THE STOP COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE

COVID INTERIM REPORT

JANUARY 2021- JUNE 2021

WWW.THESTOP.ORG
The truth is that there are so many families that really need support. In our Healthy Beginnings program, 65% of new and expecting parents reported significant income loss through the pandemic. In our drop-in, we served over 68,822 nutritious, culturally appropriate meals from April 2020 to April 2021. That’s a 28.6% increase compared to the previous year. Over the first 6 months of 2021 alone, we have seen a 17% increase in our food bank files (each file representing 1-9 people), including a 15% increase in youth below the age of 18. While we have seen a higher demand for our programs over the past year, we have also experienced a 22% decrease in donated food, meaning our expenses have increased as we purchase additional healthy food supplies and vouchers for drop-in meals and our food bank.

We should all be alarmed that there are so many people in our own community who need access to emergency services. It hasn’t been easy, but The Stop took the necessary measures to scale up our food access services to feed thousands of people during a global health crisis.

The demand has not eased as we enter our second year of COVID, 2021.
I’m immensely grateful for our staff, volunteers, donors, and supporters who’ve rallied to keep each other safe and healthy through the pandemic. From our frontline workers packing hampers, to the donors who’ve supported our work, to the mutual aid groups that have sprung up across the city—we have all a part to play in looking out for one another.

We know that meals alone can’t build a community’s resilience. Our power comes from our connections and our responsibility to each other. As we continue to ride out the pandemic, The Stop is looking to the future. The 1 in 7 Torontonians who struggle with food insecurity will need more support as our country recovers and attention moves elsewhere.

Our organization must plan for innovation, so that we can efficiently respond with programs and advocacy—no matter what the future holds.

We have a significant number of people we are committed to helping. The work is ongoing, and we are committed to it.

Thank you for being a part of it.
The Food Bank
PROVIDING CRITICAL ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

THE POWER OF HEALTHY FOOD

What we eat, and how we eat it, has a powerful impact on our sense of self. Our ability to access the foods we love, to express ourselves through cooking, and to share our traditions with others can build pride in our identities. It also deepens the connections we have with our families, cultures, and neighbours.

Food is at the heart of all of our work at The Stop. We provide opportunities for people to share a meal, enjoy a taste of home, and foster their sense of community.

FOOD BANK CHANGES AND COVID

Our Food Bank now provides a three-day supply of food to individuals and families who live in the GTA and beyond. Through creative partnerships and the support of our donors, our hampers always feature fresh produce, milk, eggs, and whole grains.

The Stop has seen an increased need for hampers, with many families coming from outside our catchment area; we’ve ultimately decided to increase access to our food bank by offering hampers 2x per month (up from 1x) to a larger audience across the GTA.

We’ve seen a decrease in donated food as larger groups cannot gather to host food drives throughout the pandemic. Additionally, we’ve been preparing hampers with much fewer volunteers to ensure social distancing.

“If The Stop didn’t exist, there would be a big void in the community”
-Community Member

17% Increase in files at our food bank.
15% Increase of total number of kids 18 and under served.
16% Increase in total number of out of area files served.

Each our our files represents a family of 1-9 people.
DROP-IN MEALS
FROM SEATED MEALS TO TAKE AWAY

CHANGES IN OUR MEAL SERVICE

Outside of COVID, individuals could come and be served while seated at round tables in our drop-in space. We have been unable to safely host our community members, so we have transitioned our service to take away meals.

We have provided thousands of healthy and culturally appropriate meals to vulnerable community members. Our chefs and kitchen volunteers have settled into a routine; getting used to packing food into hundreds of containers. We’re going to be so efficient when we go back to plated food!

“
It’s more important than ever for us to look after each other — especially those who have always been the most at-risk in our community.

- Monica, Community Chef

28.6% increase in meals provided in April 2020- April 2021 in comparison to the previous year

431 take away meals served each day between April 2020-April 2021. That is 68,822 for the year!

