

ONTARIO HUNGER REPORT 2005

november 2005

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ONTARIO
ASSOCIATION OF
FOOD BANKS

about the ontario association of food banks (oafb)

The Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) is a cooperative alliance of food banks across the province, representing over 100 members in communities across Ontario, from Ottawa to Windsor and Thunder Bay to Niagara Falls.

The organization has helped serve its members since 1992 and has four major aims to achieve its vision of hunger relief.

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

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

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

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

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

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Special thanks to our partners in hunger relief, the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB), for their continued work in collecting HungerCount data and producing their annual report on food banks in Canada. This report would not be possible without their diligent efforts.

key facts

- **no. of Ontarians served by food banks:** 338,563 (highest in the country, and an increase of 4.8 per cent since 2004)
- **no. of children served by food banks:** 144,234 (increase of 11.7 per cent since 2004)
- **most common family type:** single people, 34.3 per cent of those served
- **percentage of recipients with jobs:** 14.5 per cent of those served
- **principle source of income for those served:** social assistance, 50.2 per cent of those served
- **no. of persons served by food banks as proportion of Ontario population:** 2.71 per cent

other facts

- the number of people served by food banks in Ontario has increased by 21.5 per cent since 2001
- over 60 per cent of Ontario's food banks reported an increase in the number of working poor served
- one in three food banks in the province reported a decrease in their ability to meet the needs of their clients
- one in four food banks reported that they did not have enough food to meet the needs of those they serve

introduction

Food banks in Ontario have served their communities for a generation. It has been over 20 years since the first modern food bank operations opened in major cities in the province. First established as a temporary measure to serve hundreds, food banks have grown substantially to meet consistently rising demand, now feeding tens of thousands across Ontario.

There is a clear need to understand these changes on an ongoing basis, as well as the context within which food banks operate. Therefore, this report will provide an environmental scan of food banks in

Ontario, outline recent and ongoing trends that affect food bank usage in the province, and discuss the impact of hunger on Ontarians.

The report tells a story about hunger, but does not offer any recommendations for its end. It is a brief overview to tell the story of those served by food banks – an illustration of the problem, its root causes and its impacts. This is the beginning of a new conversation. The Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) will soon begin work to conduct further research to develop long-term solutions to the issues of hunger and poverty.

This is the beginning of a new conversation.

data sources & methodology

There are four major data sources that are used for this report. The first is the data collected through the HungerCount survey, which is administered through the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) in partnership with provincial organizations and food banks across the country. The data collected through this survey is primarily quantitative, and includes valuable information that helps to build a profile of food banks and those they serve. This survey has been administered on a regular basis since 1997.

The second major data source is the annual member survey for the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB). This is a phone survey of member food banks conducted during the summer in order to build a better understanding of the challenges that these organizations face.

The third major data source includes Statistics Canada datasets. Information on household spending, labour, and income was collect-

ed and analyzed to provide a better picture of the challenges faced by Ontarians in need. This data was compiled through monthly reports produced by Statistics Canada as well as the most recent census.

The final data source is secondary research. Although this secondary research focuses mostly on the impacts of hunger through a brief literature review, a number of reports were also used to provide background on the trends affecting those served by food banks in Ontario.

It should be noted that in many cases, this report utilizes the low income cutoff (LICO) measure established by Statistics Canada. LICO is the point where the portion of income spent on food, clothing and shelter is 20 percentage points more than average. On average, this translates into roughly 70 per cent of a household's total income. Although it is not an exact measure, it is felt that it is reflective of the trends outlined in this report.

This section will outline trends describing the situation of those served by food banks, as well as the conditions faced by food banks themselves.

TRENDS: THOSE SERVED BY FOOD BANKS

A tremendous number of Ontarians continue to be served by food banks in the province. A total of 338,563 individuals were served by food banks in Ontario per month in 2005.¹ This represents a 4.8 per cent increase in those served since last year, or 15,652 more hungry Ontarians.² But what is most striking about this figure is the number of children accessing food banks. Children under 18 now represent over 43 per cent of those served.³ This represents an annual increase of 11.7 per cent. These figures can be clearly seen in graph one below.

