



2023

IMPACT REPORT



A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If you've visited a grocery store recently, you'll know that food prices are rising—and fast. At The Stop, it's the thing I'm most conscious of—how do we meet the growing needs of our community, while our own prices rise? There's no easy answer.

In February of this year, the average price of our food hamper was \$60. This September, the same hamper of essential groceries cost \$85. **That's a staggering 43% increase in just over six months.** It's a scary place to be, as food inflation doesn't show signs of decreasing, and more people than ever have registered to access our food bank.

But despite these challenges, we push on. We are proud to still be running our programs that make genuine

improvements in the lives of our neighbours. Wherever we can, we advocate for change at the municipal, provincial, and national level. In the last year, we've partnered with dozens of organizations working to improve the lives of others. Our volunteers keep us moving ahead, our staff continue to deliver services in ways that are dignified and affirming, and we're always in awe of the generosity of our supporters. Because we know that we're stronger together.

Thank you again for being part of The Stop for the last 40 years.

This report highlights some of the impact we've had on the lives of members of our West Toronto community and beyond, spanning from September 2022 to August 2023.

— SHAE LONDON





CONTEXT

At The Stop, it's crucially important to us that we use our findings to form evidence-based conclusions and call for systemic change. Data from our food bank reflects the heightened inequality we're seeing in Toronto and at a national level. In the last year, there has been a dramatic spike in new food bank users, as insufficient incomes and unaffordable conditions continue to destabilize families. We found that the number of new visits to our food bank in 2022 was **86% higher** than the 2015–2019 average. In 2022–2023, we registered on average 165 new households every month.

We're not alone. Daily Bread Food Bank recorded 274,000 visits across their member agencies in August 2023, nearly quadrupling pre-pandemic rates. The cost of living crisis has had a compounding impact: affecting donation levels, the cost of our service delivery, and the number of households accessing emergency food services. The burden of precarity is wearing people down, and requests for mental health support continue to rise.

We also know that the problem is much bigger, as food bank usage is a limited indicator of poverty. According to a study conducted by McMaster's Secure Empirical Analysis Lab and Hamilton

Food Share, only about one third of low-income households will use food banks ([Policy Options](#)). While we strive to make The Stop's food bank as dignified, barrier-free, and welcoming as possible, it's always a last resort for families.

To meaningfully address poverty, we need immediate policy interventions such as:

- Increased income through enhanced social assistance programs, income transfers, wages that are indexed to the cost of living, and decent work
- Improving the availability of deeply affordable housing for low-income households
- Accessible healthcare and prescription drugs

All of these measures require strong collective action and a unified voice with neighbouring food banks, community groups, and social service agencies. The Stop's mandate to address both the symptoms and root causes of poverty has been at the core of what we do for the last 40 years. As we launch our public policy strategy over the next year, please follow our work and join us in calling for lasting change.



PROGRAM PILLARS

Our work is built upon three pillars: Emergency Food Access, Community Building, and Urban Agriculture. Food is at the heart of everything we do. We provide opportunities for people to share a meal, enjoy a taste of home, and foster a sense of community.

Our **Emergency Food Access** services connect people to good food. The Stop's Drop-in Meal program extends across two sites in Toronto's West End, bringing vibrant, fresh, and healthy meals to our community daily. Our food bank distributes well-balanced and nutritious hampers to food insecure households.

In addition to providing access to nutritious food, we **build community** through a number of engagement programs and services including our peer support offices, health and nutrition classes for expecting and new parents,

tax services, and mental health and wellness programs. Once someone comes through the door for a meal or to access our food bank, we can help them address and prevent deeper issues by building positive and rewarding social connections.

Our **Urban Agriculture** programs include park-based community gardens, greenhouse, our Mashkikii;aki'ing Indigenous Medicine Wheel Garden, and our Global Roots program, for senior and youth newcomers. The Stop provides access to a 6,000 square-foot, year-round greenhouse and surrounding gardens, where over 200 kg and 60+ varieties of fresh, pesticide-free produce are grown. This welcoming space also provides safe, supportive grounds for a variety of community activities and connects our members to hyper-local produce.

