

# HUNGER REPORT

## 2015

A SNAPSHOT OF HUNGER IN ONTARIO



ONTARIO  
ASSOCIATION OF  
FOOD BANKS

**T**he Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) is a collaborative network of 125 direct member food banks and over 1,100 affiliate hunger relief programs and agencies across the province. This includes: breakfast clubs, school meal programs, community food centres, food pantries, community kitchens, emergency shelters, and seniors' centres.

Together, we provide immediate hunger relief to almost 360,000 adults and children every single month. The OAFB works tirelessly each day to ensure our member food banks across the province have sufficient resources to meet the ever-changing needs of emergency food support. This is done through the distribution of 7 million pounds of fresh and non-perishable food including fresh milk, eggs, meat, and produce.

Our organization's strength lies in its membership, which serves all regions of the province, reaching nearly all rural and urban communities in Ontario. Throughout our network, food banks across the province are working hard to address emergency food needs as well as long-term food insecurity through a wide variety of innovative programs.

From child care to dental clinics, financial literacy to resume building workshops, Ontario's food banks are not only a resource for emergency hunger relief but also centres for support, innovation, and community.

The OAFB, in partnership with its member food banks, is working hard every day to develop long-term solutions that address the root causes of hunger, while developing sustainable solutions to ultimately make food bank use history.

This report details the Ontario findings from Food Banks Canada's 2015 Annual Hunger Count survey. Also included are two special features: *Isolated Communities* and *From the Perspective of a Client*.



# WHO WE ARE

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# BY THE NUMBERS

*Food insecurity is defined as the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food<sup>1</sup>. While this may seem hard to imagine in a prosperous province like Ontario, it is a reality faced by far too many.*

**E**very single day there are Ontarians struggling to make ends meet and who are forced to make the difficult choice between their most basic needs, like paying the rent or eating a meal. It is during these challenging times that many individuals turn to food banks for assistance.

In March 2015, Ontario's food banks were visited by 358,963 people. There are many misconceptions about who it is that visits a food bank, and this year's Hunger Count continues to confirm that food bank clients are not who you think. Food bank clients are men, women, children, students, and seniors living across Ontario in both rural and urban communities. Many have post-secondary educations, are working full or part-time, or have recently retired, but are still having trouble making ends meet each month.

Initially, the numbers year over year seem comparable. Last

year's Hunger Report revealed that 375,000 Ontarians accessed a food bank in the month of March 2014, which was consistent with the findings of March 2013. This year, however, has some notable exceptions. In March 2015, Ontario's food banks saw:

- A 35% increase in senior citizens (adults over 65 years of age) visiting food banks
- The highest number of single people on record (49.2%) accessing a food bank
- 10,000 more visits to Ontario's food banks than in the previous year
- 90% of food bank clients are either rental or social housing tenants, a 4% increase over the previous year

These distinct changes in demographics show that there are groups that are at a growing risk for continued food insecurity, and that unless measures are implemented to assist, this need will only continue to grow.

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# WHO USES FOOD BANKS?

## Demographics

	Ontario (Total)	Rural Ontario
Women 18+	46.8 %	46.7 %
Post-Secondary Students	3.4 %	2.4 %
Senior Citizens	5.4 %	6.1 %
First Nations Persons	6.5 %	17.1 %
New Canadians	7.7 %	2.5 %

## Family Composition

	Ontario (Total)	Rural Ontario
Single-Parent Families	23.3%	23.0%
Two-Parent Families	17.9%	20.9%
Couples with No Children	9.5%	13.7%
Single Person Households	49.2%	42.1%

## Income Source

	Ontario (Total)	Rural Ontario
Employment Income	8.5%	9.6%
Federal Employment Insurance	2.3%	3.1%
Social Assistance	36.7%	29.8%
Provincial Disability Support	31.5%	33.2%
Pension Income	6.9%	9.7%
Student Loans	1.0%	0.3%
No Income	6.2%	7.6%
Other Income	6.8%	6.8%

## Housing Type

	Ontario (Total)	Rural Ontario
Homeowners	5.5%	13.9%
Rental Market Tenants	68.6%	64.9%
Social Housing Tenants	21.8%	16.0%
Band-Owned Housing	0.4%	1.5%
Emergency Shelter	0.9%	0.8%
Youth Shelter	0.3%	0.1%
Living on Street	0.2%	0.2%
Living With Family/Friends	2.4%	2.5%

After seeing these staggering statistics, many ask - why are there so many people going hungry? The answer is far from simple. There are many factors that contribute to why someone might be in need of a food bank.

Employment in Ontario, for example, has continued to remain uncertain since the 2008 recession. While the number of jobs overall may have increased, 1 out of every 3 jobs in Ontario is temporary, contract, or part-time. These positions are often without benefits, and workers are denied basic employment rights, such as overtime pay, and work for less than their full-time colleagues<sup>2</sup>.

Specifically, those in temporary and part-time positions make 33% and 40% less per hour respectively than their full-time counterparts<sup>3</sup>. This is reflective of a growing trend in employment in Ontario.

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Accessing affordable, nutritious food has also become increasingly challenging for Ontarians. Food prices in Ontario rose 1.2% in a single year, with the price of healthy items seeing the largest increases: fresh fruit by 6.7%, fresh vegetables

by 6.4%, and fresh and frozen meat by 10.7%<sup>4</sup>. Further, the weakening Canadian dollar has contributed greatly to the rising cost of food, particularly when it comes to the prices of imported product at grocery stores, with the worst of this depreciation still to come<sup>5</sup>.

The majority of individual food bank clients have a total income of less than \$1,100 per month, and after paying for rent and utilities there is very little left to spend on food. These rising prices have forced individuals across the province to try to stretch an already stretched dollar, causing many people to turn to food banks.

Paralleling the rise in food prices and challenges in employment is the issue of affordable housing. More than 1 in 7 Ontario households is considered to have a 'Core Housing Need,' which is someone that spends more than 30% of their income on rent and falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability, or suitability housing standards<sup>6</sup>.

To address this 'Core Housing Need' many look to rent-geared-to-income housing, but with a wait-list that grew to a record number of 168,711 households in 2014, this has become increasingly challenging. The average wait-time is now four years for a rent-geared-to-income unit<sup>7</sup>, and in some communities, residents have waited more than a decade<sup>8</sup>.

The issue of affordable housing is of particular concern for those

visiting food banks, as over 90% of food bank clients are either rental or social housing tenants. The average food bank client spends more than 70% of their income on housing, leaving only 30% of their income for all other expenses, including food<sup>9</sup>. With the average household in Ontario spending over \$650 on food every single month, it is almost impossible for these individuals to meet these costs after paying rent<sup>9</sup>.

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Given the uncertainty of precarious employment and the increasing cost of basic necessities, such as housing and food, it is understandable why so many individuals must turn to food banks each month.



