

ONTARIO HUNGER REPORT 2007



NOVEMBER 2007

ABOUT US

The Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) is a network of food banks across the province including 100 communities across Ontario, from Ottawa to Windsor and Thunder Bay to Niagara Falls. The organization has helped serve its members since 1992 and has four major aims to achieve its vision of hunger relief.

We acquire and distribute food across Ontario. With the help of our dedicated partners, the OAFB obtains and ships perishable and non-perishable food from our donors to food banks in communities across the province.

We ensure member food banks meet certain standards of safety, quality and ethics. Food banks have a responsibility to the communities that they serve. We help member food banks ensure that they can provide safe, high quality and ethical service to their community.

We offer membership support on development, operations and management. Although food banks across Ontario come in all shapes and sizes, many face the same challenges of raising funds, directing distribution operations and managing staff and volunteers. We help with the sharing of best practices and offer professional development for our members.

We educate the public and government on issues of hunger and poverty. It is difficult to articulate the challenges you face when you are struggling to find a nourishing meal. It is the responsibility of the OAFB to tell the story of food banks and those served by food banks, and educate the public on the issues of hunger and poverty facing Ontarians. These efforts are supported by diligent research and the development of long-term, credible solutions.

The OAFB is not a food bank. It is a non-profit charitable organization, and receives no funding from the United Way or any level of government.

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Author: Adam Spence (True Story written by Nicola Cernik)

Design & Layout: Adam Spence

Edited by: Nicola Cernik, Todd Jaques and Adam Spence

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All inquiries regarding this publication should be directed to:

Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB)

5 Adrian Avenue, Unit 118

Toronto, ON M6N 5G4

t: 416.656.4100

f: 416.656.4104

e: info@OAFB.ca

w: www.OAFB.ca

MAJOR FACTS ON HUNGER IN 2007

NUMBER OF ONTARIANS SERVED BY FOOD BANKS PER MONTH: 318,540 (Highest in the country)

PROPORTION OF THOSE SERVED WHO ARE CHILDREN: 38.8 per cent

PROPORTION OF THOSE SERVED WHO ARE NEW CANADIANS: 29.3 per cent

PROPORTION OF THOSE SERVED WITH A DISABILITY: 21.1 per cent

PROPORTION OF THOSE SERVED WITH A JOB: 14.2 per cent (additional 3.2 per cent on EI)

PROPORTION OF ONTARIO'S POPULATION SERVED BY FOOD BANKS: 2.6 per cent

MOST COMMON FAMILY TYPES: Single persons (37.5 per cent) and Single Parents (28.6 per cent)

OTHER KEY FACTS

- The number of persons served by food banks has increased by 14.3 per cent since 2001
- 52 per cent of food banks in Ontario have seen an increase in the number of working poor served in the past year
- 22 per cent of food banks in Ontario do not have enough food to meet the needs of those they serve
- 21 per cent of food banks in Ontario receive greater than one-third of their food supply from outside of their community

FACTORS AFFECTING FOOD BANK USAGE

- 122,426 households are on a waiting list for social housing in Ontario
- The average low-income household in Ontario would need an additional \$24 per week, \$104.40 per month, or \$1,256.76 per year just to meet a baseline standard of adequacy
- 27 per cent of jobs created in Ontario in the past two years were temporary positions
- Almost 1.7 million working age Ontarians have less than a high school education

KEY TRENDS IN HUNGER

We have identified six key trends related to hunger and poverty in Ontario from the data collected in this report:

1. **An alarming number of Ontarians continue to be served by food banks every month.** It is alarming that a population roughly the same size as London, Ontario turns to food banks every month in our province.² Almost 320,000 Ontarians are served by food banks every month. This figure has increased by 14.3 per cent since 2001. On a national scale, Ontario serves the largest number of Canadians by far, at double the closest province (Quebec) and 44 per cent of the Canadian total.

2. **Working Ontarians, Ontario's children, and Ontarians with disabilities are hit hard by hunger.** Working Ontarians, Ontario's children, and Ontarians with disabilities make up a staggering proportion of those served by food banks in Ontario. Approximately 40 per cent of those served by food banks in Ontario are children, over 20 per cent are persons with disabilities, and 17 per cent work or have recently lost their job. This is particularly striking as these figures are in opposition to the public image of hunger and poverty. They also represent a segment of our society that we believe is protected by our social safety net or their own hard work.

3. **A significant proportion of those served by food banks are new Canadians.** It is clear that the success story that defined the postwar generation has changed substantially. The narrative of our national identity surrounding newcomers is a sad tale: almost one in three Ontarians served by food banks are new Canadians. This reflects a trend of rising poverty amongst new Canadians. Between 1980 and 2000, the poverty rate for new Canadians increased from 24.6 per cent to 35.8 per cent.³

4. **The inadequacy of social assistance in Ontario has forced many recipients to turn to food banks.** A very high proportion of those served by food banks are recipients of social assistance. 46.2 per cent of food bank recipients report Ontario Works (OW) as their major source of income, and 21.1 per cent report the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) as their major source of income. It should be noted that these proportions include children. Our data shows that the level of benefits provided are far less than what would be required for a basic standard of living, which has forced many social assistance recipients to turn to food banks. For example, a single person on social assistance receives a maximum of \$548 per month.⁴ However, average base household expenses for a single person, including rent, food, transportation, and energy equals \$1065 per month.

5. **Many communities in rural and northern Ontario are hit hard by hunger.** Despite the lower totals in terms of overall population and number of persons served by food banks, there are many rural and northern communities that have a higher rate of hunger than both urban Ontario and the provincial average. In some communities, the proportion of the population served by food banks is two to three times the rest of Ontario.

6. **Ontario's food banks are struggling to keep up with demand.** Food banks have assumed an incredible responsibility to feed hundreds of thousands of their neighbours. Given that many are run by volunteers, receive no federal or provincial funding, and rely on uncertain levels of food and financial resources, they perform admirably. But the sheer numbers and growth have made it difficult for many to meet the emergency need that exists across the province. One in five food banks does not have enough food to meet the needs of those they serve. We have also surpassed the threshold by which a community can provide enough food to support their local food bank. One in five food banks receives more than a third of their food from outside their community.

INTRODUCTION

There are times when the staff and volunteers at food banks in Ontario must feel like the little Dutch boy with their finger in a dyke. They have stoically stood face forward for a generation with little more than their hands and willpower to try to prevent a raging torrent of hunger and poverty from flooding their local town or city. Every year, the reservoir gets bigger, as tens of thousands become hundreds of thousands of their neighbours that must turn to the food bank to make ends meet. It is a crisis that threatens us all.

It is vital that we draw attention to this ever present emergency so that we may motivate action to relieve the growing and tremendous pressure. This report will outline key trends on hunger in Ontario, provide an overview of food bank usage including local, regional, and national comparisons, present a profile of those served by food

banks, and illustrate how food banks are responding to the great challenge of hunger in our province.

Our report would be incomplete if we only examined hunger from the vantage point of food banks. We also want to know why so many Ontarians are served by food banks every month. Therefore, in addition to these trends, we have also examined the factors that may affect hunger and poverty in our province.

We saw 2005 as the beginning of a new conversation about hunger in Ontario, and last year as the beginning of a new partnership in hunger relief. We hope that 2007 represents the first steps towards coordinated action to reduce hunger and poverty in our province. We are not so grand as to prematurely pronounce the beginning of the end, but we believe it is the beginning of *an* end.

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DATA SOURCES & METHODOLOGY

There are three major data sources that are used for the Ontario Hunger Report in 2007. The first is the data collected through the HungerCount survey, which is a collaborative project of the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) and provincial organizations across the country, including the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB). The data collected through this survey of all known food banks in Canada is primarily quantitative, and includes valuable information that helps to build a profile of food banks and those they serve. This survey has been administered on a regular basis since 1997, targeting March as the ideal sample month. Ontario's response rate for this survey was 100 per cent of all known food banks in 2007.

The second major data source is the annual member survey for the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB). This is a phone survey of member food banks conducted over a two week period in July in order to get a better understanding of the challenges that food banks face in their operations. The response rate for this survey was 69 per cent in 2007.

The third major data source includes datasets from Statistics Canada and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Datasets were obtained from Canada Food

Statistics, the Canadian Housing Observer, CANSIM data, Census data, the Survey of Household Spending, and the Survey of Financial Security. In addition to these general datasets, data was also obtained through regular reports and research studies produced by Statistics Canada, the Certified General Accountants of Canada, the OECD, and other non-profit organizations. A full accounting of each of the datasets can be found in the reference section of this report.

As in previous reports, we utilize the low-income cut-off (LICO) measure established by Statistics Canada as a measure of poverty. LICO is the point where the portion of income spent on food, clothing and shelter is 20 percentage points more than the average.¹ However, we also recognize the necessity of adding better depth to our measure of poverty. We have attempted to add to this depth by assembling a collection of basic necessities, income and benefits, and capital assets that provide a strong picture of actual need and resources. This allows us to understand the deprivation of certain basics of life amongst low-income populations, as well as the level of income that is required to meet a standard of living that provides these basics.

318,540 Ontarians
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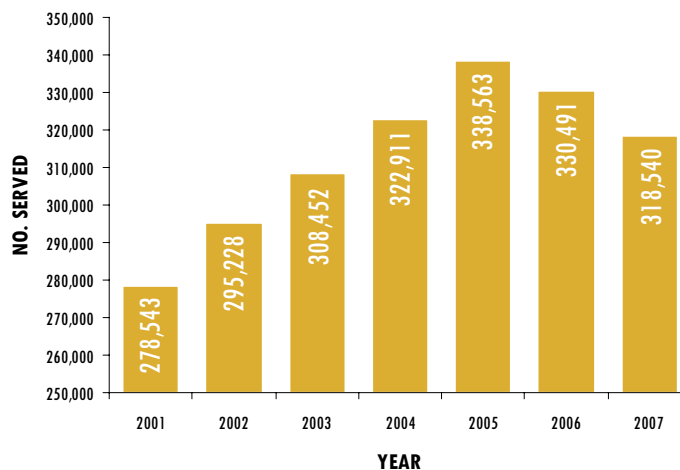
HUNGER IN ONTARIO: AN OVERVIEW

Ontario seems like a great place to live. We live in a country perceived to be one of the most progressive and prosperous nations on earth, our unemployment rate is at record low levels, federal and provincial government books are balanced, and everything but the weather and the House of Commons seems to be steady. And yet hundreds of thousands of our neighbours turn to food banks every month in order to put food on their tables.

Food bank usage in Ontario. 318,540 Ontarians were served by food banks each

month in 2007. This represents another small decrease over last year of 3.6 per cent. We hope for a sustained and a more significant decline, but the long-term trend shows that food bank usage is on the rise in our province. Since 2001, the number of Ontarians served by food banks has increased by 14.3 per cent. This increase is not a function of population growth, as the rate of change is well over double the percentage growth in Ontario's population.⁵ As a proportion of the total population, 2.6 per cent of Ontarians turn to food banks.