FOOD BANK

Our food bank offers fresh, nutritious hampers in a safe, welcoming, and dignified environment. The food bank is set up like a shop, and community members select the items they prefer for their hamper. This model promotes a stronger sense of dignity and personal agency, and enhances community connections as members interact with staff and volunteers when selecting their items. For a single hamper, a service user is typically offered a choice of 10 fruit and vegetable options. This does not include staple items like carrots, potatoes, and onions which are offered separately. Variety changes regularly, in line with seasonal availability.



IN 2022/23

- 21,570 individuals reached
- On average, our food bank served 839 households per month, with a 52% increase in new food bank memberships compared to last year
- In less than six months, the cost of a single hamper increased from \$60 (February 2023) to \$85 (June 2023)
- 66% of our food bank budget was spent on local food





DROP-IN MEALS

Our Drop-in program offers healthy, nutritious meals every day across two of our locations: 1884 Davenport and Wychwood Open Door. Our menu is designed by our talented community chefs, and preparation and service are supported by a team of dedicated volunteers and frontline staff.

Meals are served in our drop-in spaces, with community members seated at round tables and served by volunteers and staff. This serviced approach, which The Stop has embraced for over 18 years, ensures a dignified, welcoming experience, conducive to building and strengthening community connections.

We served **76,739** fresh, nutritious meals this year. We maintain our commitment to fresh, local food, with 60% of our Drop-in program budget spent on local products. Milk, eggs, and root vegetables are sourced locally throughout the year.

We deliver programming in the drop-in spaces before and after mealtimes, and 50% of our service users engage in these community-building activities, such as art tables, movies, karaoke, and bingo. This year, we also offered additional services through external providers, such as adult digital literacy sessions, legal services, haircuts, and yoga.



GOOD FOOD MARKET

The Stop's Good Food Market & Café offers fresh, local produce and prepared foods at affordable prices to our community. We continue to introduce new menu items in response to demand and with increased capacity on the team, we have nearly doubled our inventory. Our energy balls, gluten free options, and hand pies are particularly popular. We sell out nearly every week!

Much of the produce sold at the Good Food Market is sourced directly from The Stop's Farmers' Market, supporting our vendors, and from our community gardens. This supports our mission to increase access to fresh, hyper-local food.

In July, we welcomed **120** community members to our first Good Food Market Festival, with two live bands, activities, and free food and drink.



IN 2022/23

- 45 market days
- 3,400 patrons
- \$5,788 Good Food Market vouchers redeemed through our volunteer recognition program
- \$14,015 spent on local food
- \$46,352 generated in sales, which was reinvested in the program

ADVOCACY, COMMUNITY ACTION TRAINING, AND TAX CLINIC

The Advocacy Office, primarily based out of our 1884 Davenport location, provides peer-to-peer support for our community members' most pressing needs. Advocates and staff work directly with members, providing resources, counsel, and support around issues such as housing, employment, immigration, and health. As of 2023, we've expanded our service to our Wychwood Open Door location on both Wednesdays and Thursdays.

In recent years, Advocacy staff have noticed that more community members require ongoing support for mental health issues, trauma, or stress, which further complicates their ability to navigate other systems. Additionally, community members have required more help with applications, advocacy, and navigation of digital platforms, which is an obstacle for people who are digitally excluded or do not speak English as their first language. Our Advocacy team is made up predominantly of community members who have lived experience of these issues and can provide empathy and personal insight, as well as practical advice.



“

Today I helped a community member get help with baby food, clothing, and furniture. Also, after a month of hard work, the community member finally received his \$500 one-time top up housing benefit!

- COMMUNITY ADVOCATE

Our Advocacy Office runs a seasonal Tax Clinic for community members, where dedicated volunteers help people complete their tax returns. In our 2023 season, we served 322 members, returning an astonishing **\$680,000** back to our community members. In 2022, we returned \$201,000.