SPECIAL FEATURE

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A CLIENT:

# JACQUELINE & COREY

WRITTEN BY JACQUELINE DAVIDSON

Photo Credit: Bisi Alawode

**M**y name is Jacqueline Davidson, client #8025. Two adults and three children live in my household. I am one of the 1,700 clients my food bank feeds each month.

My food bank card gives my family access to food every 21 days. This card also gives my family access to other amazing services provided by our food bank. Services like the mobile market, which has given me access to fresh healthy food. The birthday club, which has helped me to have a gift for my child on their birthday. And the backpack program, which has helped at back to school time.

These well thought-out services have blessed our family so much. Not only do they wash away some of the shame of poverty but they help to restore my dignity.

Our local food bank prides itself on providing service with dignity to those who are in need of food and shelter. Our food bank strives to identify and meet the needs of those struggling financially. They look for ways to be the caring hands in our community. To reach out to those in need and offer help.

That is a good way to describe

*It is very easy to feel isolated. As parents, you battle feeling like a failure.*

poverty. A NEED that cannot be met on your own. When I can't meet the basic NEEDS of our family there is an internal struggle of shame that I must



battle each day. Poverty threatens to filter my perception, robbing me of joy and hope. It rocks my stability as a parent. Financial burdens put extreme pressure onto my marriage. Poverty is a reality you can't escape, as you live daily in survival mode.

It is very easy to feel isolated. As parents you battle feeling like a failure. My husband and I choose every day to focus on the good and to not allow poverty to turn us bitter or resentful. We are more than our NEED, we are good parents who love each other and our family. We are a family in need, not in need of a handout. We are in NEED of help...

Help because despite our best efforts there just isn't enough...

there isn't enough food to last the week...

there isn't enough money to pay the bills and buy food...

there isn't enough money to fix what's broken...

there isn't enough food to pack lunches...

there isn't enough gas in the tank to get to work...

there just isn't ENOUGH.

Living in this cycle of 'not

*My partnership with our food bank has helped me to be less reactive to our circumstances and more proactive in seeking help. I no longer feel helpless.*



enough' is exhausting. Small things feel like huge looming crises because you are so weary emotionally. Every day you are treading water to stay afloat. It's easy to feel hopeless. This is why a partnership with a food bank becomes a lifeline. A beacon of hope in your own personal storm.

My partnership with our food bank has helped me to be less reactive to our circumstances and more proactive in seeking help. I no longer feel helpless. I know that there is help and tools to keep me afloat. I know that we will make it. I know that my husband and I are doing our very best.

When we need to access help, I am so thankful that the volunteers at our food bank look me in the eye without judgement or condemnation. It lets me know that I am more than client #8025. I am more than my circumstances. I am more than a statistic. I am Jacqueline, a mother reaching out for help.

I am strong...

Strong enough to face the lack...

Strong enough to choose joy despite not having enough...

Strong enough to ask for help...  
Strong enough to be humble and receive the amazing help that is offered...

My food bank has faithfully been a support throughout this hard time. My food bank has offered hope and encouragement in so many ways over the years. We have been blessed with income tax return help, summer camp for our three children, winter coats and boots, bus tickets, gas cards, Christmas sponsors and festive parties with the staff, and Tim Hortons Camp for the children. The list is endless.

Yes, it's been years of struggle and heartache for my family. It has also been years of blessing and support. I am so very thankful for my food bank staff and the many wonderful volunteers who choose to serve my family with dignity. It makes a world of difference when you are the one receiving the help. And that gives me strength.

# SENIOR CITIZENS

Old Age Security Pension and Benefits <sup>14</sup>		
Marital Status	Max. Monthly Payment	Max. Annual Income to Receive OAS Pension
Old Age Security (OAS) Pension		
Regardless of Marital Status	\$569.95	\$118,055 (individual income)
Old Age Security Benefits		
If you a single, widowed, or divorced pensioner	\$772.83	\$17,280 (individual income)
If your spouse/common-law partner receives the full OAS pension	\$512.44	\$22,848 (combined income)
If your spouse/common-law partner does not receive an OAS pension	\$772.83	\$41,424 (combined income)
If your spouse/common-law partner receives the allowance	\$512.44	\$41,424 (combined income)
Allowance		
If your spouse/common-law partner receives the GIS and the full OAS pension	\$1,082.39	\$31,968 (combined income)
Allowance for the Survivor		
If you are a surviving spouse or common-law partner	\$1,211.79	\$23,256 (individual income)

**A**cross Ontario there are people struggling to get by. Unfortunately, seniors are a group that are of no exception<sup>10</sup>. Over 12% of senior citizens fall below the Low-Income Measure (LIM), with this number more than doubling to 27% when looking at senior citizens who also identify as single.