GRAPH: ONTARIANS SERVED BY FOOD BANKS EVERY MONTH, 2001 TO 2007

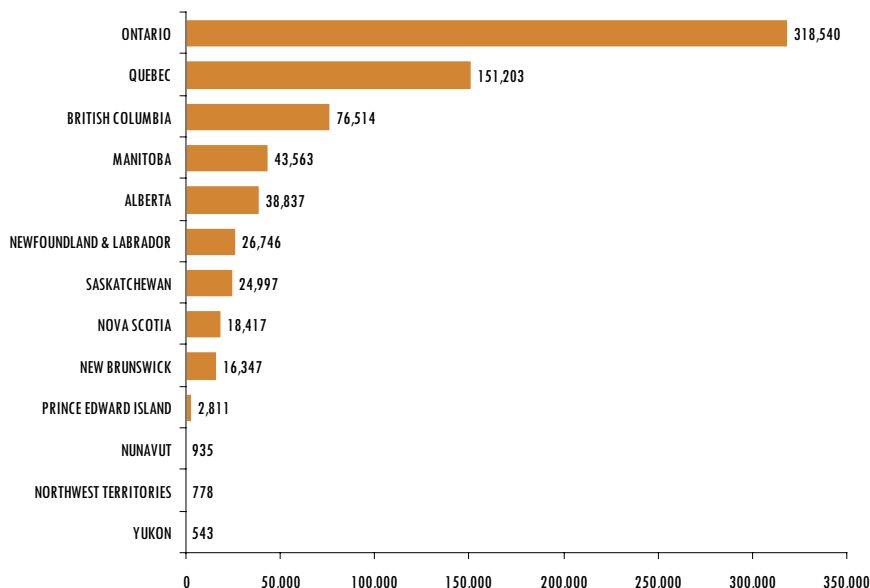


The number of people
served by food banks
in Ontario has
increased by 14.3 per
cent since 2001.

Comparison to national picture. Hunger is a tragic circumstance of Canadians in every province and territory, from St. John's to Victoria. Over 720,000 Canadians turned to food banks per month in 2007.⁶ In comparison to the other provinces, Ontario serves the largest number of Canadi-

ans, at over double the number of the closest province (Quebec) and 44.2 per cent of the national total. This is an imbalance in comparison to the share of Ontario's total population as a proportion of the overall Canadian population, which is 38.5 per cent.⁷

GRAPH: CANADIANS SERVED BY FOOD BANKS EACH MONTH BY PROVINCE, 2007⁸



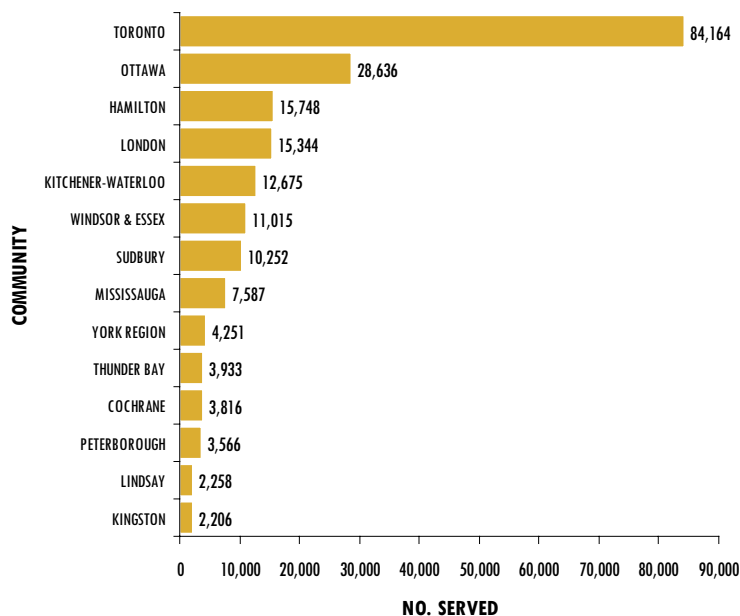
GEOGRAPHY OF HUNGER IN ONTARIO

If you travelled to all four corners of Ontario, you could probably hear people talking about hunger and poverty from the quiet lakefront cottages of Kenora to the constant hum of the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, and the thunderous majesty of Niagara Falls to the dull roar of the House of Commons. They likely do not know that they share a common narrative with the hundreds of thousands of their neighbours that live with hunger, and the thousands of fellow citizens who have committed themselves to reducing and relieving hunger and poverty in almost all of our villages, towns, cities, and major centres.

Hunger in Urban Ontario. Given that the vast majority of our population lives

in cities, it is unsurprising that the majority of Ontarians served by food banks live in urban centres. However, it is surprising how many Ontarians living in our cities must turn to food banks to make ends meet. Seven communities in Ontario serve more than 10,000 of their fellow citizens. This unfortunate list includes Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, London, Kitchener-Waterloo, Sudbury, and Windsor-Essex. As the largest cities, food banks in Toronto and Ottawa serve the greatest number of Ontarians, providing emergency hunger relief to over one third of the total number served in the province.⁹ Hunger and poverty is a very real problem in urban Ontario.

GRAPH: ONTARIANS SERVED BY FOOD BANKS EVERY MONTH IN SELECTED MAJOR CENTRES IN ONTARIO, 2007



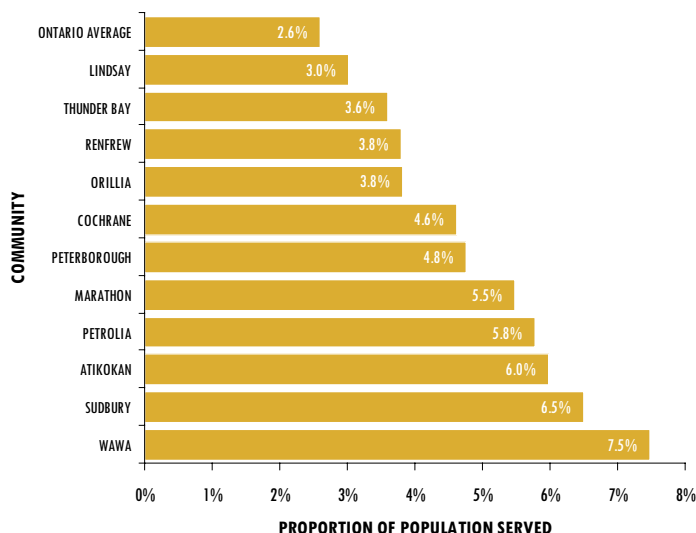
Hunger in Rural & Northern Ontario. Our cities are not the only domain of hunger and poverty in our province. It is a sadly shared characteristic of both our cities and our towns – an unfortunate tie that binds together urban and rural Ontario despite many other differences. Tens of thousands of Ontarians in northern and rural Ontario turn to food banks every month. Despite what many believe, hunger is not limited to the city streets of Toronto and Ottawa. It sharply intersects Main Street in every

community in our province.

Despite the lower totals in terms of overall population and number of persons served by food banks, there are many rural and northern communities that have a higher rate of hunger than urban Ontario and the provincial average. In some communities, the proportion of the population served by food banks is two to three times the rest of Ontario. This trend is felt most acutely in Northern Ontario.

Our cities are not the only domain of hunger and poverty in our province. It is a sadly shared characteristic of both our cities and our towns.

GRAPH: PROPORTION OF POPULATION SERVED BY FOOD BANKS IN SELECTED RURAL & NORTHERN COMMUNITIES IN ONTARIO, 2007



The majority of households served by food banks are families.

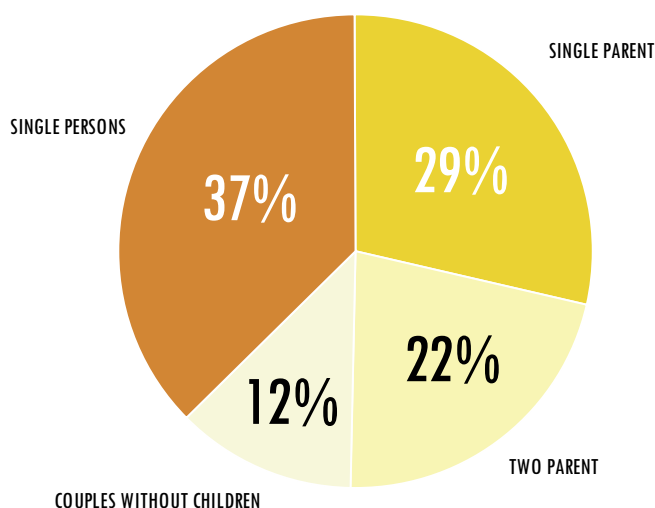
WHO IS HUNGRY IN ONTARIO?

The staggering overall figure of persons served by food banks and the tremendous breadth of hunger in Ontario is extremely troubling. But our examination of hunger and poverty in Ontario must also be accompanied with a thorough accounting of the characteristics of those served by food banks. Our examination of hunger and poverty in Ontario includes a breakdown of the household and individual characteristics of citizens forced to turn to food banks.

HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS


Family Types. The majority of households served by food banks are families. 63 per cent of all households served are single parent or two parent households. However, this also means that a very significant number of single Ontarians are served by food banks. Single persons represent 37 per cent of those served by food banks in the province.