Through the organization's Community Action Training (CAT), a 12-session course on social justice and personal development was delivered in the summer of 2023. The course focused on building confidence and developing a broad understanding of social issues to empower participants to make change in their communities. After completion of the course, we encourage participants to become advocates within the organization so they can support others with similar experience. This year, we hired 4 CAT participants.



IN 2022/23

The Advocacy Office made **2,447** referrals:

- 336 housing
- 684 income
- 109 legal
- 68 mental health and addiction
- 208 meal program
- 106 employment
- 96 settlement

HEALTHY BEGINNINGS

Healthy Beginnings is our perinatal program for pregnant individuals and their families. The program serves community members experiencing poverty, poor housing, mental health challenges, and language barriers through tailored emotional, informational, and practical assistance. We deliver workshops, educational sessions, healthy meals and food hampers, vouchers for our community market, and free childcare.

In the last 12 months, we have transitioned back to in-person programming, with a cap of 35 participants weekly. Due to the

repercussions of the pandemic, rising inflation, and the increasing wave of immigration to Canada, we are seeing more local families in need of support.

The program continues to serve nutritious hampers, run cooking demonstrations, and host special events including a Mother's Day celebration, a high tea social, and a special Christmas dinner.



“

The Healthy Beginnings team has great human quality and empathy. I appreciate their willingness to help and being of service. I really appreciate having the opportunity to bring my mom with me to the program because we can learn things together and enjoy this wonderful program as a family. Healthy Beginnings has given me the most support since I came to Canada. Thank you for everything!

**- HEALTHY BEGINNINGS
PROGRAM PARTICIPANT**

IN 2022/23

- 459 recurring participants
- 46 sessions run
- 1,445 food hampers distributed
- \$42,600 grocery cards given out



EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

The Stop's Emotional Wellness program consists of three areas of programming per week at two locations.

PEER ENGAGEMENT GROUP

Bi-weekly, peer-led sessions that encourage participants to discuss ways of healthier coping around the issues important to them.

ART TABLE

Weekly informal art-making sessions and other therapeutic workshops, including yoga.

PERSONAL CARE ITEMS

Regular distribution of zines containing information and resources such as therapy lines, free activities, and community supports, as well as essential care items (e.g., deodorant, feminine sanitary products, masks, and hand sanitizer).

Over the last year, all programming returned to in-person, allowing participants to reduce their social isolation and connect with others. We found that **100%** of our focus group participants identified as dependent on social assistance (Ontario Works) or disability income support (Ontario Disability Support Program). The distribution of personal care items has been particularly important as the cost of hygiene basics increases.

Among a range of personal feedback, participants this year expressed appreciation for the program and its focus on mental health, access to a "safe space" to connect and share, and a place to reduce stress. Anxiety, sleep, and conflict resolution were all important topics during our peer-supported sessions over the last year.



IN 2022/23

- 95% of surveyed participants reported that the Emotional Wellness Program has made them feel more motivated and improved their emotional health
- 94% of participants reported reduced stress and a feeling of greater control because of participation
- 3,803 personal care item packages were distributed to participants across both our drop-ins, providing essential nutritional, health, and resource supports participants
- 1,633 visits to our art tables across both drop-in locations



COMMUNITY KITCHENS

Our Community Kitchens programs provide a safe space to prepare and eat high-quality, nutritious food for people who do not have access to resources for making healthy meals on their own. Workshops facilitate community-building among participants: they share food knowledge and skills, make connections with others, learn about nutrition and healthy food, and share a meal. During the pandemic we ran sessions remotely, but in the last year we were able to meet again. We currently run:

COZY KITCHENS

This program emulates the traditional kitchen at home. We aim to create a cozy space in which stews, salads, and desserts are prepared, and intimate dialogues emerge in a safe, fun, and confidential space. This series is new as of spring 2023.

MEN'S COOKING GROUP

This program is for people who identify as male to learn from others, share their own stories, and improve their cooking skills. We found that **79%** of the participants in the program are single individuals living on their own, and some of them are facing mental health challenges. We were able to restart this workshop series in winter 2022.