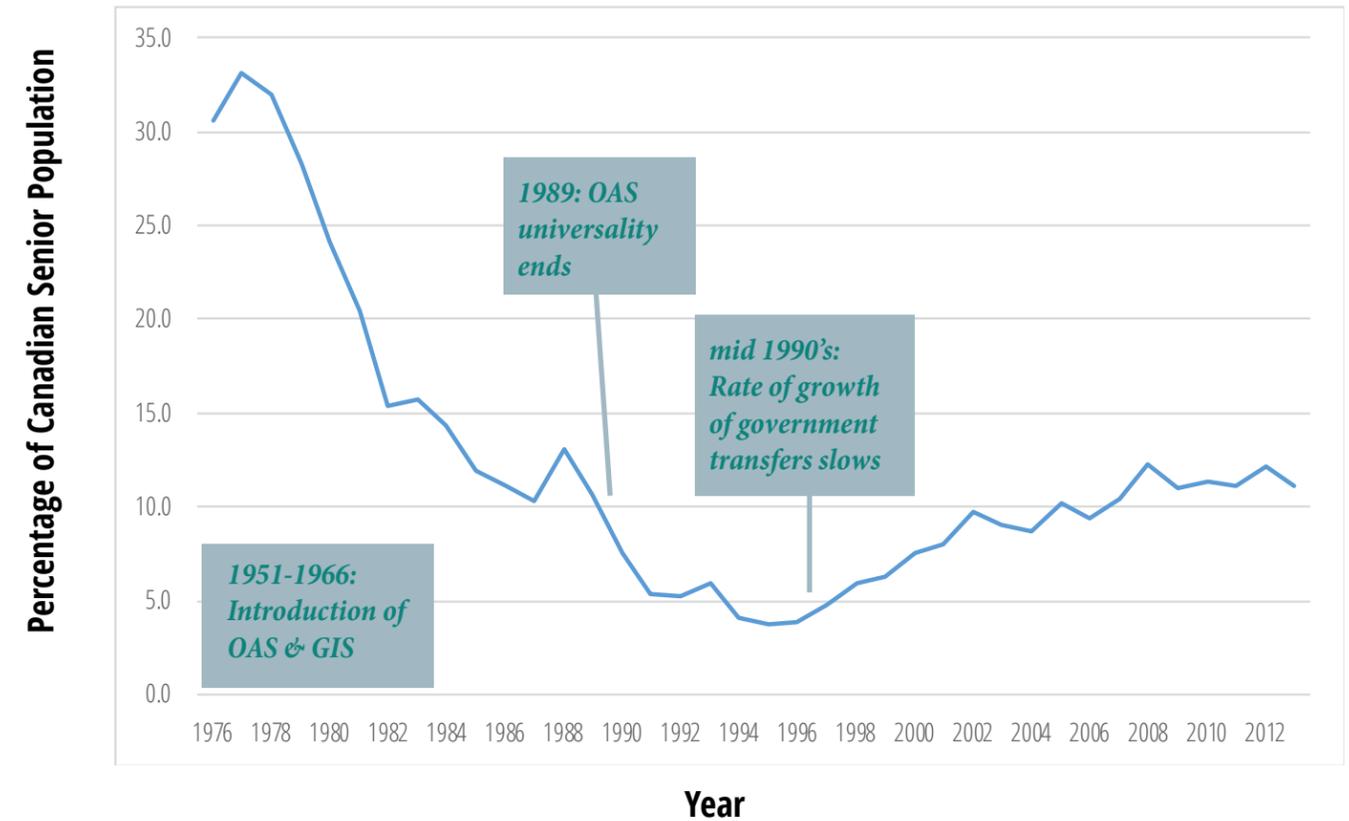
There are various social supports in place for Ontario's seniors, including Old Age Security (OAS), the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), and Guaranteed Income Supplements (GIS). GIS is a sub program of OAS specifically designed to reduce senior poverty through the payment of benefits to those seniors who fall below the LIM<sup>11</sup>. A single senior receiving the maximum OAS and GIS supplement will have an income of only \$1,342.78 every month<sup>12</sup>, making it very difficult to stay afloat. When this income is considered against the rising cost of basic living expenses, seniors are increasingly vulnerable of falling into poverty.

This was reflected in this year's Hunger Count data with Ontario seeing a 35% growth in the number of seniors visiting food banks compared to 2014. This growth is particularly concerning when looking at the aging population across Canada, where seniors are predicted to represent 23% of the population by the year 2030<sup>13</sup>.

With this increasing number of seniors, there will be an increased dependency on OAS and public pensions. These social safety nets play a crucial role in Canada's retirement security and should be kept strong to ensure that this growing population of seniors do not fall into poverty.

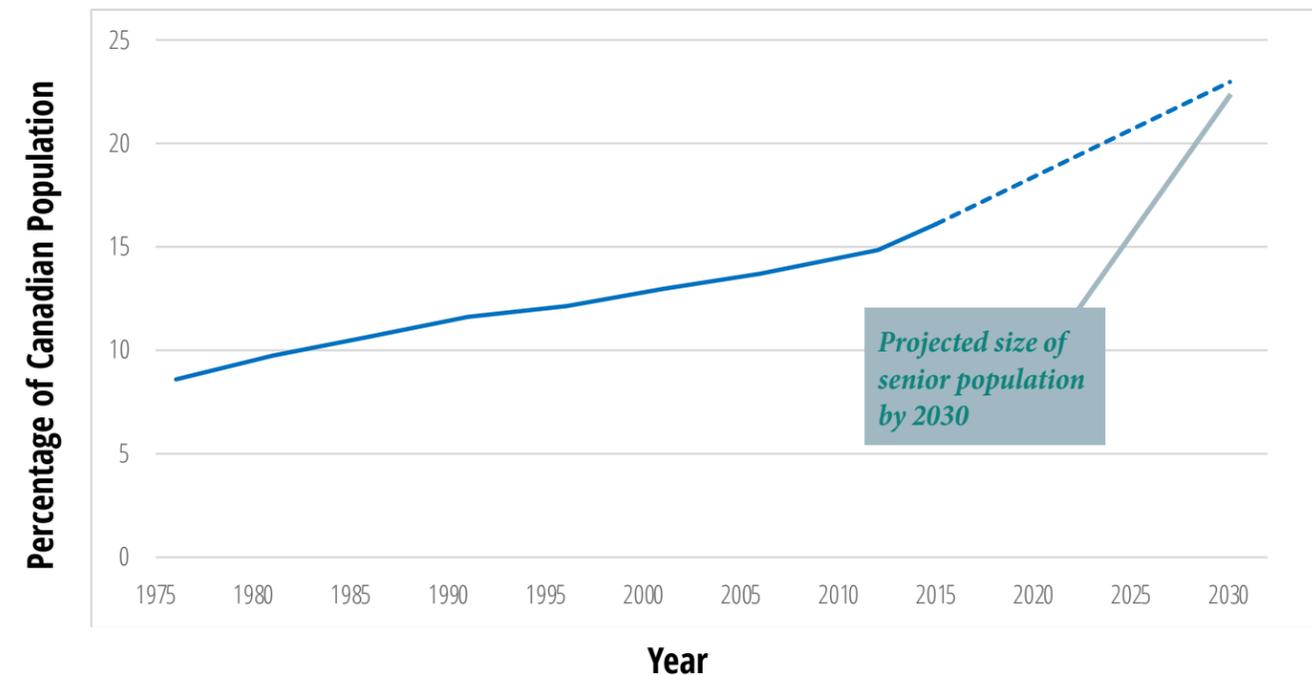
## CANADIAN SENIORS WHO FALL UNDER LIM

13, 15, 16, 17



## GROWTH OF CANADIAN SENIOR POPULATION

18, 19



# SINGLE PEOPLE

In Canada, single person households currently represent more than one quarter of all households. With no one to share expenses, a single person spends a larger amount of their income on basic needs, like food and shelter, while saving significantly less<sup>20</sup>.

This reality is even more stark for single individuals who are on social assistance. Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) provide a maximum of \$656<sup>21</sup> and \$1098<sup>22</sup> respectively for an individual. Annually, this falls far below Canada's established Low-Income Measure.

It is single-person households that now comprise almost 50% of those who visit food banks across Ontario, growing over 11% in the last 5 years alone. With these added economic stresses, and no one to share financial burdens, the majority of these individuals experience deep levels of poverty.

In the 2015 Ontario budget, updates were made to OW, which included an increase of \$25 per month for single adults. While this is a step in the right direction, more progress needs to be made to guarantee that social assistance reform has transparent benchmarks, reflects the realities faced by all households, and ensures that all individuals, including single person households, can afford their most basic needs<sup>23, 24</sup>.