GRAPH: HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION OF ONTARIANS SERVED BY FOOD BANKS, 2007



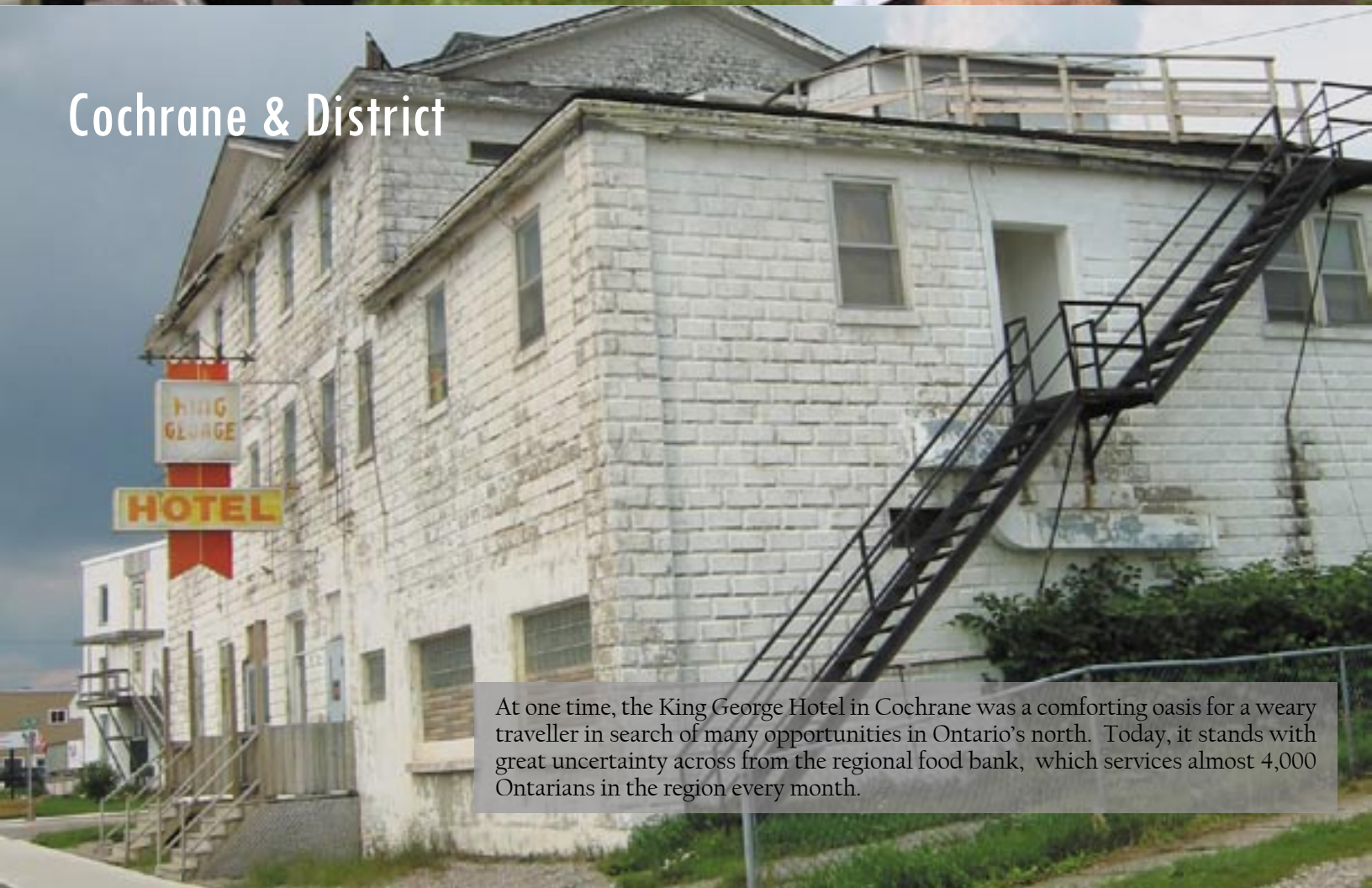
IN PICTURES: HUNGER IN NORTHERN ONTARIO

Marathon

A man with a mustache, wearing a light blue polo shirt and a watch, stands with his arms crossed in front of a white building. A blue sign in the background reads "Marathon Community Centre FOOD BANK MONDAY 6-8 FRIDAY 1-3".

Mitch, the coordinator of the local food bank in Marathon, has a very difficult task. The town has a very high rate of food bank usage, which is double the provincial average, at 5.5 per cent of the local population.

Cochrane & District

A large, multi-story building with a prominent fire escape. A sign on the building reads "KING GEORGE HOTEL".

At one time, the King George Hotel in Cochrane was a comforting oasis for a weary traveller in search of many opportunities in Ontario's north. Today, it stands with great uncertainty across from the regional food bank, which services almost 4,000 Ontarians in the region every month.

Nipigon



In February 2007, the plywood mill in Nipigon burned to the ground, putting over 120 people out of work in a town of less than 2,000. They announced it wasn't opening again in the late summer, because of the struggles in the forestry sector. A lot of local families had little certainty about their long-term future, as well as their daily ability to put food on their tables. Many families had to turn to the local food bank for support. All that is left is a barren field and signs pointing to nowhere.

Thunder Bay & Surrounding Area

A photograph of five women standing in front of a light blue building. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The woman on the far left is wearing a red shirt and glasses. The woman next to her is wearing a white sweater and glasses. The woman in the center is wearing a white shirt and glasses. The woman next to her is wearing a light blue shirt and glasses. The woman on the far right is wearing a pink and white striped shirt and glasses. They are all holding a large yellow sign that reads "Rural Cupboard Food Bank" in green and orange lettering. The sign is held in front of them, partially obscuring their bodies. The building behind them has a dark roof and a white cross on the wall.

Rural
Cupboard
Food
Bank

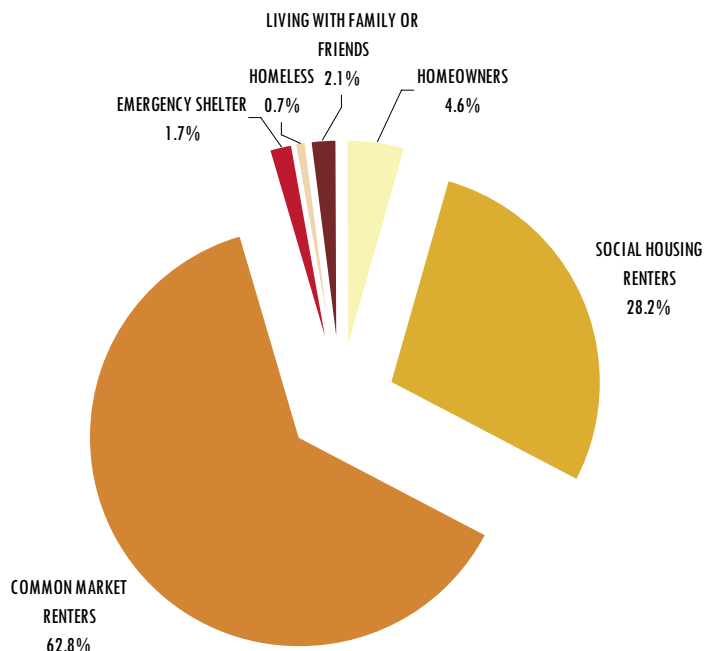
Hunger stretches across this region, reaching into the urban, rural, and remote communities surrounding the city. In many cases, the rate of food bank usage is much higher than the provincial average. It may even be higher, as many remote centres are not connected to the network, and do not report their figures. Pictured here are volunteers at the Rural Cupboard Food Bank in Kakabeka Falls.

Housing Types. One of the key additions to this year's report is a breakdown of housing types. The vast majority of households are renters: 63 per cent are in the common rental market, and 28 per cent live in social housing. The remaining households live on opposite ends of the housing market. 4.5 per cent of households do not have a home or live in transitional housing (homeless, shelter, or with friends and family), and 4.6 per cent are homeowners.

Energy. After the basics of food and

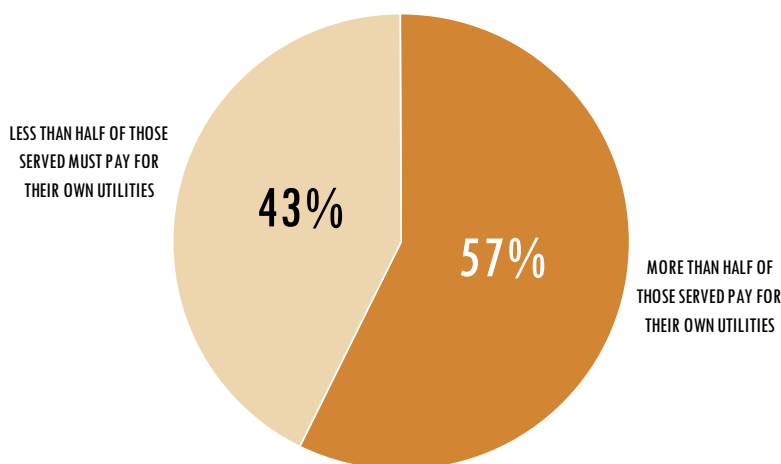
rent, the cost for energy is clearly another important household expense for any family. It is therefore vital to understand if and how this expense may affect families served by food banks. In the first year of data collection, it is apparent that a significant number of those served by food banks must pay for their own utilities. 57 per cent of those food banks collecting data on utilities report that the over half of their clients must pay for their own heating, hydro, and/or water bills.

GRAPH: HOUSING STATUS OF ONTARIANS SERVED BY FOOD BANKS, 2007



57 per cent of those food banks collecting data on utilities report that the over half of their clients must pay for their own heating, hydro, or water.

GRAPH: BREAKDOWN OF FOOD BANKS IN ONTARIO BY SHARE OF CLIENTS WHO PAY FOR THEIR OWN UTILITIES, 2007



Ontario's children continue to be hit hard by hunger. 38.8 per cent of those served by food banks are children.

21.1 per cent of all persons served by food banks in this province are persons living with disabilities

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Age. Ontario's children continue to be hit hard by hunger. 38.8 per cent of those served by food banks in Ontario are children. In absolute terms, this means that 123,557 children are served by food banks every month. It is a national shame that so many children go hungry in Ontario.

Employment. A very significant proportion of individuals served by food banks are working Ontarians. 14.2 per cent of those served by food banks in Ontario report that employment earnings are their major source of income. When children are removed from the equation, we can see that one in four Ontarians served by food banks work.¹⁰ In addition to these figures, there are also many Ontarians turning to food banks that have recently lost their jobs, and are receiving Employment Insurance. When taking these figures into account, 17.4 per cent of those served by food banks in Ontario are employed or have recently lost their job.

This number is rising in many communities. A majority of food banks have continued to witness a rise in the number of working Ontarians that they serve. Fifty-

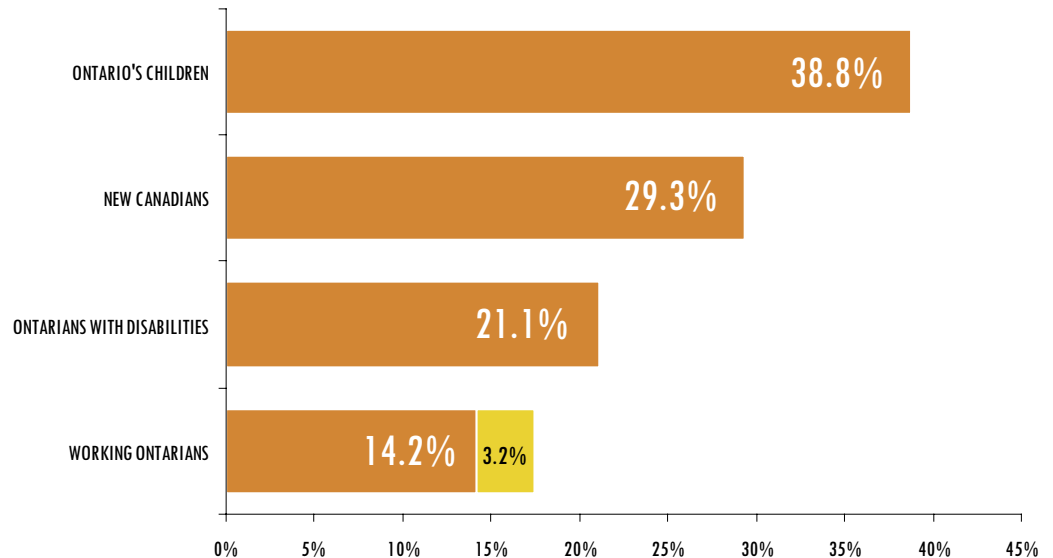
two per cent of food banks in Ontario report an increase in the number of working poor served in 2007. This figure is down slightly from 60 per cent in 2006.

There are also many Ontarians served by food banks that are not employed. 46.2 per cent of all Ontarians, including children, report general social assistance (Ontario Works) as their major source of income.

New Canadians. A very high proportion of those served by food banks in Ontario are new Canadians. Almost 30 per cent of Ontarians forced to turn to food banks are newcomers to Canada. Unfortunately, many of their first experiences of our nation are in the waiting room of their local food bank.