SABOR LATINO

This is a bi-weekly Spanish language and culturally specific program which welcomes people from different backgrounds to come together to learn, share, and celebrate the culinary traditions from Latin America and Spanish-speaking countries. This popular program restarted in winter 2022. This year, The Stop worked in partnership with Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre to deliver

nutrition workshops. On designated Fridays, families attended the workshops and enjoyed a meal together. Some of the topics included "Balanced Meals and Mindful Eating", "Picky Eating and Iron Deficiency in Kids", "Eating Disorders", and "Vitamin D and Calcium".

Between April and June 2023, we additionally ran "Soups and Salads" food demos in our drop-in area during food bank hours, so visitors could learn healthy recipes and receive samples, while they waited for their hampers.



IN 2022/23

- 61 planned sessions across all three programs
- 943 meals shared
- 126 unique participants

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Volunteers are central to our work at The Stop. Their support allows us to run our programs and provide high-touch engagement across our membership. This year, we've been delighted to be able to welcome them back on site, as in-person programming has resumed. All of the successes you read about in this report are made possible by our volunteers.

Central to the design of The Stop's Volunteer program is our commitment to community-building, improving connectedness and a sense of belonging, fostering skills development, and reducing social isolation. We prioritize volunteers from equity-seeking groups, and more than **40%** of our volunteers face lived experience with marginalization.

In April 2023 we acknowledged our volunteers' commitment by hosting

an appreciation event. Joined by 100 participants, we shared a special dinner made by our chefs, played games, and celebrated their hard work.

We piloted our Market Bucks scheme this year, through which volunteers can exchange their Good Food Market vouchers for credit for our Farmers' Market, in recognition of their work. This was a great success, and we'll be continuing the initiative through 2023–2024.



IN 2022/23

- 192 active volunteers
- 19,368 volunteer hours donated
- 78% of volunteers said they learned a new skill through the program
- \$4,971 distributed to volunteers through our Market Bucks scheme
- 83% of volunteers reported feeling a greater sense of connectedness to the community through volunteering



Volunteering at The Stop became my guiding light — helping me through a relationship breakup, the loss of a family member, and an ongoing job pursuit. The Dig-in gardening program at the Green Barn was the highlight of my week, infusing me with purpose and a genuine sense of belonging.

- VOLUNTEER



GREENHOUSE AND DIG-IN PROGRAM



This year at our Green Barn location, we hosted **25** weeks of "Dig-in" program sessions and **12** weeks of winter greenhouse sessions, providing participants with tangible urban agriculture skills and opportunities for knowledge-sharing of their own. New participant-led vermicompost bins were added to the greenhouse, creating a sense of shared responsibility and care for the worms, soil health, and harvest.

We also ran eight public workshops, engaging **136** community members on a variety of topics, such as growing microgreens, seed starting, and botanical printing with cyanotypes.



SEEDLING GIVEAWAY PROGRAM

To help increase access to fresh, local produce, we grew **over 8,000** seedlings in our greenhouse and distributed them across Toronto and the Greater Toronto area. Within this total, **3,000** seedlings were distributed to over 50 diverse community gardens, agencies, and groups, and over **1,000** seedlings were shared with approximately 300 individuals across The Stop's three sites. The remaining seedlings went to our community gardens, enabling us to grow more food to support our communities.



GLOBAL ROOTS GARDEN

Bringing newcomer youth and seniors together, our Global Roots Garden program, run in partnership with CultureLink Settlement Services, connects senior and youth participants from immigrant or newcomer backgrounds through the sharing of cultural traditions, knowledge exchange, and environmental stewardship.

Through this program, participants were able to grow culturally-relevant organic food and share their knowledge around it, making cross-cultural connections in the group. Some of the produce we grew included: bitter melon, luffa, gow choy (garlic chives), Scotch bonnet peppers, and lovage. This year, we had 31 participants and six volunteers join each week, dedicating a total of **44** hours to the program.