	Poverty Line (LIM in CMA 2014)	Annual Income 2014	Basic Income Gap
<b>Ontario Works</b>			
Single Person Household	\$19,774	\$656 x 12 = \$7,872 (Basic Needs – \$280.00, Max Shelter – \$376.00)	\$11,902 A gap of 33% (LIM-AT)
<b>Ontario Disability Support Program</b>			
Single Person Household	\$19,774	\$1098 x 12 = \$13,176 (Basic Needs – \$619.00, Max Shelter – \$479.00)	\$6,598 A gap of 60% (LIM-AT)

25, 26

# FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN ONTARIO

The OAFB distributes fresh, frozen, and non-perishable food to its 125 direct member food banks across the province. From urban centres, to rural communities, to the far corners of the North, there are very few areas of the province that are not served by one of our member food banks.

This past year, the OAFB distributed more than 7 million pounds of food to these agencies, including fresh eggs, meat, milk and produce, or the equivalent of 5 million meals.

Sound distribution is of the utmost importance to the OAFB as it is what ensures that children

do not have to go to bed hungry, students do not have to choose between buying books or having dinner, and that senior citizens do not have to choose between heat and food throughout the winter.

Food banks across Ontario rely on the OAFB to ensure effective and efficient food delivery so that they can continue to confidently provide front line service to their clients.

Serving an area as large as Ontario, however, is not without its challenges. Take, for example, the recent 2,000 kilometer distance that a shipment of food took to Pikangikum, a small

First Nations community in Northwestern Ontario with an estimated 90% unemployment rate:

Pikangikum is a remote First Nations community with a notoriety of challenges well beyond those of its neighbours: lack of potable water, unprecedented suicide rate among its youth, social unrest, addictions, and epidemic levels of health issues, such as diabetes.

The closest OAFB member to Pikangikum is the Regional Food Distribution Association (RFDA) in Thunder Bay. This food bank, which delivers food throughout Northwestern Ontario, is always



Photo Credit: Regional Food Distribution Association, Thunder Bay

looking for opportunities to source nutritious food for the health team that serves the Pikangikum community - a job they do with both passion and professionalism.

The OAFB regularly ships food 1,400 kilometres to Thunder Bay; however, getting food into Pikangikum is a project unto its own. As a fly-in community that is only accessible by airplane, ice roads, or boat, delivering much-needed food requires innovation, careful planning, and a dedicated group of people committed to ensuring the safe arrival of the delivery. This is where the RFDA steps in.

Getting food into Pikangikum has a sense of urgency, as there is a narrow window of time when the RFDA is able to safely deliver food to the community before the winter freeze sets in. Both

the Health Centre and School Meal Program are desperately in need of food, and cannot wait an additional two months until the ice roads fully form.

This fall, the RFDA made a trip to the remote reserve to ensure that it would have enough food for the upcoming winter months. The delivery included fresh, frozen and non-perishable products such as fruit, vegetables, frozen meats, and bulk staples, like rice, flour, oatmeal, sugar and baking powder.

Prior to the trip, volunteers spent hours packing and repacking the food hampers in order to maximize capacity and ensure food preservation for the long trip ahead. Once the hampers were ready, the RFDA loaded the refrigerated trailer of the Executive Director's four-wheel drive truck with the food for Pikangikum.

The first leg of the trip was a 560 kilometer drive to Red Lake, which took about seven hours with unusually good driving

conditions. It is here that the staff and volunteers of the RFDA spent the night, taking turns running the refrigeration unit and monitoring its temperature every few hours.

It is also here that they had to wait for the right time to drive up the Nungesser Road, a gravel forest-access road en route to Taxi Bay and the turn-off to Pikangikum. A twisting, washboard-riddled trail, travelling this portion of the trek with a fully-loaded trailer was particularly slow.

The timing to Taxi Bay had to be perfect, as the RFDA's arrival had to coincide with the arrival of the barge that was to take the Executive Director's truck and trailer the final leg of the journey across Pikangikum Lake. The barge is run by a private enterprise and can cost up to \$1,000 per trip. Missing the narrow window of opportunity was not an option, as this was the last chance to make the food delivery before the winter freeze.

Upon arrival in Pikangikum, the RFDA waited with its trailer until it was empty, before making the long trek back home.

This is standard food distribution for the RFDA. There are countless challenges, but the food bank continues to find solutions. This story is unique to delivering food to this community, but the dedication and care shown is something found in all of Ontario's food banks. Hundreds of food bank staff and volunteers strive on a daily basis to meet almost impossible needs with insufficient resources, and always with their clients in the forefront of their minds.

The role of the OAFB is to help them meet these challenges by providing additional resources to assist. Whether it is setting up the first leg of the journey for a food delivery, as with the RFDA, or providing them with nutritious food they may otherwise not be able to access, distribution is key to these services.

Like our food banks, the OAFB is continually evolving provincial programming to adapt to the ever-changing needs of member food banks and the clients they serve.

The OAFB has focused over the past three years on building fresh food programs in partnership with Ontario's agricultural sector to ensure that all Ontarians have access to the healthy food they need to learn, play, work, and grow.

The OAFB is pleased to say that for the second year in a row, more than 50% of food acquired and distributed has been either fresh or frozen. Truckloads of healthy food including potatoes, ground beef, cabbage, eggs, and even organic, local rainbow trout were distributed across Ontario to directly support those who needed it most. This year, provincial farmers, food processors, and food

transporters helped to provide Ontario's food banks with:

- Almost one million litres of fresh milk
- Over 144,000 dozen eggs
- 45,500 servings of Ontario beef
- 33,500 servings of Ontario turkey
- 30,100 servings of Ontario pork
- Over one million pounds of perishable food including fruits and vegetables

On behalf of the provincial food bank network, the OAFB truly thanks its partners for their generous and ongoing contributions throughout the year.