Disabilities. Almost 70,000 Ontarians living with disabilities are faced with hunger every month. 21.1 per cent of all persons served by food banks in this province are persons living with disabilities. This figure is well beyond the population average of 13.5 per cent.¹¹ In addition, this also means that over one in five recipients of disability benefits in Ontario must turn to food banks to try to make ends meet.¹²

GRAPH: POPULATION GROUPS AS A TOTAL PROPORTION OF THOSE SERVED BY FOOD BANKS IN ONTARIO, 2007



OUR COLLECTIVE EFFORT TO RELIEVE HUNGER: FOOD BANK TRENDS

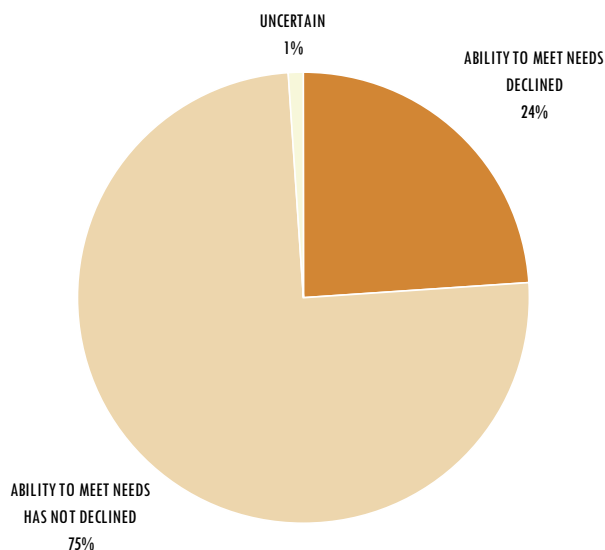
There are hundreds of food banks across Ontario working collectively to provide hunger relief. They have accepted a responsibility to respond to the crisis of hunger. But it is neither within their ability, nor is it their ultimate responsibility, to provide for the health, well-being and success of all Ontarians. This is a collective responsibility of our federal, provincial, and municipal governments.

Their response is influenced by a number of factors, from overall need to the availability of food and financial resources. In 2007, there are a number of key trends that can be seen in the ability of food banks to meet local needs, food hamper size, frequency of service, and food supply.

Change in Ability to Meet Need. It is nothing less than a minor miracle that

food banks are able to feed hundreds of thousands of their neighbours every week of every month of the year. Alongside luck, they must rely almost solely on at least five of the seven virtues present in their staff and supporters: charity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility. Many food banks are run solely by volunteers, receive no provincial or federal government funding, and rely on unstable levels of food and financial resources from their own community and beyond. Despite both luck and virtue, these challenges, alongside increased need, mean that many food banks struggle to meet the emergency needs of those they serve. Twenty-four per cent of food banks in Ontario reported a decline in their ability to meet the needs of those they served in 2007.

GRAPH: CHANGE IN THE ABILITY OF ONTARIO'S FOOD BANKS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR CLIENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR, 2007

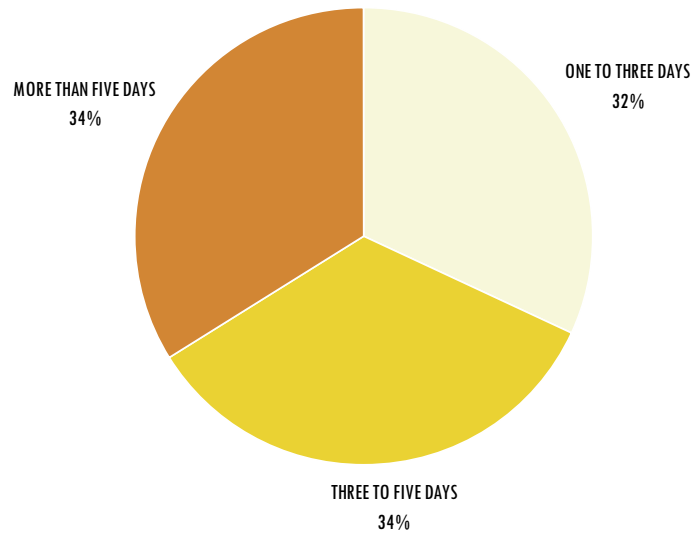


Alongside luck, food banks must rely on at least five of the seven virtues present in their staff and supporters: charity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility

Food Hamper Size. It is often forgotten that food banks are an emergency service. They were originally intended to respond to a temporary emergency of poverty and hunger which was the result of an economic downturn in the economy and a tightening of social services budgets in the early and mid-eighties. Fortunately and unfortunately, most continue to play that role by

providing an emergency supply of food to attempt to fill a gap during a particularly difficult time of the month for those they serve. They do not, and cannot, provide for the full nutritional demands of their clients. Two-thirds of food banks in Ontario provide between one and five days worth of food in a hamper.

GRAPH: AMOUNT OF FOOD PROVIDED PER HAMPER BY FOOD BANKS IN ONTARIO, 2007

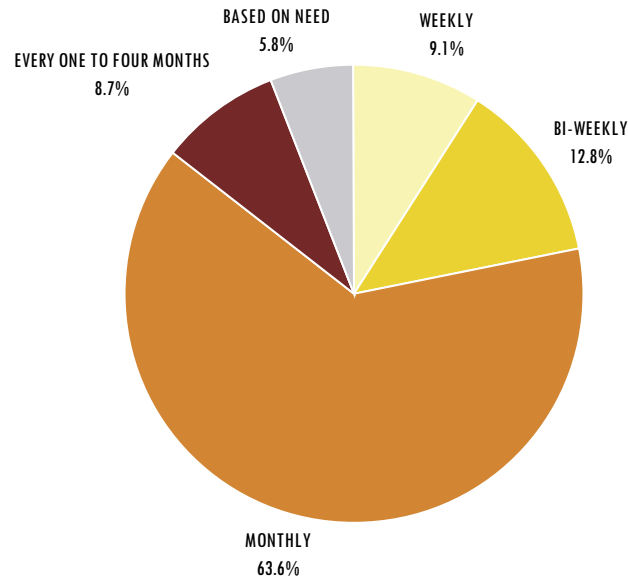


Many food banks do not have enough food to meet the needs of those they serve. In 2007, 22 per cent of food banks did not have enough food to meet the needs of their clients.

Frequency of Service. The majority of food banks provide their services, such as hamper programs, on a monthly basis. 63.6 per cent of all food banks in Ontario are able to serve their clients every month. However,

the need is so great in many communities that service is offered more frequently. Over 20 per cent of food banks provide service on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

GRAPH: FREQUENCY OF SERVICE PROVIDED BY FOOD BANKS IN ONTARIO, 2007



Food Supply. From soup to nuts, a tremendous amount of food moves through the network of food banks in Ontario to neighbours in need. Tens of millions of pounds of food are distributed through local hamper, shelter, and kitchen programs in Ontario every year. In order to understand changes to the food supply, it is important to determine whether supply meets need, and the source of food donations.

Food banks provide an emergency supply of food on a monthly basis to their neighbours. But it is difficult for many food banks

to provide this emergency service given the overwhelming demand. Many food banks do not have enough food to meet the needs of those they serve. In 2007, 22 per cent of food banks did not have enough food to meet the needs of their clients. This represents a small increase over 2006 of three per cent.

We have surpassed a threshold where many communities no longer have the capacity to meet the needs of their local food bank. The continued and unbelievable generosity of community partners and neigh-

bours has been outflanked by the sheer numbers of persons forced to turn to food banks.

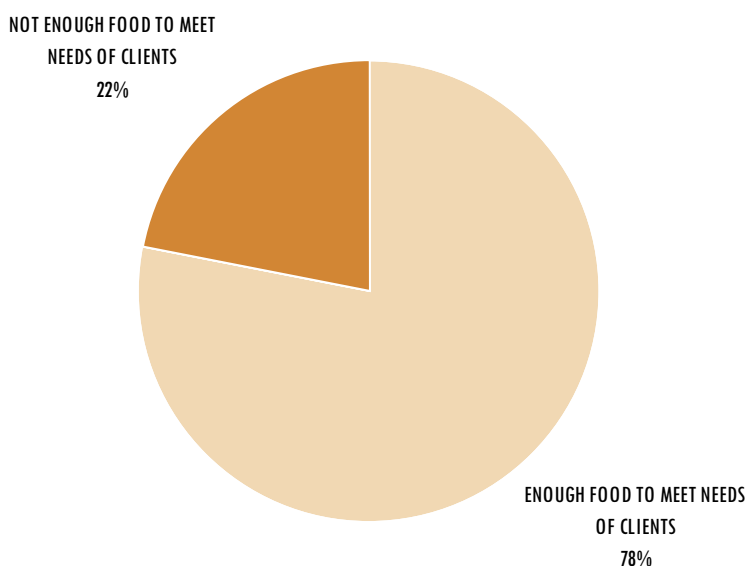
This has led to two necessary responsive actions. First, our network of food banks is working to improve coordination of food acquisition and distribution, in order to increase the overall supply of food donations at a regional and local level. This means that a greater volume of food is received from outside of the community. In 2007, 21 per cent of food banks in Ontario received greater than one-third of their food supply from outside of their community. This does represent a year-over-year decline of nine per cent, but an increase from 2005. It is

believed that a decline in national corporate food donations between 2006 and 2007 contributed to this trend.

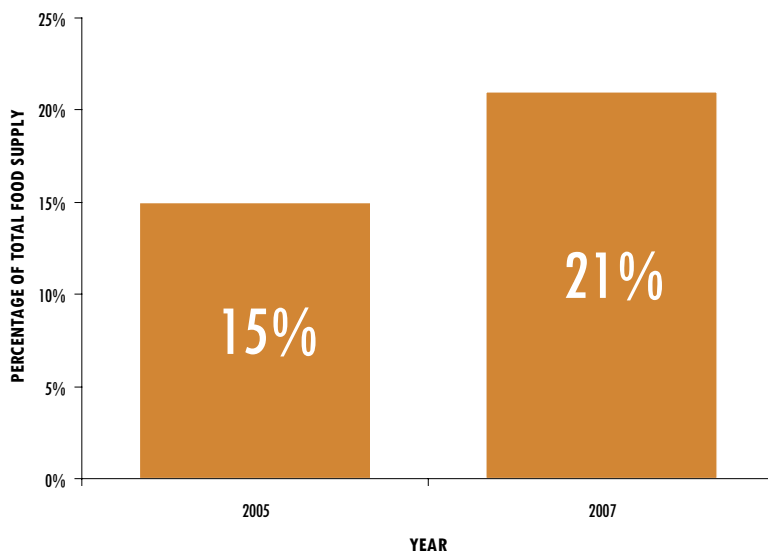
Second, many food banks must also purchase a significant amount of food in order to attempt to ensure their supply of food can meet local demand. A majority of food banks (64 per cent) in Ontario purchase over ten per cent of the food they distribute. A very significant number of food banks purchase a large quantity of food. 29 per cent of food banks in Ontario must purchase one third of their food supply in order to provide for hungry neighbours in their community.

The continued and unbelievable generosity of community partners and neighbours has been outflanked by the sheer numbers of persons forced to turn to food banks.