50% of our food budget is spent on all local food/farms
“Food brings people together and my son and I shared a very special moment eating this beautiful meal together”

- Ileana
LEARN, COOK, AND SHARE MEALS

Our Community Kitchens bring people together to learn, cook, and share nutritious, culturally diverse, and inexpensive meals. When the pandemic hit in March of 2020, our Community Kitchen program was faced with the challenge of re-imagining the approach of our cooking groups. After careful research, testing, and planning, the meal kit program was introduced in February 2021. Inspired by popular meal kit services on the market, this program makes resources freely accessible to individuals and families living on the margins and experiencing food insecurity.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Each meal kit varies based on the size of the household and can be picked up twice a month. Sufficient ingredients are provided to prepare at least two servings per household member. Meat and vegetarian options are always available for participants. Additional dietary needs such as halal and gluten-free are also carefully considered.

Our Community Members can:
- Schedule a time for pick-up
- Take the meal kit home with them
- Discover what’s inside and enjoy cooking
- Take photos and/or write about it

52 Households received fresh, quality ingredients.

The total cost of each meal kit is about $4 per serving.
In April and May, we partnered with University Health Network, Toronto Public Health, Davenport Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre and Women’s College Hospital to organize four vaccination clinics. We hosted three of these clinics at 1884 Davenport Road and collaborated with DPNC at Pelham Park for the fourth.
We understand that emergency food alone will not address poverty, so we empower people experiencing marginalization to help themselves and each other through our Community Action Program (CAP).

CAP empowers people to challenge chronic income and food insecurity by building stronger community support networks, raising political consciousness, and taking direct action. The Community Advocacy Office is a peer-run project where trained advocates (who are also community members) provide information, referrals, and general assistance to fellow community members. All services are strictly confidential.

**CAP CHANGES AND COVID**

Our Community Action Team has been busy during COVID. To keep this program running, we created a window service with an intercom phone system to provide privacy and facilitate communication between community members and Peer Advocates.

**HEAR FROM OUR COMMUNITY**

“Being a Peer Advocate has been a formative experience. I learned how to be an active and useful participant in my community. I take great pride in helping community members navigate obscure systems of aid, as well as providing services to folks who, like myself, may experience barriers elsewhere.”

-Norhan

“Everyone has been able to access the services provided by The Stop through the advocacy office even during COVID, community members have gained information they wouldn’t be able to without the office being open.”

-Misty
The Stop's Farmers' Market
SUPPORTING OUR LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

We believe that farmers’ markets play a critical role in food sovereignty where community members can use their dollars to directly support local farmers and vendors, shortening the gap between food consumers and producers while building connections with the people who grow, produce and prepare our food.

The Stop’s Wychwood Barns Farmers’ Market strives to create space for farmers, vendors and community members from diverse backgrounds and is engaged in an ongoing consultation to address barriers to participation in our space.
We believe that when we connect our work to an understanding of how racism and oppression impact our ability to eat, grow, live, and thrive, we can reimagine a society that’s truly grounded in food justice.
Healthy Beginnings is a weekly drop-in program for expectant mothers who can participate until their infant is six months old. These mothers are on a low income and often experience a combination of challenging life circumstances such as single parenting, poor housing, mental health, marginalization, recent immigration, and language barriers.

INFORMATION, EDUCATION, AND SUPPORT

Healthy Beginnings is a weekly drop-in program for expectant mothers who can participate until their infant is six months old. These mothers are on a low income and often experience a combination of challenging life circumstances such as single parenting, poor housing, mental health, marginalization, recent immigration, and language barriers.

“The last year really pushed me to adapt to the changes thrown at me by surprise. I got laid off from work, a surprise pregnancy, and had to look for a new job to qualify for maternity leave. Being able to join Healthy Beginnings was a blessing.”

- Program Participant

Traditional programming has been suspended since March 2020. In addition to weekly hamper and grocery gift card ($10) distribution for the registered participants, we have been:

- Sending a weekly e-news with info on pregnancy, mental health supports, activities for children, online support groups
- Conducting weekly check-ins and “wellness calls” on the phone
- Connecting on our new What’s App group where the moms can share with each other and maintain the social connections they began to develop during the in-person programs
- Providing baby essentials like wipes and diapers
- Creating healthy recipes to include with our hampers
- Distributing surveys to participants to gauge the way they/their families have been impacted by COVID and what types of supports they need.

65% of participants lost income during COVID
21% were eligible for government supports
7% had access to paid sick days if they had to isolate
Volunteer Program
VITAL IN EVERY ASPECT OF OUR WORK

Volunteers play a vital role in every aspect of our work. Many of our volunteers have experience with issues facing our community, such as unemployment, poverty, and homelessness. This creates a unique sense of community in a non-judgmental and empathetic environment. Volunteering at The Stop has had an important impact on mental health, especially during the pandemic.