## PIKANGIKUM

## TORONTO



## THUNDER BAY



## RED LAKE

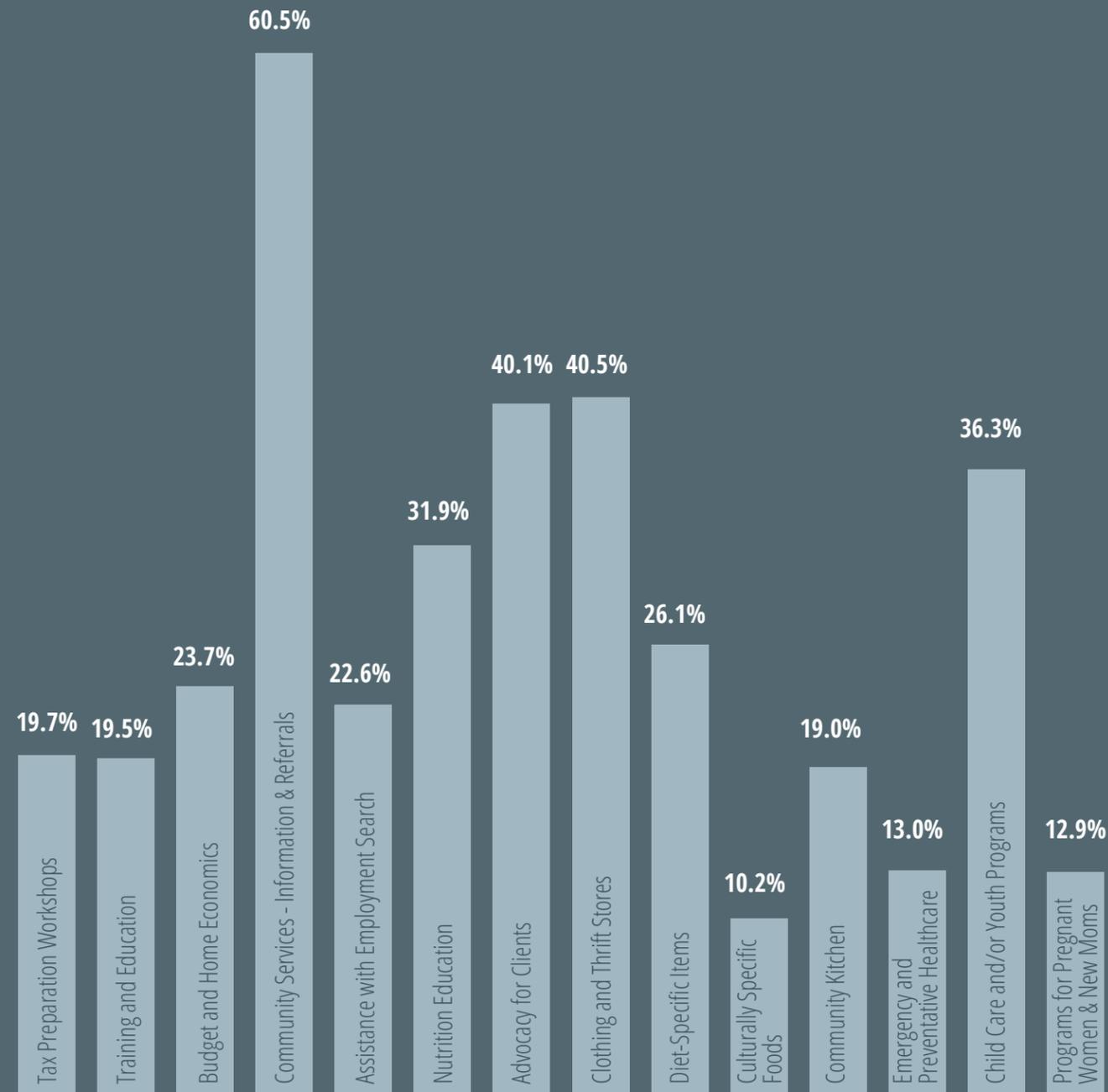


## TAXI BAY



# BEYOND THE TABLE

Food banks across Ontario have grown beyond the traditional idea of a non-perishable food cupboard. Recognizing hunger as a symptom of poverty, food banks provide emergency food support in addition to programs and services that assist those living with financial insecurity.



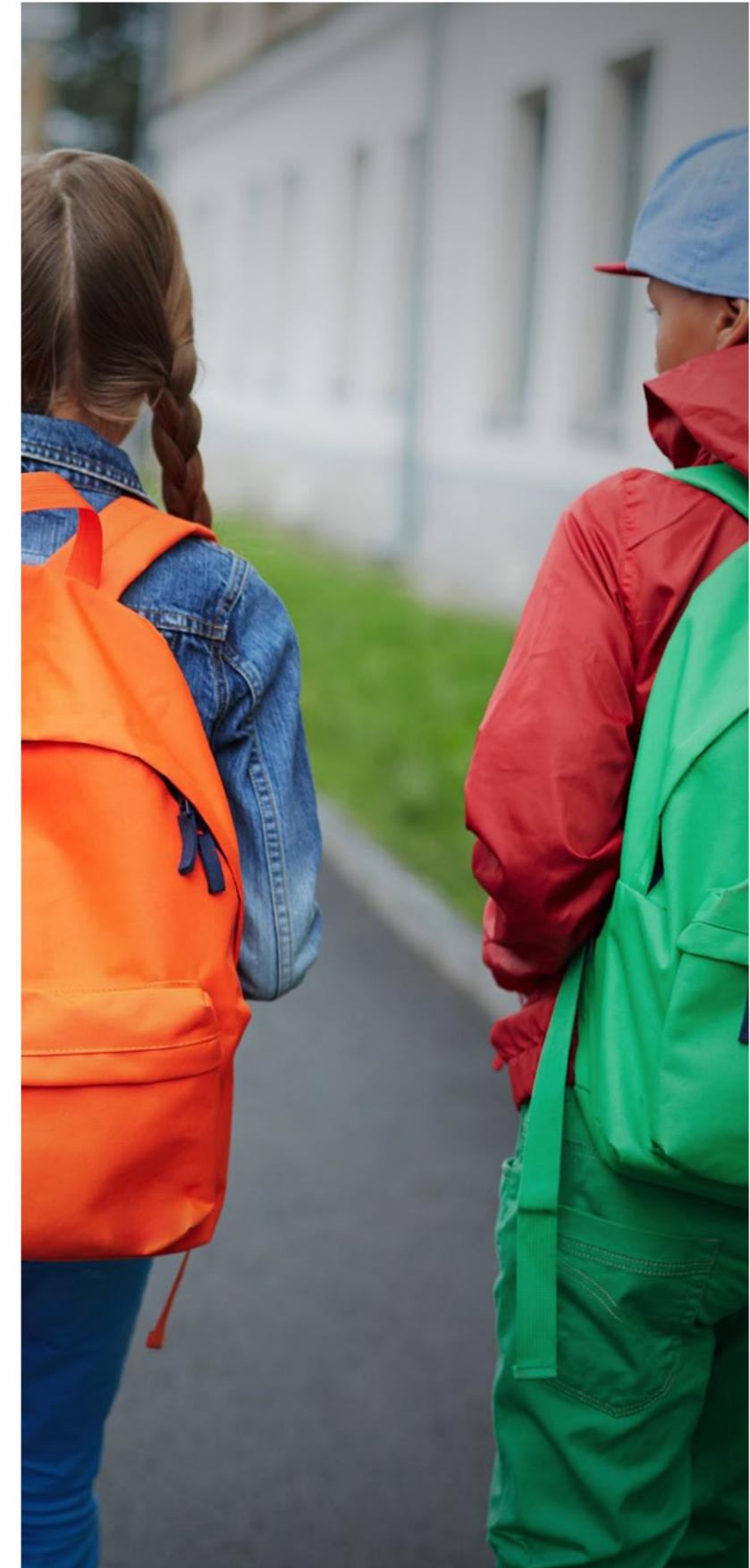
**A** food bank is an organization that works to provide emergency food support and programming to those in need in a dignified, safe space.