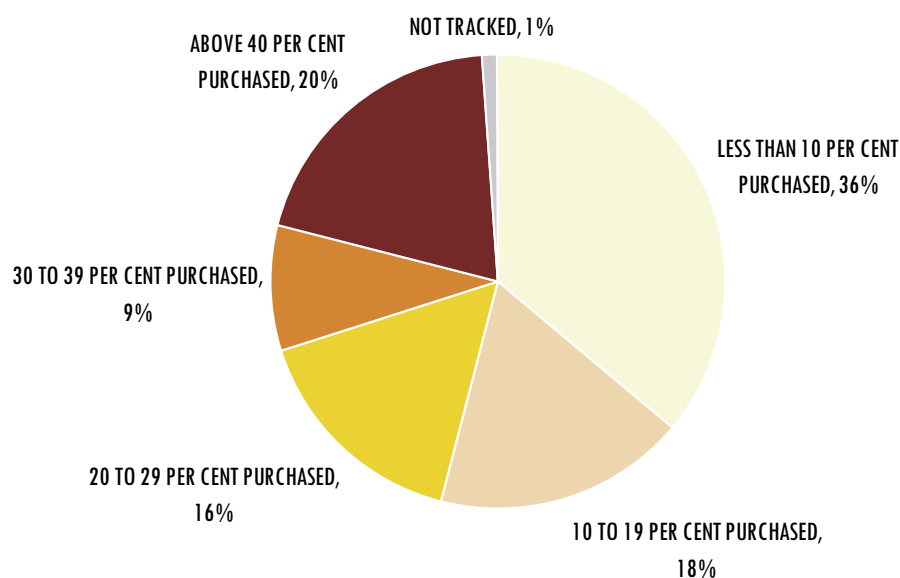
GRAPH: FOOD SUPPLY AT FOOD BANKS IN ONTARIO IN RELATION TO NEED, 2007



GRAPH: PROPORTION OF FOOD BANKS IN ONTARIO RECEIVING GREATER THAN ONE THIRD OF THEIR FOOD SUPPLY FROM OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY, 2005 TO 2007



GRAPH: PERCENTAGE OF FOOD SUPPLY THAT MUST BE PURCHASED BY FOOD BANKS IN ONTARIO, 2007



LOOKING AT THE BASICS: FACTORS AFFECTING FOOD BANK USAGE

The trends above shed light on a rather dark and troubling image of hunger in Ontario. Hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are forced to turn to food banks every month in every village, town, city and major centre. These people are our neighbours, our co-workers, our children, our parents, and those we have welcomed to our nation with open arms.

Why are so many Ontarians turning to food banks? Unemployment is down, the federal government's bank account is overflowing with money, the majority of Canadians feel a general sense of content in their quality of life, and we remain committed to our belief that our nation will not, and does not, allow anyone to fall through our social safety net.

It is a difficult question to answer. In essence, if food banks are the canary in the coal mine, we need to find out what is happening to the canary. In our response, we have developed three groups of indicators including household expenses, income and benefits, and capital. These indicators were chosen for their strong linkage to hunger and poverty, and hence, food bank usage.

We know that the cost and affordability of basic household expenses like rent, energy, and food have a direct impact on one's budget and general standard of liv-

ing. These costs are directly associated or affected by an individual's income and benefits. For example, the level of income supports as well as wages and the quality of the job market determines both individual and overall capability to obtain the basics of life. But the panorama of poverty does not fit neatly into that simple frame. Hunger and poverty are not merely a bi-weekly battle between the pay stub and the grocery bill. We must also bring the concept of financial security and advancement into the frame. The level of income and ability to afford the basics or an emergency circumstance are affected by one's level of human and financial capital. For example, one's level of education directly affects their income, and their ability to advance their quality of life.

In addition to the development of these indicator groups, we have also created a model of two households by outlining income levels and basic expenses. As it is the first comprehensive attempt to develop these models, it will be necessary to further refine these factors and improve our understanding of hunger and poverty in Ontario. Moving forward, we hope that this overall approach provides us with enhanced capacity to improve our diagnosis of the root causes of hunger and poverty.

Why are so many Ontarians turning to food banks?

...if food banks are the canary in the coal mine, we need to find out what is happening to the canary.

BASIC HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES

Our first set of related indicators focuses on basic household expenses, including housing, food, energy, and health.

HOUSING

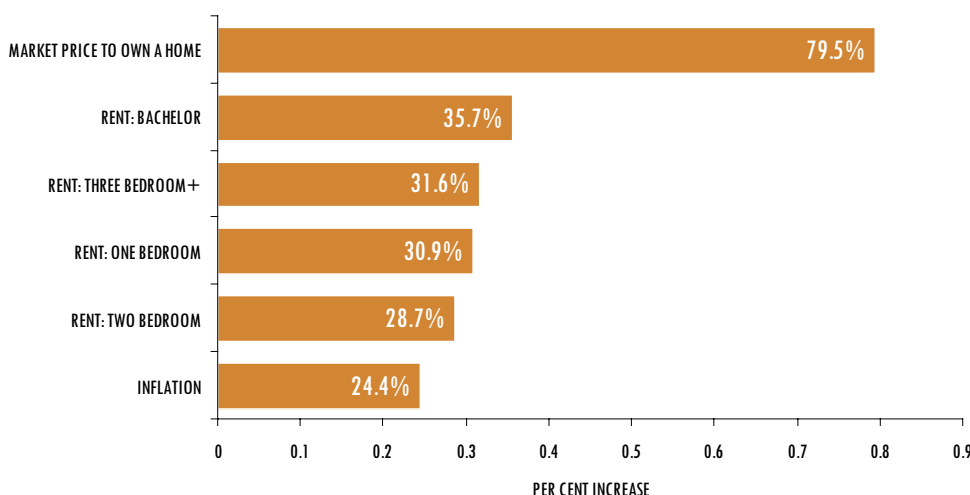
The affordability of housing has declined significantly. The cost of housing has increased tremendously over the past decade, which has caused an overall decline in affordability. Between 1995 and 2006, the cost to own a home increased by 79.5 per cent. Rental housing also showed a significant rate of increase beyond inflation, at a high of 35.7 per cent for a bachelor apartment to 28.7 per cent for a two bedroom

apartment. Fortunately, between 2001 and 2006, the overall rate of increase for rental housing has slowed to slightly below inflation.¹³ However, the cost of housing relative to income is still at very high levels due to the long-term increase.

There is a significant demand for affordable housing. 122,426 Ontario households are on a waiting list for social housing.¹⁴ This represents 2.7 per cent of all Ontario households, which is roughly equivalent to the proportion of Ontarians served by food banks every month.¹⁵

122,426 Ontario households are on a waiting list for social housing.

GRAPH: CHANGE IN COST OF HOUSING IN ONTARIO, 1995 TO 2006¹⁶



FOOD

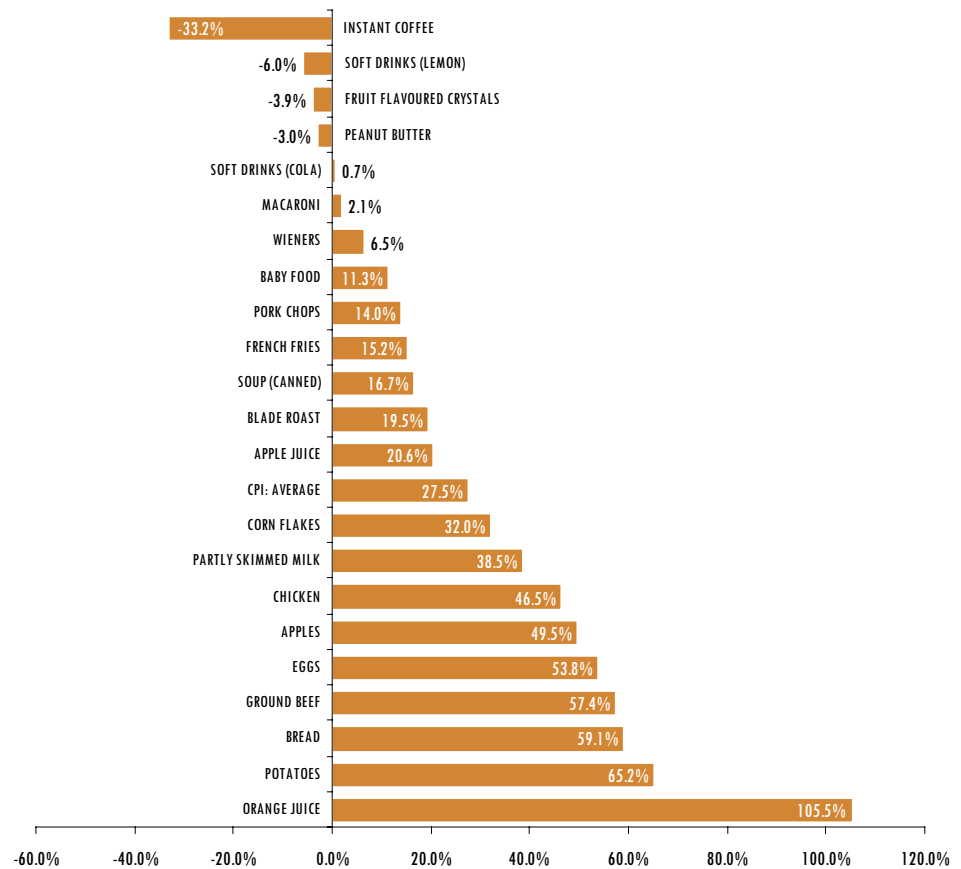
The change in the cost of healthy foods has outpaced inflation and the cost of non-healthy foods. Over the last ten years, the price of many nutritious foods grew much more significantly than non-healthy foods. The cost of many healthy staple foods in a healthy diet, including milk, eggs, bread, chicken, and beef grew at a much faster rate than inflation, as well as many less healthy foods, such as French fries, wieners, soft drinks, and macaroni. For example, the price of ground beef has grown at almost double the rate of inflation since 1995 (57.4 per cent vs. 27.5 per cent), whereas the price of two litres of cola has remained almost the same (\$1.39 vs. \$1.40), and hot dog wieners have only increased by 6.5 per cent. The Canada Food Guide does not recommend these items as they are may

be higher in sodium and calories and lower in nutrient content.¹⁷

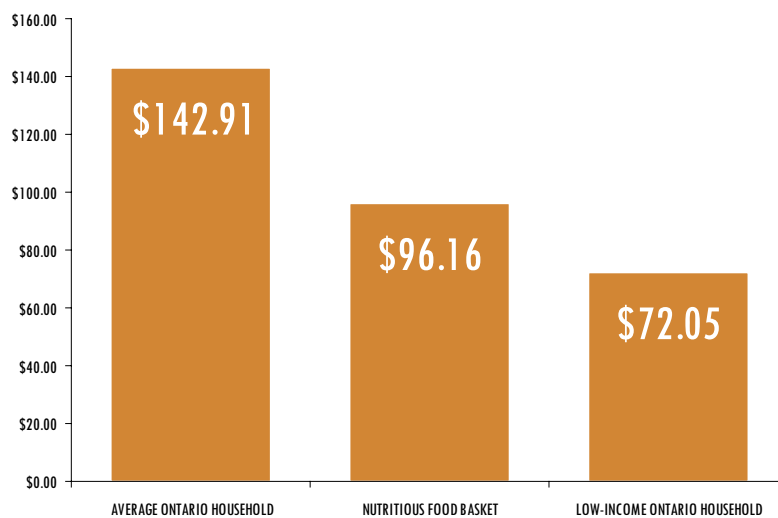
Weekly household food budget. Low-income families simply do not have enough money to spend on food. This is clear on the drawn faces of those walking through the doors of food banks across Ontario, but rational economics also proves this point. The average Ontario household spends \$142.91 per week on groceries, and the nutritious food basket compiled by public health agencies across the province mark the minimum cost of groceries at \$96.16 per week. However, the average low-income family only spends \$72.05 per month on groceries. This household needs an additional \$24 per week, \$104.40 per month, or \$1,252.76 per year just to meet a baseline standard of food adequacy.

