Nourish Project which provides workshops for gleaners and promotes activities among them. The program has operated with funding support from the City of Peterborough, local churches, the YWCA, and Peterborough Public Health.

JustFood: offers people in the City and County the opportunity to pre-purchase boxes of food each month, and in doing so, to access healthy food at a reduced cost. It strives to provide participants with the chance to try new foods and build connections in their community. Today, participants order boxes 1 week in advance, and then pick them up from a neighbourhood contact person or from the downtown packing centre. JustFood

subsidizes the cost of boxes so that participants may decide, within a range, how much they will pay.

Come Cook With Us: provides series of 4 to 6 weekly 2-hour workshops so that participants can learn food skills, try different recipes, cook meals together, and take home a food voucher and food for their families. Come Cook With Us is funded and staffed by Peterborough Public Health.

Collective Kitchens: involve monthly two-to-three-hour sessions, staffed by a Peterborough Public Health facilitator. Participants can jointly plan and prepare enough food to take home food for several meals for their households. Collective kitchens focus on providing food skills, broadening healthy diets, fostering social connections, and empowering people around food choices. Currently nine Collective Kitchen groups operate in Peterborough City and County. The program is funded by Peterborough Public Health.

The Nourish Project: a collaborative operating under the oversight of Peterborough Public Health, GreenUP, and YWCA Peterborough Haliburton, to create a network of places across the City and County to foster healthy food access, food skills (growing and cooking food), advocacy, and community building. The Project now has four sites (Peterborough City, Curve Lake First Nation, Lakefield and Havelock), supports several pre-existing programs (JustFood, Peterborough Gleans, and Peterborough Community Gardens) and has developed several other initiatives including Market Dollars, Market Meals, Grow Workshops, Seed Savers Collective, Community Seed Library, Peer Advocacy Office, Peer Advocacy Training, Basic Income Network Peterborough, and the Nourish Food Series of community talks.

Peterborough Food Action Network (PFAN): formerly the Peterborough Community Food Network, is a working group of the Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network and is chaired by Peterborough's Medical Officer of Health. Its goal is to, "Ensure that everyone in Peterborough has enough healthy food to eat as part of a long-term food security strategy."[25] PFAN is comprised of a diverse range of people interested in food, including social agency staff, public health staff, representatives of faith communities, community food advocates, and people with lived experience of poverty and food insecurity. Its work is guided by a community food security continuum model which spans food access, capacity building (skills, knowledge, community, and systems change.

For more information about food programs in Peterborough, see:
http://www.foodinpeterborough.ca/
https://nourishproject.ca/programs

Appendix B: Summary of recommendations by the 21 participant mothers

Food Programs in General*

Access

- using schools as meeting places for food events/programs
- timing programs around work schedules, e.g. making programs available outside 9-5, or making them mobile (e.g. supports that come to women, like lactation consultants do) even if there might be a fee for this
- marketing/advertising programs more

Skill building

- learning to can fruit and how to prepare from scratch food (e.g. beans) from the foodbank
- more programs specifically for men/fathers to learn to cook
- learning more about how to access food, especially after women are done programs
- moms' lunchmaking fair, with demonstrations and samples, that fits into moms' schedules

Social connections

- bringing people together more over food, sharing, and fellowship, fostering more social connections and people there who care, esp. connecting people with different incomes
- groups for moms to meet other moms to talk about food at convenient times
- recognizing the difficulty for people calling a program, being sure to call people back

Redistribution/new ways of accessing food

- providing gift cards and milk coupons, for women to be able to select what they need
- facilitating safe food exchanges (e.g. with those with an abundance of food like beef)
- finding groups who can donate large food grade containers/buckets so people can use them for container gardening
- providing access to a fresh whole milk supplier
- restaurants and grocery stores rerouting extra food to shelters or letting people know when they could come and pick it up
- establishing edible landscapes, growing more food instead of inedible ornamentals
- providing opportunities for youth to participate in markets
- market vendors donating at the end of the day (already doing with local Food Not Bombs)
- setting up pop-up fresh food stands/banks around the city where people could get healthier food more conveniently in safer parts of downtown
- more ways for people to share/trade produce that they grow
- a regular, predictable service to take groups of women to get groceries, perhaps on a weekly basis, perhaps at a cost of $5 each

**Recommendations for specific programs have been provided to those programs.*

Summary of recommendations by participant mothers (continued)

Beyond Food- Programs in General

- making supports, especially for single moms, more advertised/visible
- encouraging mixed resident groups in subsidized housing communities
- advertising and outreach within communities and housing complexes
- providing more support for women with substance abuse issues and for sex trade workers
- providing someone like a visiting public health nurse to visit and talk with single moms
- doing more to address substance use issues in Peterborough

Government Supports

- providing food protections, ensuring it is safe to grow food
- encouraging more public knowledge of food origins, food safety
- stronger state financial supports, safety nets, maybe Basic Income or raising minimum wage
- providing good information on feeding babies on a budget
- reintroducing home economics in schools
- providing discounts for produce for families over a certain number
- providing food-specific credits, perhaps a grocery card (useable at many grocery stores, so accessible) for certain foods or just produce or just non-GST-taxed foods, especially for families over a certain number
- more frequent installments or better scheduling of government cheques to make it easier to budget
- ensuring Child Tax Credit helps to support all the children a mother feeds or supports whether they live with her fulltime or part-time

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