There is not one model specific to the term “food bank”. A food bank can be anything from a local place to access food support - to a distribution centre that supports smaller community agencies - to an emergency shelter, community food centre, meal program, or breakfast club.

Food banks appear in many forms to best suit the needs of their own unique communities. With the efforts of hundreds of staff and volunteers across the province, food banks provide those in need with food assistance and programs that not only support but also empower their clients.

Throughout the year, Ontario’s food banks provide services far beyond emergency food support that includes:

- Income tax clinics to help assist clients complete their annual tax return
- Backpack programs that ensure children have sufficient food over the weekend when they do not have access to school meal programs
- A mobile market that travels to remote areas where food support might not otherwise be accessible
- Drop in days with on-site nurses and dental hygienists to assist with emergency and/or preventative healthcare
- Employment skills training, including job search techniques, interview preparation, and resume writing skills



# SPECIAL FEATURE ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

Food insecurity is being felt uniquely by communities across Ontario. In Northern Ontario, the challenges being faced are unprecedented, such as soaring food prices, rising heat and hydro costs, and a growing housing crisis. There are many organizations working together to try desperately to address these immediate needs while also working towards a long-term solution.

One such organization is our member in Thunder Bay, The Regional Food Distribution Association (RFDA), who works tirelessly to build collaborative partnerships and programs to address the needs of their community. Every month they serve 14,000 individuals scattered across an area just smaller than the size of France. This number does not yet include the estimated 35,000 individuals living in fringe and isolated communities.

Volker Kromm, Executive Director of the RFDA, writes about his experience delivering food to a community in Northern Ontario:



Photo Credit: Regional Food Distribution Association, Thunder Bay

There are many corners of our region that I will never see, or hear of, or even wonder if they exist. Yet within these places, there live people that have countless stories; the type that can either elevate the soul to great heights, or more often melt the hardest heart.

I met Amelia the other day, as I was helping to deliver emergency food, in a little known village north of Ignace. In my work as the Executive Director of the RFDA, I feel it is important to understand the depth and breadth of poverty in

Northwestern Ontario.

I speak often of the number of people that must resort to food banks in larger urban centres, like Thunder Bay. Fortunately, the public responds, as do the many organizations that feed, clothe and care for our neighbours. These services are vital, since the demand is indeed growing and access is becoming more fractured and complex.

I heard of Amelia by chance, referred by a compassionate person that lives in the village named

Liz. Besides the administrative duties and serving the 20 or so students at the school, Liz also finds time for the residents that have fallen through the gaps of the social fabric in her dwindling community. I am certain that kindness is simply one of her innate qualities - sharing her gifts with those much less fortunate.

Amelia lives in a small log cabin, without the conveniences that we take for granted: plumbing, electricity, proper windows, or even home insulation. The space she shares with her adult son is equipped with a wood stove (their only source of heat) which is also used for preparing food in traditional ways. We delivered a few bags of fresh produce bought from a local Thunder Bay farmer, along with basic donated staples and canned goods to ward off hunger.

Upon arriving at her home I realized that we faced a more immediate physical hurdle. Amelia and her son had no firewood to burn, nor the resources to repair their broken chainsaw, or the means to go out into the forest to gather wood. They are both dealing with a litany of health challenges stemming from addictions, malnourishment, frailties of advancing age, and limited mobility.

Amelia is a mere wisp of a woman confined to her bed for the most part, suffering from repeated falls and, I suspect, other not so apparent afflictions. Yet during our visit she smiled broadly, laughed, spoke lovingly, and was openly appreciative of our visit and the offers to help. Amelia

sat all the while trembling like a leaf from the cold. We wrapped her blanket around her and gave her woolen mittens and a hat, distributed after donations were made at the local school. It may appear that we were in the right place that day.

I am rarely prepared to see the ravages of poverty, misfortune, and life's harsh circumstances. It is important to communicate a few of these stories. Otherwise we will continue to rely solely on the instincts and training of too few professionals and the selfless

## Who will be there for them this winter?

There are many other Amelias that you and I may never hear about. Last winter she froze her feet after an exposure episode, was hospitalized, and then released herself, being anxious to be home.

I commend the regional health authorities for their role as the vital health links to these invisible people, that have no voice, and lack a vibrant community around them. As an outcome of this experience, we have resolved to carry extra blankets, clothing, and food when visiting our forgotten neighbours. I will look for a functioning chainsaw and even carry a few sticks of wood in my truck - enough to take the edge off the cold, make some tea, and soften some vegetables so they can be eaten without dentures.

We are collectively blessed by the many individuals and organizations, like the Mary Berglund Community Health Centre, that extend their umbrella of care into every nook and cranny of the hinterlands. Intuitively, we know that we are stronger together if each does a small part. I am repeatedly humbled by what can be done by so few.

commitment of volunteers, like Liz.

I have a photo of Amelia to remind me of the importance of generosity and caring. My current calling happens to be the most difficult job that I have ever had, yet one that I embrace willingly. I am also not naïve to think that any of us should be acting alone, or that our charity is always welcome, or that someone will always ask for assistance. It is important though, to always stand ready.

Amelia's strength inspires me. The conditions she must endure haunt me daily. Shelter, warmth, clothing, food, health care, and the simplest supports for those times when we cannot walk alone should not be too much to ask.

The next time when opportunity does knock, I will be bold enough to ask business leaders, politicians, and countless generous individuals to be giving. It is the members and affiliates of the RFDA that do so much more than just give out food. I would like to be more like them.



WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD A  
**BETTER ONTARIO**

*Food banks are important social hubs and centres for change in every community they serve, yet we know that they alone cannot end hunger. As a symptom of poverty, the best and most effective way to put an end to food insecurity is to work collaboratively to develop strong public policy that tackles the root causes of the problem. By addressing the need for affordable housing, secure employment, and improvements to social assistance, we can help to alleviate hunger in our province. This is why it is imperative that we work together to build a better Ontario.*

The Government of Ontario plays a very important role in our mission to end hunger in this province, but we need every Ontarian to speak out and take action.

While working together to build solutions to address hunger, it is vital that communities support their local food banks and the people who rely on them. By donating healthy foods, volunteering at special events, and raising funds for your food bank, you

will help ensure that thousands of Ontarians do not go hungry, while long-term policy solutions are developed.

While you support your food bank and your community, encourage leaders on all levels of government to actively work on solutions that address hunger.