...the average low-income family only spends \$72.05 per month on groceries. This household needs an additional \$24 per week, \$104.40 per month, or \$1,252.76 per year just to meet a baseline standard of food adequacy.

GRAPH: CHANGE IN COST OF SELECTED FOOD ITEMS IN CANADA, 1995 TO 2007¹⁸



GRAPH: FOOD EXPENDITURE BY SELECTED HOUSEHOLD TYPE COMPARED TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET, 2005^{19,20,21}



Between 2003 and 2007, the cost of household heating fuel increased from 68 to 74 per cent in Ottawa, Toronto, and Thunder Bay.

ENERGY

Energy represents a disproportionate share of household income for low-income families. Low-income Ontarians spend a disproportionate amount of their income on energy. Low-income Ontarians spend 13.7 per cent of their household income on energy, compared with the Canadian average of four per cent.²² These households in Ontario spend 6.1 per cent of

their household income on electricity alone, which is six times as great as the highest income quintile.²³

Cost of energy. The cost of energy is still at all-time highs for all households across Canada. Between 2003 and 2007, the cost of household heating fuel increased from 68 to 74 per cent in Ottawa, Toronto, and Thunder Bay. Fortunately, the cost of energy seems to have stabilized in the past

few years. The increases to the overall cost of energy are compounded by the fact that low-income households are often less energy efficient. They also have less capability to adopt high front end cost measures that would increase efficiency and reduce costs in the long-term.

Low-income energy assistance programs. Although there is no clear metric or indicator for low-income energy assistance programs, some small scale low-income energy programs have been introduced by energy providers and the provincial government to decrease the overall energy burden of families.²⁴ These are positive first steps. However, these are generally one time ini-

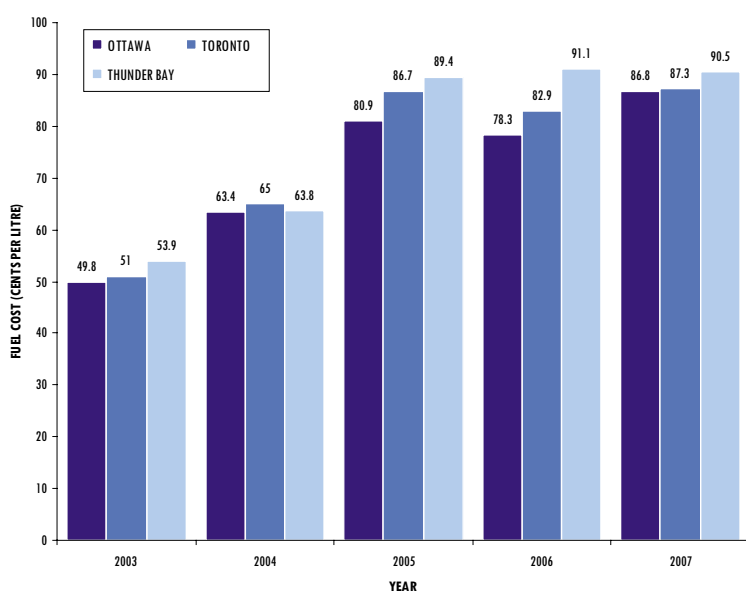
tiatives or pilot projects, and these interventions are insufficient in addressing the overwhelming need for support.

HEALTH

Cost of health care. We live in a nation that is extremely proud of its system of universal health care. It is certainly the envy of many parts of the world, and for good reason. But it is far from perfect. Essential health care services are not always free, and many are not affordable. In 2004, 26 per cent of Canadians with below average incomes went without health care they needed because of the cost.²⁵

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GRAPH: AVERAGE RETAIL PRICE OF HOUSEHOLD HEATING FUEL IN SELECTED ONTARIO CENTRES, 2003 TO 2007



INCOME & BENEFITS

After basic household expenses, our second set of related indicators focuses on income and benefits, including employment (types and wages), income supports, and supplementary benefits.

EMPLOYMENT

The overall employment picture appears bright. We have thirty year lows in unemployment and Ontario continues to create new jobs. But we may not be creating quality jobs with the right mix of wages and benefits to ensure a quality of life for both individuals and the province as a whole. In June 2007, the top seven labour markets in Canada were all west of Kenora.²⁶

Employment: Types. It is a well known fact that we are losing manufacturing jobs in Ontario. Since 2005, Ontario has lost

122,300 manufacturing jobs.²⁷ This is certainly troubling, given that many of our towns and cities are founded and sustained by this sector. In addition, these jobs are often accompanied by important supplementary benefits and long-term financial security. However, the loss of manufacturing jobs in Ontario is not a long-term trend. Since 1986, the proportion of Ontarians employed in manufacturing has declined by an astonishing 7.8 per cent. In today's terms, this means that over half a million Ontarians are no longer employed in manufacturing.²⁸

More new jobs have been created in the last two years, which have replaced these positions. But the quality and wages of these new jobs are limited. Almost one in three of the new jobs created in Ontario

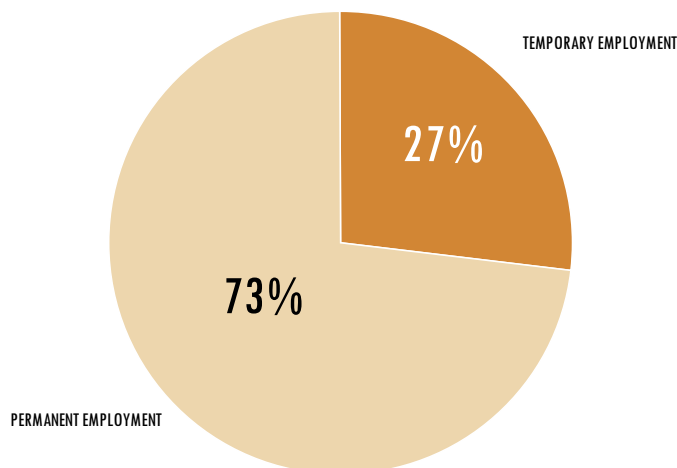
The number of Ontarians employed in sales and service occupations grew by 11 per cent in the past two years. At the low end of the pay scale, it is already the largest employment sector, with 25 per cent of all Ontarians employed in sales and service occupations.

during this time period were temporary. Unfortunately, the hallmarks of these employment opportunities are fewer benefits, lower wages, and less security. In October 2007, temporary workers in Ontario earned an average of 39 per cent less per hour than permanent employees.²⁹

Overall, there has been a sustained increase in average hourly pay for workers in Ontario. However, the employment cat-

egory with the greatest labour force growth in the past two years was the sales and service sector, which has the lowest wages of all employment categories. The number of Ontarians employed in sales and service occupations grew by 11 per cent in the past two years. At the low end of the pay scale, it is already the largest employment sector, with 25 per cent of all Ontarians employed in sales and service occupations.

GRAPH: NEW JOBS IN ONTARIO OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS (TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT)³⁰



GRAPH: LABOUR FORCE GROWTH IN ALL SECTORS OVER PAST TWO YEARS (OCTOBER 2005 TO SEPTEMBER 2007)

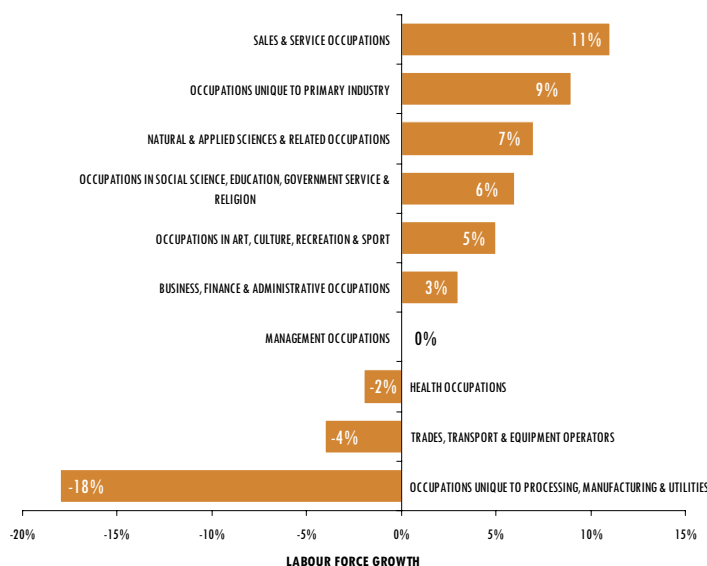


CHART: AVERAGE HOURLY EARNINGS BY INDUSTRY TYPE, SEPTEMBER 2007

INDUSTRY TYPE	AV. WAGE PER HOUR
Management occupations	\$ 34.09
Natural and applied sciences and related occupation s	\$ 30.07
Occupations in social science, education, government service and religion	\$ 27.26
Health occupations	\$ 25.60
Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport	\$ 22.59
Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	\$ 20.98
Business, finance and administrative occupations	\$ 20.53
Occupations unique to processing, manufacturing and utilities	\$ 18.34
Occupations unique to primary industry	\$ 14.99
Sales and service occupations	\$ 14.43

INCOME SUPPORTS

Employment Insurance. It has been widely reported that it is extremely difficult for unemployed Ontarians to access income supports from the federal government. Only 27 per cent of Ontarians who lose their job receive Employment Insurance (EI) benefits.³¹ If Ontarians cannot access this program for temporary support between employment, they are forced turn to alternative financial supports such as Ontario Works (OW) or to third sector supports such as food banks. Employment Insurance is failing Ontarians.

Social assistance. The mid-1990s cuts to social assistance in Ontario were both drastic and punitive. Unfortunately, we cannot turn back the clock to reverse those decisions for those receiving assistance since that time. Given the current context, it is necessary to determine whether the current level of benefits meets a standard of adequacy. There have been three increases to the rates since 2003, which represent very small steps towards the aim of ensuring adequacy. Today, the maximum monthly allowance for a single person on Ontario Works (OW) is \$548 and the maximum monthly allowance for a single person on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is \$979. We will use these figures to determine their adequacy by comparing them to basic household expenses in two case studies below.