Outside of COVID, we usually have around 270 volunteers helping us run our programs. Due to social distancing precautions, we were running our programs with about 70 helpers! We have now been safely re-introducing volunteers back to the space, with about 150 active volunteers.

HEAR FROM OUR VOLUNTEERS

“Volunteering provides the opportunity to meet new people, build friendships, and work as a team to support community members. The staff are welcoming, organized, and dedicated to The Stop’s mission and values. I look forward to volunteering each week.”

- Volunteer

“I had no idea how much volunteering had such a positive impact on my mental health. Being around other people who share my values and having structure during the week breaks the isolation. Volunteering helps me feel I’m not alone during this difficult time”

- Volunteer

Volunteering at The Stop has been my top source of friendly & in-person interactions over the past months, which I am very grateful for.”

- Volunteer
The Good Food Market is just one of the ways that The Stop aims to generate sustainable access to healthy foods in underserved neighborhoods. Residential areas without a grocery store within walking distance are called “food deserts” and Good Food Markets were specifically designed to fill the gaps in these areas by bringing healthy foods closer to home.

Purchasing our produce in large quantities, in season, directly from local farmers, and utilizing our amazing volunteers means that we can keep things affordable. And, by purchasing directly from farmers who are growing locally and sustainably, we are supporting the broader community as well. The GFM is a multidimensional food security tool. It allows us to provide reliable access to whole healthy affordable foods in our community while simultaneously supporting our local food economy.

When we began to look at how we could safely re-open The Stop Café, we resolved to merge the Cafe and Good Food Market programs.

The GFM at 1884 increases community access to high quality, culturally appropriate and affordable produce. With the addition of The Stop Café, the GFM will now be able to supply our customers with fresh baked sourdough bread, baked goods, healthy prepared foods such as soups, stews and sauces, as well as additional grocery items such as dairy and protein.
"I meet nice people and share experiences with them. I can talk to people. Toronto is a big city and I feel alone sometimes. [Here] I’m involved with something and the garden is alive. You can bring some tomato, salad or callaloo home and they smell good and fresh and you’re proud of something. It’s life".

- Program Participant
Through COVID we haven’t been able to gather, but typically we partner with the Sagatay program from Na-Me-Res (Native Men’s Residence) to animate the garden at Hillcrest Park, which includes the Mashkikii;aki’ing (Medicine Earth) Medicine Wheel Garden.

This partnership provides the men of the Apaenmowineen (Having Confidence in Oneself) program the opportunity to share teachings and learn more about plant medicine, gardening, and healthy living.

During this time we have:
- Grown 4.5 kg of food and traditional medicines.
- Served roughly 300 meals.
- We are also helping another gardening project that will hopefully allow the participants from Sagatay to gain experience in market gardening and will receive an honorarium and produce for their efforts.
- Sourcing more culturally-specific food from Indigenous growers/producers and trying to coordinate field trips so participants can see how foods are traditionally produced.
We had some stumbling blocks this year (like seed order delays, pesky pests and a pandemic), but we made it!

Each year, we work toward providing seedlings to different growing groups across the city so that folks in those communities can care for the plants and each other. The food grown can then be re-distributed to their families and communities. In order to support others in this way, we need to work together, show up for and support each other, and take care of ourselves in order to keep helping others.

The seedlings were basil, bok choy, chives, dill, marigolds, okra, and many more.

Our greenhouse and sheltered garden provide year-round growing space and an inspiring environment for the community to learn and share agricultural knowledge.

- Total seedlings planted: >11,000
- 5,000 of those seedlings went toward our giveaways (to our individual community members and participating community gardens)
- Total harvest (indoor + outdoor): 16.42 kilos
TO SUPPORT OUR WORK OR GET IN TOUCH

DONATE | DONATE@THESTOP.ORG
We count on dedicated supporters to fund our work and receive little government funding. Most of our funding comes from individuals like you!

VOLUNTEER | DIANE@THESTOP.ORG
Volunteers are the lifeblood of our organization. We always need more welcoming faces, helping hands, and committed individuals.