The OAFB would like to make the following three recommendations:

01

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING**



Photo Credit: City of Toronto

In most cities, housing costs are rising at exceptional levels<sup>27</sup> and for so many Ontarians the chance of a stable, secure, affordable home is out of reach.

Access to affordable housing improves a family's overall health and well-being, including academic achievement and employment status<sup>28</sup>. The average food bank client spends over 70% of their income on housing, which puts them at a dangerously high risk of homelessness<sup>29</sup>.

There is a critical need for both a provincial and national housing strategy. The federal government has proposed increases to affordable housing, rent-g geared-to-income

co-ops, and Housing First initiatives<sup>30</sup>, all of which would go a long way in helping to address some of the root causes of hunger in our province.

While these policies are developed nationally, work can still be done at the provincial level. An Ontario Housing Benefit would support the goals of a long-term, affordable housing strategy by closing the gap between rent and income.

Building a housing system that allows every Ontarian a safe and affordable place to live will diminish the need for emergency food support. Affordable housing is essential to building healthy communities.



02

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

In the 1990s, the Ontario government cut social assistance rates at unprecedented levels. When it comes to inflation-adjusted dollars, the rates of Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) are lower now than they were in the 1970s<sup>31</sup>.

Currently, a single person on OW receives \$656<sup>32</sup> a month (\$7,872 per year), while a single person on ODSP receives \$1,098 a month (\$13,176 per year)<sup>33</sup>. In many cities this is not even enough to cover the cost of one month's rent, let alone other essentials like utilities, food, clothing, and transportation.

It is impossible to live a healthy life in this province when you earn less than \$14,000 each year. Studies show that poverty and health are closely intertwined. When a person is unable to provide for themselves, they are likely to have lower

productivity at work, and for children, at school<sup>34</sup>. We cannot allow poor health to be a barrier for our most vulnerable citizens.

Updating Ontario's social assistance programs is essential to tackling food insecurity. Over 65% of food bank clients list social assistance as their main source of income. If we can improve the living conditions for these Ontarians by raising assistance levels, it will reduce the need for additional support agencies, like food banks.

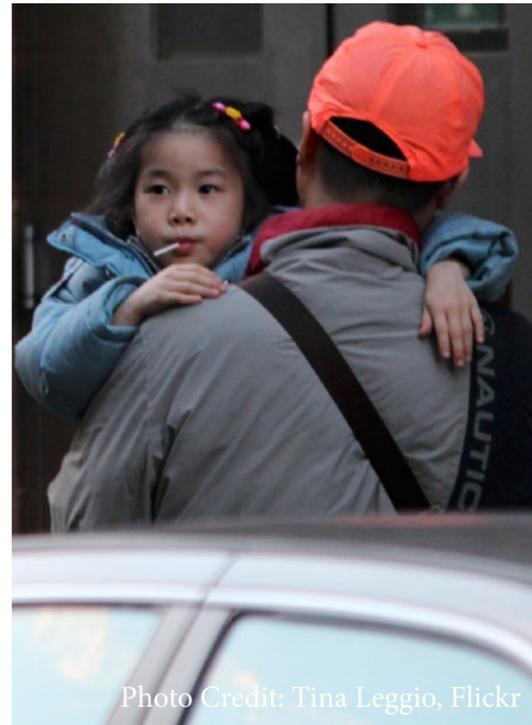


Photo Credit: Tina Leggio, Flickr



Photo Credit: COD Newsroom

03

SECURE EMPLOYMENT

Ontario has seen a dramatic shift in the nature of employment over the past decade. In this province alone there are 1.7 million jobs that are considered insecure<sup>35</sup>.

Working for minimum wage with no benefits, and an unpredictable work schedule, can make it incredibly difficult to cover the basic cost of living.

Ontario has weathered two recessions within the past

ten years; both our economy and our communities are feeling this stress.

Prior to the 1990s, the minimum wage was set to be within 50% to 60% of the average Ontarian wage. This allowed a minimum wage worker to earn above the poverty line. Due to periods of stalled wage increases, an Ontarian working full time in a minimum wage job today earns 20% below the province's Low-Income Measure<sup>36</sup>.

Without stable jobs, an increasing number of Ontarians are finding it difficult to make ends meet each month and are being forced to look to food banks for assistance. Creating well-paying jobs that build our economies and our communities is essential to alleviating hunger.



**The Ontario Association of Food Banks believes that we can end hunger; however, it will not be possible without the proactive support of our federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Through investments in affordable housing, secure employment, and a strong social assistance program, we believe that struggling Ontarians will find the support they need to break the cycle of poverty.**

# MOVING FORWARD

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Food banks are the voice for the hundreds of thousands they serve. From children, adults, students, and seniors, food banks are on the front-line every day ensuring that people across Ontario have access to the support they need. But they shouldn't have to do it alone.

In a province as prosperous as Ontario, there is no reason a child should go to bed hungry or that a senior should have to skip a meal simply because they cannot afford it. Poverty remains a pervasive issue in this province. In order to make progress, a collaborative effort needs to be made by all, including government and nonprofits alike, to work together to create sustainable solutions for the health of all Ontarians.

The Ontario Association of Food Banks believes that, together, we can end hunger.



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Thank you to our member food banks for participating in the 2015 Hunger Count!