Child Benefits. Ontario's low-income families with children have struggled with

inadequate benefits for more than a decade. The overall level and interaction of federal and provincial benefits has left children well below a standard of adequacy. The introduction of the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) in 2007 is certainly a welcome step forward for low-income families and children across Ontario. However, there is a clear need to accelerate the schedule of increases to the proposed maximum of \$1,100 per year.

SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFITS

Individuals must also be able to access benefits for preventative care, emergency circumstances, and their retirement. Unfortunately, many low-income Ontarians lack basic supplementary benefits, including life or disability benefits, supplementary health, vision, or dental coverage, or registered pension plans.

- **Life or disability benefits.** Only 18 per cent of Canada's low-income workers have access to life or disability insurance, compared to 61.5 per cent for non low-income workers.³²
- **Supplementary health or dental insurance.** In low-income families with at least one worker, only one quarter of the families receive supplementary health or dental insurance, compared to 75 per cent for other households.³³
- **Registered pension plan.** Only 15.1 per cent of low-income workers were offered a pension plan by their employer, compared to 48.7 per cent for non low-income workers.³⁴

HUMAN & FINANCIAL CAPITAL

Our third set of related indicators focus on human and financial capital, including basic education and literacy, and the asset and debt position of households.

EDUCATION

Millions of Ontarians lack basic education and literacy skills. Hundreds of thousands of Ontarians lack basic education and literacy skills. Almost 1.7 million working age Ontarians have less than a high school education. This represents 18.2 per cent of the total population.³⁵ This effect is more pronounced as age increases. 13.2 per cent of Ontarians aged 20 to 34 do not have a high school education, whereas 27.3 per cent of Ontarians aged 45 to 64 do not have a high school education. Our record on literacy for those who do not complete secondary studies is poor. For adults who

have not completed secondary school, Canadian adults ranked 13th, 14th and 15th respectively in prose, document and quantitative skills among 30 OECD countries in a recent test of literacy.³⁶

An even larger proportion of Ontarians are at what would be considered to be a basic level of education. 29 per cent have a high school diploma or some post-secondary education. Although their prospects are brighter, many experience similar challenges of literacy and lack of opportunity.

Inadequate basic education and literacy has a significant negative impact. The employment prospects for Ontarians with lower levels of education and literacy are not bright. The unemployment rate for individuals with less than a high school education is much higher than the Canadian average (10.2 per cent versus 6.2 per cent).³⁷

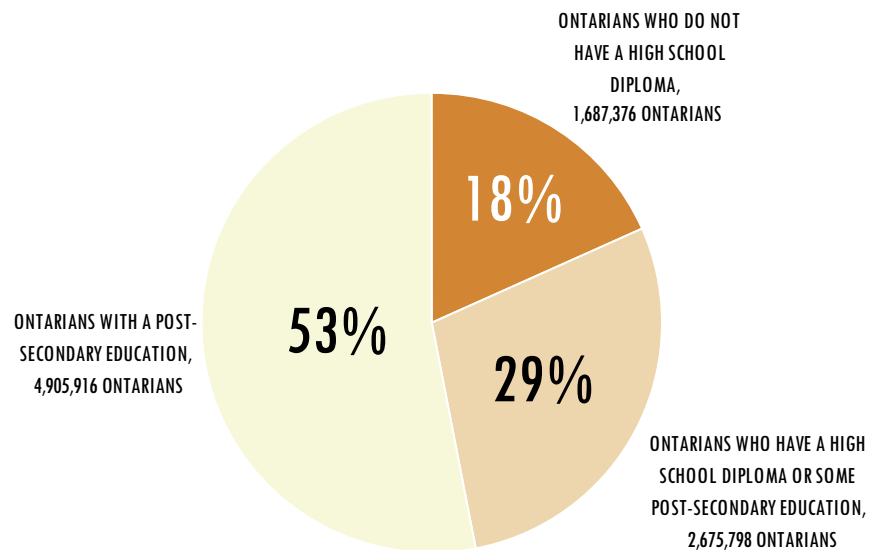
Almost 1.7 million working age Ontarians have less than a high school education.

If they successfully find employment, individuals with less than a high school education typically earn 33 per cent less than the average earner, and only 43 per cent of what an individual with a university degree would earn.

The other clear impacts to inadequate basic education are on both national social cohesion and productivity. We have heard of the two solitudes, and the growing divide between rural and urban Canada. But there is also a growing divide between the hyper-educated and those who lack basic secondary education. It is relatively easy for the hyper-educated college and university graduates to find employment with much higher wages. They are also much more mobile in their chosen fields and in their

ability to move from location to location to find employment or an improved quality of life. But the level of opportunity, lifestyle, and mobility of those who lack basic secondary education or the bare minimum of a high school diploma are extremely limited. The lack of basic education and literacy also raises challenges for overall productivity. It is estimated that over the next five to ten years, approximately 70 per cent of all job openings will require some form of post-secondary education, including a trade certificate, a college diploma or a university degree. Unfortunately, only 53 per cent of Ontarians have these qualifications. The 18 per cent of Ontarians who do not have a high school education are the furthest behind.

GRAPH: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF ONTARIANS, 2001³⁸



ASSETS & DEBT POSITION OF HOUSEHOLDS

All Canadians have been struggling with saving money and building assets. The number of Canadian households that saved money in 2004 fell to its lowest levels since the 1930s. In 2004, just over 84,000 Canadians declared bankruptcy, a 57 per cent increase from 1994.

Home ownership. The struggle to save for a home is felt most acutely by low-income families. Between the mid-1980's and the late 1990's, low-income families became less likely to own a home. The proportion has lowered from one in three to one in four families holding a residence as an asset.³⁹ This decline in savings or financial assets is also reflected in home ownership amongst new Canadians, with the rate of home ownership declining by five per cent between 1981 and 2001.⁴⁰ Without savings or any

financial assets, it is difficult for families to contribute to the advancement of their children through higher education, receive loans based on their own equity, or transfer wealth to subsequent generations. The result of these difficulties is an increased limitation on intergenerational mobility, or the ability of children to move out of poverty.

Debt ratios. Low-income Ontarians also have very high debt ratios when compared to both assets and income. Low-income Canadians have twice the national debt-to-asset ratio average at \$29 of debt for every \$100 in assets.⁴¹ The debt to income ratio of low-income Canadians is also much higher. In 1999, low-income Canadians had a debt to income ratio of 11 per cent, compared to the national average of 5 per cent.⁴² For example, a low-income household with an income of \$12,000 per year would have an

average debt of \$1,200.

Pension assets. Low-income families are much less likely to have pension assets to ensure their financial security after retirement. 64 per cent of economic families with incomes below \$30,000 have no private pension assets.⁴³ This is over twice the national average of 29 per cent.

Payday loans. The challenge of debt and the inadequacy of government and mainstream financial institutions' support of low-income families have forced many to turn to payday loan providers. Unfortunately, the effective annualized interest rate

can be as much as 1,200 per cent.⁴⁴ Low-income families are twice as likely to use a payday loan compared to the national average. In 2005, 4.6 per cent of low-income families in Canada received a payday loan, compared to the national average of 2.3 per cent.⁴⁵ Usage is most acute in families with the lowest income and assets. Six per cent of families with bank balances of \$500 or less had taken out a payday loan, compared to one per cent of those families with balances of between \$2,100 and \$8,000 and virtually no families with a bank balance of greater than \$8,000.⁴⁶

A MONTH IN THE LIFE: UNDERSTANDING ADEQUACY

The poverty measures established by Statistics Canada provide an excellent window into understanding the breadth of poverty across the country. In general terms, the most common measures determine relative poverty, which is important in a nation where we strive towards equality.

But it is also possible to have a basic understanding of poverty in more absolute terms. Some of the indicators highlighted in this report actually demonstrate deprivation to certain basics for an adequate quality of life. In an ideal world, we would be able to directly ascertain the proportion of Ontarians who are deprived of any and all of the basics of life. But we can also attempt to understand deprivation by determining how the interaction of the above characteristics (particularly expenses and income) makes it difficult to put food on the table. It also demonstrates the tough choices between expenses that many families are forced to make every month.

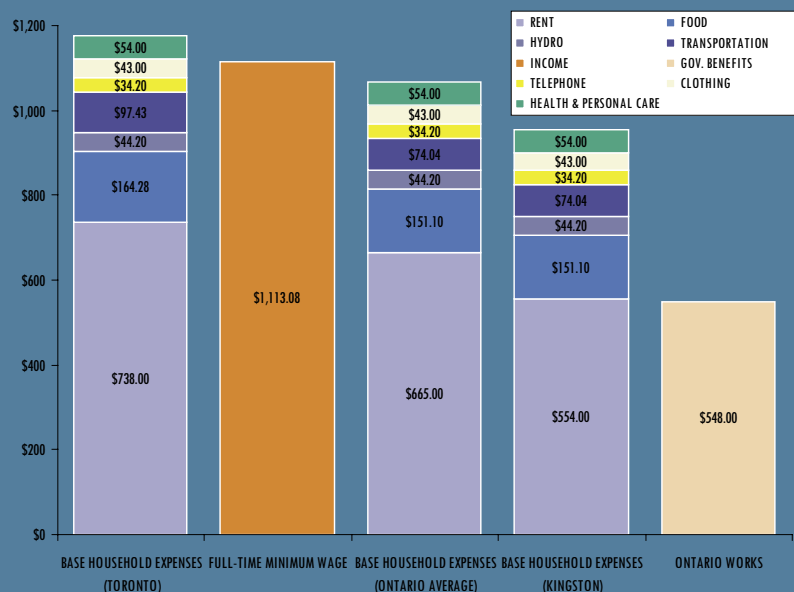
In order to achieve this understanding, we have put together a simple monthly budget with the cost of basic household expenses, and compared it to minimum wage and base social assistance benefits in Ontario. The budget includes enough money for a phone, a place to sleep, food on the table, basic personal & health care, clothing, and public transportation. These figures exclude other necessary expenses including savings, education, entertainment and recreation, household maintenance, insurance, debt servicing, and unexpected emergency expenses. These factors would need to be taken into account in future models.

The costing data for the models has been obtained through the Toronto's Nutritious Food Basket, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Bell Canada, the Survey of Household Spending, and the Ministry of Energy.

EXAMPLE ONE: SINGLE PERSON LIVING ALONE

It is estimated that the base household expenses for a single person are \$954.54 per month in Kingston, \$1065.54 on average in Ontario, and \$1,175.11 in Toronto. These figures demonstrate that Ontario Works (OW) falls short of a basic measure of adequacy. On average, it may be possible for a single person working full-time on minimum wage to have the very basics, but they would have no money for the other necessary expenses outlined above.