95%

of participants reported an improvement in how socially connected they felt



EARLSCOURT COMMUNITY GARDEN

The Stop's EarlsCourt Community Garden in EarlsCourt Park brings together members of the community to learn about all aspects of gardening and share its harvest. Through learning to care for plants, we learn to take care of each other.

This year, we successfully trialed new donation pathways, contributing bulk produce to the Good Food Market and any remaining harvest to The Stop's Emergency

Food Services programs. This model ensures higher yields from our gardens are directed to feeding members of our community.

With some garden redesign we were able to balance the harvest more evenly throughout the growing season, which allowed participants to have more access to fresh produce.





IN 2022/23

- 199 kg of fresh produce harvested for participants
- 52 kg of fresh produce harvested for meal programs
- 44 program participants contributed to over 8,000 square feet of public urban gardens

MASHKIKII;AKI'ING MEDICINE WHEEL GARDEN



At the Mashkikii;aki'ing garden, The Stop works in partnership with Toronto's Native Men's Residence (Na-Me-Res), an organization serving unhoused/underhoused Indigenous men. Participants come together twice a week to work in the gardens, enjoy a meal, and share cultural traditions.

85.7%

of participants reported an increased sense of connection to Indigenous cultures

A recent survey of our program reported that **92%** of participants found an improvement in their emotional and spiritual well-being through their participation in the program, and **100%** of participants reported an improvement in their physical health and well-being.



“

It's not easy to start recovery. I thought, oh I'll get better overnight. It takes time. And this is an example of that. When you see something else growing, you see you could do it yourself.

**- MASHKIKII;AKI'ING
GARDEN PARTICIPANT**

IN 2022/23

- 100 kg of fresh produce harvested
- 71 indoor and gardening sessions
- Over 60 program participants
- 1,226 plates of food prepared and shared onsite

FARMERS' MARKET

The Stop's Farmers' Market creates an inclusive, accessible space and support for farmers, vendors, and artists who offer locally made, eco-conscious, and ethical goods.

The market was very active this year with an average of 2,120 customers attending each week. We added nine new vendors and our farmers have managed to keep prices stable in the face of inflation, resulting in seasonal vegetables that are more affordable than those at the grocery store.

After a successful 8.5-month pilot of the Market Bucks program, our volunteers redeemed **\$1,455** of fresh, locally grown produce and artisanal goods, and reported feeling appreciated and part of the community because of this program.

We lowered first-year vendor rates, introduced stall sharing, and updated the

application process in order to make the Farmers' Market more inclusive for both vendors and customers.

We established several internal and external partnerships that help our community members gain increased access to fresh, local food, receive training and employment opportunities, and help the broader community develop skills to find employment.

Through our continued partnership with the Black Entrepreneurship Alliance, we provided hands-on market exposure to its graduates, and one of last year's participants is now a weekly vendor. In addition to offering an opportunity for participants to experience a farmers' market environment and form connections with customers, the partnership allowed our Farmers' Market to be a space that could welcome a more diverse variety of products.



IN 2022/23

- 103,051 total patron visits
- 32 tables that provided space for initiatives in the community
- 54 total vendors
- \$4,627 worth of fresh, local produce was purchased from Farmers' Market vendors for our Good Food Market



THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

- Sara Abdella
- Niki Ainslie
- Rima Akl
- Pedram Albuye Semmami
- Lizeth Aragon
- Mickal Aranha
- Josephine Armstrong
- Melanie Arnold
- Rachel Azzopardi
- John Bagnall
- Ejigayehu (Gigi) Beferdu
- Sandra Bertoia
- Sabrina Boubaha
- Chad Boucher
- Sarah Bowness
- Janet Burke
- John Bush
- Linda Buskin
- Jake Byrne
- Gladys Caceres
- Douglas Cameron
- Paul Carney
- Erin Carroll
- Chris Carter
- Valentina Castellini
- Bruno Cerqueira
- Daphne Chambers
- Azali Charles
- Kalen Chen
- Sally Cho
- Betty Chou
- Leya Choudhury
- Carrie Clark
- Kristian Clarke
- Rhonda B Cohen
- Jane Cowan
- Celeste Crevier
- David Cronsilver
- Julia Culpeper
- Katherine Cusimano
- Aimee Darcel
- Akiko Date
- Robin Dawson
- Carla De Sousa
- Irene De Sousa
- Patrick DiTomaso
- Patrick (Pat) Dolan
- Ann Dugan
- Joanna Ebbutt
- Brad Edelson
- Rosalee Edwards
- Elizabeth Espinoza
- Marcellinus Essah
- Shaheen Fa Mughal
- Grace Fabiano
- Arminda Filipe
- Josh Fogel
- Hyacinth Francis
- Juliet Francis
- Patrick Fraser
- Hilary Freeman
- Ross Freeman
- Gwen Friedman
- Ran (Raina) Gao
- Lauren Genz
- Indira Gobin
- Laura Godfrey
- Angelica Gonzalez
- Poonam Goyal
- Laurie Harada
- Ivan Paul Haramustek
- Kevin Hareguy
- Wendy Hernick
- Idalia Herrera
- Maria Hersht
- Wendy Hillman
- Kim Hoang Tran
- Donna Holmes
- Toby Houle
- Sandra Hryhor
- Nilofer Irani
- Lev Jaeger
- Dave Johansen
- Stephanie Johnson
- Deborah Kanga
- Noa Kanyike
- Justine Keyserlingk
- Bohfinai Konate
- Carl Korte
- Mike Lapenna
- Maria Larizza
- Margaret Laycock
- Chris Le Ber
- Lorraine Lecount
- Marilyn Lee
- Andrea Legarde
- Vanessa Lehan
- Ron Leitold
- Audrey Lengyel
- Leila Lessem
- Amy Leung
- Natan Levi
- Andy Lim
- Carolyn Lim
- Josephine Liu
- Linda Lohmus
- Lynn Lowes
- Laura Lozada
- Sanyo Lue-Kim
- Michael MacDonald
- Judy MacPherson
- Shayan Malik
- William Marciales
- Elissa Marks
- Carmen (Maria) Martinez
- Cameron Maveal
- Michael McKibbin
- Emily McNamee
- Jessica McQuoid

- Natasha Meissner
- Mary Michaelides
- Abdirizak Mohamed
- Maria Morales
- Tashani Morris
- Francine Neander
- Carole Neron
- Alda Neves
- Jean Niravong
- Honey Novick
- Luz Ortiz
- Misty Parsons
- Pasang Pasang
- Anika Pask
- Melita Paunic
- Eti Pazos
- Mical Pearlman
- Kathryn Peden
- Marcia Peralta
- Randi Pert
- Elizabeth Pietrodangelo
- Lindy Pinto
- Clinton Pontes
- Jessica Poole
- Jorge Prado
- Ice (Chen Xue) Qing
- Hali Rapkowski
- Patti Rennie
- James Rhatigan
- Sean Rockburn
- Aura Rodriguez
- Jill Roussy
- Selen Salazar
- Jacinto Salcedo
- Karla Sanchez Castro
- Marius Sarunas
- Stephen Schaefer
- Alison Schneider
- Joanne Schwartz
- Nicola Scott
- Marc Seeman
- Danny Shortell
- Betty Jean Smith
- Gail Smith
- Paula Smith
- Stacy Smith
- Mary Smythe
- Elena Solomon
- Anna Sottile
- David Stock
- Rosalind Strauss
- Lilla Stuart
- Mary Tanner
- Danielle Tchao
- Rosemary Tomlinson-Morris
- Daniel Torres Cano
- Chris Valentine
- Erika Valle
- Christine Von Gemmingen
- Grace Walsh
- Jennifer Watkins
- Tim Watson
- Kathy Williams
- William Woods
- Liz Yaworski
- Eunkyung Yim
- Charles Yu
- Fermin Zelaya





The Stop Community Food Centre

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IMAGINE CANADA