<b>Acton</b>	Acton Foodshare	<b>Mississauga</b>	The Mississauga Food Bank
<b>Ailsa Craig</b>	Ailsa Craig & Area Food Bank	<b>Mount Forest</b>	Community Pantry
<b>Alexandria</b>	St. Vincent-de-Paul Food Bank	<b>Mountain</b>	House of Lazarus
<b>Alliston</b>	The Good Shepherd Food Bank	<b>Napanee</b>	The Napanee Salvation Army Food Bank
<b>Aurora</b>	Aurora Food Pantry	<b>New Liskeard</b>	The Salvation Army
<b>Bancroft</b>	North Hastings Community Cupboard	<b>Newcastle</b>	Clarington East Food Bank
<b>Barrie</b>	Barrie Food Bank	<b>Newmarket</b>	Newmarket Food Pantry
<b>Barry's Bay</b>	Madawaska Valley Food Bank	<b>Niagara Falls</b>	Project S.H.A.R.E
<b>Beamsville</b>	Community Care of West Niagara	<b>North Bay</b>	North Bay Food Bank
<b>Belleville</b>	Gleaners Food Bank	<b>North York</b>	North York Harvest Food Bank
<b>Belleville</b>	Quinte Region Food Share Shelter - Gleaners	<b>Norwich</b>	The Salvation Army Family Services & Food Bank
<b>Blenheim</b>	The Salvation Army (Blenheim)	<b>Norwood</b>	Asphodel Norwood Ministerial Food Bank
<b>Blind River</b>	Blind River Emergency Food Bank Inc.	<b>Orangeville</b>	Orangeville Food Bank
<b>Bobcaygeon</b>	Bobcaygeon Helps Food Bank	<b>Orillia</b>	The Sharing Place
<b>Bolton</b>	Caledon Community Services	<b>Oshawa</b>	Feed the Need in Durham
<b>Brantford</b>	Community Resource Service	<b>Ottawa</b>	Ottawa Food Bank
<b>Brockville</b>	Operation Harvest Sharing	<b>Owen Sound</b>	The Salvation Army Community and Family Services
<b>Burk's Falls</b>	Burk's Falls & District Food Bank	<b>Palmerston</b>	Palmerston Food Bank
<b>Burlington</b>	Partnership West Family Support Network	<b>Paris</b>	The Salvation Army - Brantford & Paris
<b>Caledonia</b>	Caledonia & District Food Bank	<b>Parry Sound</b>	Harvest Share Community Food Bank
<b>Cambridge</b>	Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank	<b>Perth</b>	The Good Food Bank
<b>Campbellford</b>	Campbellford Warkworth Fare Share Food Bank	<b>Peterborough</b>	Kawartha Food Share
<b>Carleton Place</b>	Lanark County Food Bank	<b>Port Colbourne</b>	Port Cares Reach Out Food Centre
<b>Cayuga</b>	Cayuga Food Bank	<b>Port Elgin</b>	Salvation Army Community & Family Services
<b>Chatham</b>	Chatham Outreach for Hunger	<b>Prescott</b>	Food For All Food Bank
<b>Cobalt</b>	Colbalt. Coleman, Latchford and Area Food Bank	<b>Renfrew</b>	Renfrew & District Food Bank
<b>Cobourg</b>	Northumberland County Fare Share	<b>Richmond Hill</b>	LifeCorps Food Share
<b>Cobourg</b>	Food 4 All Northumberland	<b>Ridgetown</b>	Ridgetown Salvation Army Family Services
<b>Cochrane</b>	Cochrane Food Bank Inc.	<b>Sarnia</b>	Inn of the Good Shepherd
<b>Collingwood</b>	The Salvation Army Food Bank	<b>Sault Ste Marie</b>	The Salvation Army Community & Family Services
<b>Cornwall</b>	Centre Agape Centre	<b>Seeley's Bay</b>	R.O.L.L. Aid Centre
<b>Dunnville</b>	Salvation Army Dunnville, Community & Family Services	<b>Sharbot Lake</b>	North Frontenac Food Bank
<b>Eganville</b>	Eganville & District Community Food Bank	<b>Simcoe</b>	Simcoe Caring Cupboard
<b>Elliot Lake</b>	Elliot Lake Emergency Food Bank Inc.	<b>Smiths Falls</b>	Smiths Falls Community Food Bank
<b>Erin</b>	East Wellington Community Services	<b>Smithville</b>	West Lincoln Community Care
<b>Fergus</b>	Centre Wellington Food Bank	<b>South River</b>	Good Happenings Food Bank
<b>Fonthill</b>	Pelham Cares Inc	<b>St. Catharines</b>	Community Care St. Catharines & Thorold
<b>Fort Erie</b>	The Salvation Army Fort Erie	<b>St. Thomas</b>	St. Thomas Elgin Food Bank
<b>Gananoque</b>	Gananoque & District Food Bank	<b>Stirling</b>	Stirling and Area Christian Community Care
<b>Georgetown</b>	Georgetown Bread Basket	<b>Stratford</b>	Stratford House of Blessing
<b>Goderich</b>	St. Vincent de Paul	<b>Sudbury</b>	Banque D'Aliments Sudbury Food Bank
<b>Grimsby</b>	Grimsby Benevolent Fund Food Bank	<b>Sunderland</b>	Brock Community Food Bank
<b>Guelph</b>	Guelph Food Bank	<b>Sydenham</b>	Southern Frontenac Community Services
<b>Hamilton</b>	Hamilton Food Share	<b>Thunder Bay</b>	Regional Food Distribution Association
<b>Hanover</b>	The Salvation Army	<b>Tillsonburg</b>	Helping Hand Food Bank
<b>Hastings</b>	Hastings & Roseneath Ministerial Food Bank	<b>Toronto</b>	Daily Bread Food Bank
<b>Havelock</b>	Havelock & Community Food Bank	<b>Trenton</b>	Trenton Care and Share Food Bank
<b>Hawkesbury</b>	Hawkesbury Food Bank	<b>Uxbridge</b>	Uxbridge Loaves and Fishes Food Bank
<b>Ingersoll</b>	The Salvation Army Ingersoll	<b>Walkerton</b>	Walkerton & District Food Bank
<b>Jarvis</b>	Jarvis Caring Cupboard	<b>Wallaceburg</b>	Wallaceburg Salvation Army Family Services
<b>Kanata</b>	Kanata Food Cupboard	<b>Warkworth</b>	7 Hills Community Pantry
<b>Kingston</b>	Partners in Mission Food Bank	<b>Wasaga Beach</b>	Wasaga Beach Ministerial Food Bank
<b>Kitchener</b>	The Food Bank of Waterloo Region	<b>Waterdown</b>	Food with Grace - Waterdown Food Bank
<b>Lake St. Peter</b>	Word of Life Outreach	<b>Waterford</b>	Waterford and District Food Cupboard
<b>Lanark</b>	Lanark Highlands Food Pantry	<b>Welland</b>	The Hope Centre
<b>Lindsay</b>	Kawartha Lakes Food Source	<b>Warton</b>	The Salvation Army
<b>Listowel</b>	The Salvation Army Community & Family Services	<b>Winchester</b>	Dundas County Food Bank
<b>London</b>	London Food Bank	<b>Windsor</b>	Windsor & Essex County Food Bank Association
<b>L'Orignal</b>	Banque Alimentaire de L'Orignal	<b>Wingham</b>	North Huron Community Foodshare
<b>Mattawa</b>	Mattawa and Area Food Bank	<b>Woodstock</b>	The Salvation Army Emergency Housing Community & Family Services
<b>Meaford</b>	Golden Town Outreach	<b>Zurich</b>	Blessings Community Store & Food Bank
<b>Midland</b>	The Salvation Army - Midland		
<b>Mindemoya</b>	Manitoulin Family Resources		
<b>Minden</b>	Minden Food Bank		



**ONTARIO**  
ASSOCIATION OF  
**FOOD BANKS**

555 Richmond Street West  
Suite 501  
P.O. Box 1108  
Toronto, ON  
M5V 3B1  
[www.oafb.ca](http://www.oafb.ca)  
416-656-4100

The 2015 Hunger Report was written by Carolyn Stewart, Amanda King and Erin Fotheringham and designed by Ashley Quan.