ANNUAL REPORT 2016

USING FOOD AS A TOOL
This year at The Stop, we took a step back to look at the impact of our work, wanting to make sure we were on track with what was most needed by the communities we serve in our changing city. We started with a Theory of Change process, an opportunity to take stock and sharpen our thinking about our impact.

From our early days in St. Stephen-in-the-Fields in Kensington Market, when we started with coffee and sandwiches, The Stop has used food as a tool – to connect with people, build community, and create spaces for personal and city-wide change. And we still do!

There is more about our Theory of Change in this report, but it is important to note what we have always heard from community members and what is true today: that though people come to The Stop for food – a meal or a food hamper – they keep coming back because of the people.

Over healthy meals and in thriving gardens, they find a place to connect, meet people, and build community.

This year, we also did an evaluation of our volunteer program. Every year, hundreds of people make The Stop a vibrant, welcoming space. In our kitchens, serving meals, working at events – our volunteers are everything to us and one of our greatest strengths. We provide meaningful opportunities for people from across neighbourhoods, cultures, and economic demographics, people who are program participants and those who are not, to work side-by-side, every day, nourishing each other and Toronto.

At a time when our city continues to struggle with poverty, leaving thousands behind, as we hold tight to the shameful title of child poverty capital of Canada, and at a time when hateful political discourse across the world fills our airwaves, we think this kind of social solidarity is more important than ever.

Thank you so much to our volunteers and donors who believe, as we do, in the importance of social solidarity, of using food as a tool, and in making Toronto a healthier, more hopeful place for all.
We bring people together at our weekly markets: our Good Food Market, which provides affordable produce to members of the Davenport community, and The Stop’s Farmers’ Market at Wychwood Barns, which creates a vibrant community space in St. Clair West.

At our markets around the table, we build connections in our Drop-in, Healthy Beginnings programs, community kitchens, or after a session in one of our gardens.

We work with allies across the city, advocating for systemic change. Our Community Action Program trains community advocates, amplifying voices for change.

The Stop brings people together at our fundraising and engagement events throughout the year. Thank you to everyone who attended an event to support our work and to celebrate the power of food.

“At The Stop, I feel more connected to the community.”

“I often ask people what they plan to do with the produce they are buying. It not only makes for interesting conversation, but helps build relationships with community members.”

– Good Food Market Staff

What’s on the Table has helped define what a great food event in this city can be. …the right for everyone to have access to good food is a mission we are proud to support and one that will help define the type of city we want to be.”

– Ken Hunt, Publisher, Toronto Life

AT OUR EVENTS

25% increase in customer visits this year at the Good Food Market.

2,000 to 3,000 customers each week in the summer at The Stop’s Farmers’ Market at Wychwood Barns.

88 healthy babies were born in our Healthy Beginnings program this year, and 100% of participants made new friends in the program.

2,200 visits were made to our peer-run Community Advocacy Office this year, resulting in over 1,300 phone calls and referrals.
Our Theory of Change: Using Food as a Tool

Who & Where
We work in the Davenport West and St. Clair West communities with people who self-identify as income insecure and experience barriers to access and inclusion.

We also work with our supporters and allies to advocate for change, locally and provincially.

How

Community Services
Focus on meeting emergency and immediate needs.

Community Programs
Focus on building supportive groups.

Social Enterprise
Focus on generating income and achieving social, cultural, and/or environmental aims.

Change-making
Focus on systems-level change, in collaboration with allies.

Short-Term Outcomes (6 months – 2 years)
- increased food access
- greater engagement and connection
- increased awareness, pride and self-confidence

Long-Term Outcomes (2 years)
- improved health and well-being
- increased sense of community
- greater opportunity
- increased engagement in social justice

Ultimate Impact (2020)
Healthier, more connected, more self-determined communities, and progressive policy related to food and income.

the stop
community food centre
REFLECTIONS ON OUR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The Stop has been encouraging participants to volunteer in the delivery of our programs for nearly 20 years. We consider volunteering to be a key strategy in supporting our community members living in poverty. This year, we undertook a six-month research project to understand the motivations, benefits, and barriers associated with volunteering, with an aim to increase the proportion of participant volunteers. 

The results of this project were surprising and affirming. First, we discovered that there is remarkably little data on the benefits of volunteering for service users. This lack of research seems to indicate a bias in the literature—volunteering is assumed to be something that only affluent people can do. And yet, research has also indicated that, generally speaking, people who are faring poorly have the most to gain from volunteering. To the extent that volunteerism is about benefiting volunteers as well as supporting operations, this finding suggests we should be supporting those people who have the most to gain to volunteer—including people living in poverty.

The benefits are clearly substantial. While all volunteers cited “meeting people” as a top benefit, participant volunteers were far more likely to feel less lonely. Participant volunteers were also more likely to say that volunteering gave them “something to do,” which they linked to increased feelings of self-esteem and mattering, the perception that one is noticed and valued in the world. Participant volunteers experienced more significant improvements in their mood, particularly around stress, anxiety, and depression. And, finally, and unexpectedly, participant volunteers felt less shame when using The Stop’s services, partly because of a sense of reciprocity, but also because, through volunteering, they realized that they were not alone in their struggle with poverty.

The effects of poverty are crushing, extending far beyond material deprivation. People living in poverty feel isolated, excluded, and unworthy, and these feelings are connected to their overall health outcomes, not to mention their ability to build different lives. Our research confirmed years of experience that when low-income people are active participants in service delivery, volunteering itself becomes a powerful tool for poverty alleviation.

“You’re part of the net, you know what I mean? And you’re not just hanging in the net, you’re building the net.”

~ Participant Volunteer
Our Generous Supporters

September 2, 2015 to August 31, 2016

Every gift to The Stop provides increased access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds health and community, and challenges inequality. Due to limited space, the following lists those who have made contributions of $1,000 or more. We acknowledge, with gratitude, the significant contributions made by all donors, and the many restaurants, wineries, breweries, and chefs who contribute to our annual events.

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Government of Canada - Public Health Agency of Canada
The Slaight Family Foundation
The Sprott Foundation

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The New Farm
The Young Fund at Hamilton Community Foundation

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On behalf of The Stop, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to each and every donor. We are deeply grateful for your generosity and commitment to ending hunger in our community. Your support enables The Stop to provide fresh, healthy food to those in need every single day.
The Stop strives to increase access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds health and community, and challenges inequality.