GRAPH: HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES FOR A SINGLE PERSON IN ONTARIO COMPARED TO SELECTED INCOME SOURCES, 2007

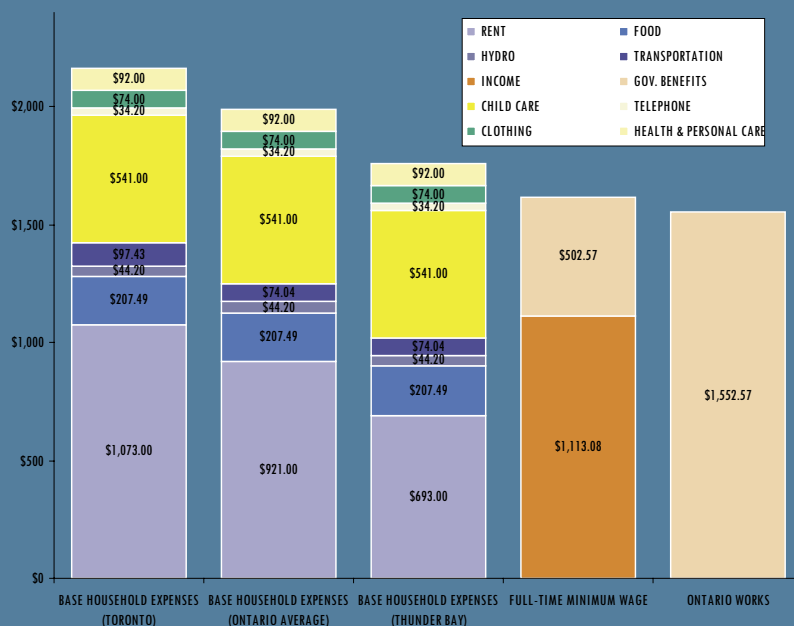


EXAMPLE TWO: SINGLE MOTHER WITH ONE CHILD

Life can be very difficult for a single mother with one child in Ontario. It is estimated that the base household expenses for a single mother with one child are \$1,987.83 on average in Ontario, and \$2,163.32 in Toronto. These figures demonstrate that Ontario Works (OW) and current levels of child benefits fall short of a basic measure of adequacy.

Additional modelling was performed on employment on a sales and service occupation, as this is the largest labour sector and it has experienced the greatest growth in the past two years. On average, a single mother working full-time in a sales and service job could earn \$2,246.70 per month, including government benefits. On average, it may be possible for this family to have the very basics, but it would be difficult to afford the other necessary expenses outlined above.

GRAPH: HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES FOR A SINGLE MOTHER WITH ONE CHILD IN ONTARIO COMPARED TO SELECTED INCOME SOURCES, 2007



MARY'S STORY

It is easy to get lost in the numbers. There are a lot of them. But we cannot forget that these figures are only a reflection of the lives of people in poverty in our province.

This is Mary's story. It is a true story, but we have changed her name in an effort to protect her dignity.

Mary grew up just outside of Jarvis, Ontario, a small rural community 45 minutes southwest of Hamilton, halfway between Caledonia and Port Dover. In addition to raising her family when she was still a child, Mary endured years of both physical and emotional abuse. Forty years ago, at the age of nine, Mary's responsibilities were more than most could imagine as a child.

Her parents were definitely not the acting inspiration for Ward and June Cleaver. But the house needed kept, and she had one younger brother that needed to be raised. "I raised my brother...and my parents," says Mary. "At six, I cooked my first full-course meal, and by the time I was nine I was doing all the cleaning, washing and budgeting for the family."

The pressure was too much for a young girl. She left home at fifteen. At eighteen, she went to Mohawk College in Hamilton to study welding. By twenty-one, the unfortunate influence of her family began to creep back into her life. She met a man who her father pressured her to marry, even though she knew it didn't feel right. And it wasn't. After escaping the abuse at home, she soon found herself right back in the middle of a life filled with verbal and physical abuse.

It was around this time that Mary started feeling like something was wrong. After a few visits to her doctor, she was subsequently diagnosed as suffering from Fibromyalgia. It is a common, chronic syndrome characterized by pervasive or persistent muscle, joint or bone pain, sleeplessness, chronic fatigue, prolonged muscle spasms, and difficulty concentrating and multi-tasking. It is not surprising that depression often follows the diagnosis, as was also the case with Mary. When she came home from the doctor and told her husband about the diagnosis, he responded with his hands, not his arms.

At twenty-eight, Mary and her husband had a son, and the abuse continued. Her husband would take the phone with him, and not allow her to drive or even have a license. In order to avoid physical abuse, she kept herself and her son locked in a bedroom for hours at a time. She was trapped in her own home. It was now even more difficult for her to escape because she had her son to provide for as well. Oddly enough, her son ended up as her saviour. At five years of age, after witnessing his father abusing his mother, he called the police. He told them, "Take my daddy to jail." They did. Mary was left on her own with her son.

Being able to pick up a food hamper twice a month is a necessity for Mary and many others all across Ontario. Mary receives benefits through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and is paying more than fifty percent of her monthly income on housing. It is a very simple place, but it is safe, and it is a home.

Utility payments, transportation, and other expenses eat away the little money that remains after paying for housing. As is the case for many, whether to "heat or eat" is a decision that she must make during the cold months. Mary's friends won't come to visit her in the winter because she keeps the heat so low. "I have electric baseboard heating, so I keep it as low as I can stand it to be and wear multiple layers of clothes in the fall and winter," Mary explains.

It is one of the ways this resourceful woman makes her money go as far as she can. "I buy food when it's on sale, and I cook a lot from scratch, which saves me a lot of money." She is plainly dressed, and tries to keep her clothing in good condition. But it is hard. Mary hasn't bought a new pair of boots in five years. She likely hasn't seen a dentist in years. She is missing most of her front teeth on both the top and the bottom, and is highly self-conscious about it. As she tries to cover this characteristic, you can see sweet shyness she must have lost as a child. And coming to know her, you come to appreciate that a good pair of shoes, dentist visits, and toiletries are luxuries for her, as they are for hundreds of thousands of Ontarians.

Currently engaged to a man she met while volunteering at the food bank, Mary cannot help smiling when speaking about him. It is obvious she loves him very much. Her blue eyes sparkle when she talks of him and for a few brief moments she forgets to cover her shyness. She is trying to save up for a small wedding, but her first priority before the ceremony is to, "get all this looked after" says Mary, pointing at her mouth.

Despite the many hurdles Mary has had to jump over throughout her life, she is still thankful. For many of us, it may seem hard to imagine any joy in the lives of those who rely on food banks and subsist with difficulty on inadequate government benefits, or low-wage work. However, it is obvious that Mary finds joy in the friendships she has made through the food bank, the volunteering and giving back she is able to do, and of course, her upcoming wedding—once she is able to smile without too much sweet shyness.

TOWARDS A POVERTY REDUCTION PLAN

We must establish clear guidelines for moving forward. First, poverty reduction measures and targets should be in place by the end of 2008. Second, the poverty reduction plan must be developed for all low-income Ontarians. Third, the government should commit significant up-front and ongoing funding for the poverty reduction plan. Fourth, the comprehensive poverty reduction plan must begin implementation by the 2009 provincial budget.

We will not wait for our governments to take action.

Despite the troubling figures above, we have reason to hope. Or, at the very least, there is a reason to be cautiously optimistic. The re-elected provincial government has made a commitment to the development of, "...a comprehensive provincial poverty reduction strategy."⁴⁷ The government has already moved on the development of this strategy with the appointment of a cabinet committee responsible for poverty reduction chaired by the Minister of Children and Youth Services.⁴⁸

The reduction of poverty is a monumental task. But it is in our collective interest to do so. It is morally just and economically necessary. We must take action to change our province's circumstances, to encourage development, to improve overall quality of life, and to ensure equality for all citizens.

As we move towards a poverty reduction plan, we must change our collective approach to hunger and poverty. There are no simple solutions or singular actions that will generate the necessary changes that we seek. We must develop a new perspective on hunger and poverty that advances

a new approach to business, a new way of conducting government, and a new way of life. We can learn a great deal from leading thinkers such as Jeffrey Sachs and Muhammad Yunus, international approaches such as Ireland and the United Kingdom, and the global environmental movement. Their approaches provide us with important lessons in how to understand problems, and what we can do to respond to them. We have seen the effects of their revolutionary thinking and actions. It is time to ignite our own revolution in thought and action.

Before the government takes action by developing and implementing its poverty reduction plan, we must establish clear guidelines for moving forward. First, poverty reduction measures and targets should be in place by the end of 2008. Second, the poverty reduction plan must be developed for all low-income Ontarians. Third, the government should commit significant up-front and ongoing funding for the poverty reduction plan. Fourth, the comprehensive poverty reduction plan must begin implementation by the 2009 provincial budget.

OUR COMMITMENT TO HELP REDUCE HUNGER & POVERTY

We will not wait for our governments to take action. We cannot continue to wait. Food banks were created because ordinary citizens had a sense of moral impatience and recognized the necessity for action to respond to hunger in their community. In addition to our efforts to relieve hunger, we will re-invigorate that moral impatience towards an effort to help reduce hunger and poverty in Ontario.

We will find partners. Despite the strength of the network of food banks across the province, we cannot assume this task on our own. We will need partners in poverty reduction from ordinary citizens and corporations, to municipalities who have established poverty reduction as a priority and other non-profit organizations that share our aims. We hope that they will answer our call to fellowship.

We will drive the discussion. We will seek to foster dialogue and consensus with our partners towards the implementation of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan

for all Ontarians. The release of our discussion paper in September was an attempt to frame the discussion towards a poverty reduction plan. We will also release a series of papers in 2008 outlining our recommendations for child poverty reduction measures and targets, as well as our detailed recommendations for necessary investments and policy changes in Ontario's proposed poverty reduction plan.

We will foster direct action. We will also look to take a leadership role as a catalyst for reducing poverty in Ontario at a local level. In order to achieve this aim, we have already begun to explore the feasibility of poverty reduction projects in a small group of target communities across the province, with the local food bank playing a leadership role amongst a group of community partners.

In 2007, we are making a commitment to help reduce hunger and poverty in Ontario.

CONCLUSION

We have never been at a point with greater need and greater potential for change. Almost 320,000 Ontarians were served by food banks every month in 2007. This alarming figure has risen by 15 per cent since 2001. A tremendous number of working Ontarians, Ontarians with disabilities, and new Canadians are served by food banks. The inadequacy of social assistance has also forced tens of thousands to turn to food banks in Ontario. This is not only an urban problem, limited to the busy streets of downtown Toronto and Ottawa, as many communities in rural and northern Ontario are hit hard by hunger. Food banks struggle to keep up with the needs of their communities, and many are stretched beyond their limit.

We have been able to improve our understanding of the causes of hunger and poverty, as well as our understanding of adequacy and depth. The rising cost and deprivation of many basic household necessities coupled with the inadequacy of income and benefits has clearly made it difficult for

hundreds of thousands of Ontarians to put food on the table. Beyond expenses and income, limitations on human and financial capital assets have also made it difficult for tens of thousands of Ontarians to escape poverty or survive a difficult period in their lives.

By understanding the challenge of hunger and its causes, we are better prepared to make informed decisions and recommendations that will lead to coordinated action to reduce hunger and poverty in Ontario. We are hopeful that the provincial government has made a genuine commitment to a comprehensive poverty reduction plan. We believe this plan must be developed for all low-income Ontarians and put into place by 2009. Whatever the result, we see their public statement as an opportunity to make our own commitment to help reduce hunger and poverty in Ontario by finding partners, driving the discussion, and fostering direct action.

Together, we can end hunger. Think about it.

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Think about it.

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One cannot
think well,
love well,
sleep well,
if one has not dined well.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

We can end hunger. **Think about it.**

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