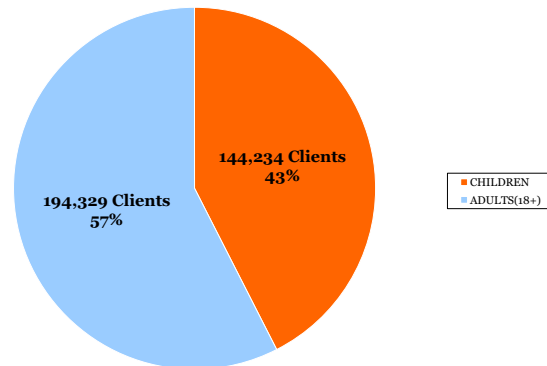
But this is clearly not a one year phenomenon. The number of people served by food banks in Ontario has increased by 21.5 per cent since 2001. And this is not a function of increasing population as the rate of increase is over three times greater than the rate of population growth in Ontario.⁵ The increase in food bank usage can be clearly seen in graph two.

The composition of those served by food banks is also changing in other ways. There are now many more Ontarians with employment income, or working poor, accessing these services. In 2005, one in seven Ontarians served by a food bank had a part-time or full-time job.⁷ Many food banks have begun to notice this trend. Over 60 per cent of Ontario's food banks reported an increase in the number of working poor served in between January

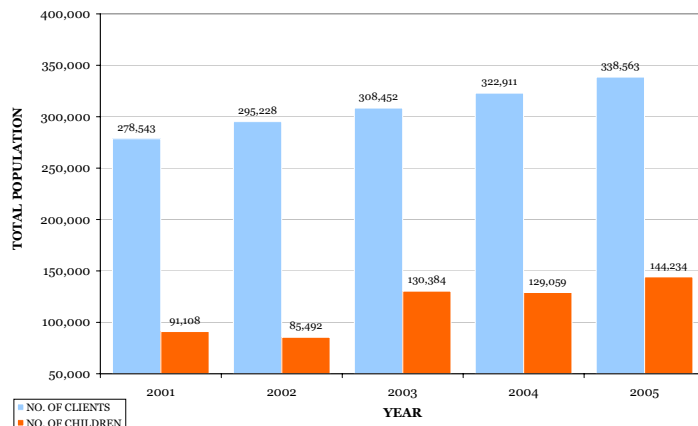
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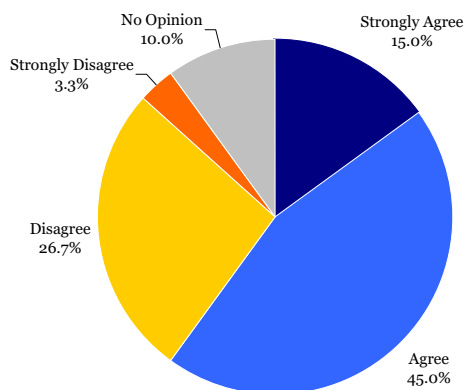
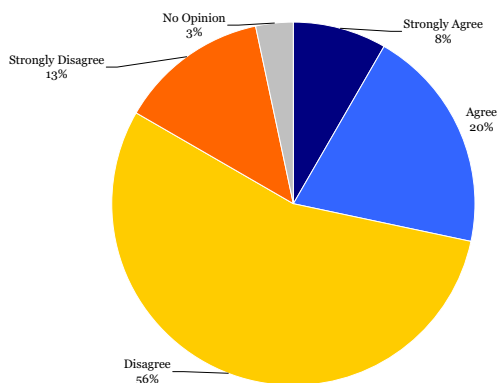
Graph One: Food Bank Usage in Ontario, 2005⁴



Graph Two: Food Bank Usage in Ontario, 2001 to 2005⁶



The number of people served by food banks in Ontario has increased by 21.5 per cent since 2001.

Graph Three: Food Banks Reporting an Increase in the Number of Working Poor, 2005⁹Graph Four: Food Banks in Ontario Reporting a Decrease in the Ability to Meet the Needs of their Clients, 2005¹³

and June 2005.⁸ This trend can be seen in graph three.

It should be noted that some of these trends are not found at a national level. Across Canada, the number of Canadians in need served by food banks has actually seen a year over year decrease of 2.1 per cent.¹⁰ Between 2001 and 2005, the rate of increase in number of Ontarians served is actually 46.3 per cent greater than the national average.¹¹ Some provinces have actually seen a fairly substantial annual decrease. In Alberta, the number of residents served by food banks decreased by 16.6 per cent. In Quebec, the number served decreased by 9.1 per cent.¹²

TRENDS: FOOD BANKS

Despite the generosity of thousands of Ontarians, many food banks continue to struggle to provide hunger relief to those in need in their communities. In many cases, that ability to provide emergen-

cy assistance is actually decreasing. Roughly one in three food banks in the province reported a decrease in their ability to meet the needs of their clients in 2005. This can be seen in graph four.

Although difficult, some food banks can continue to feed those they serve while their ability to do so diminishes. However, many cannot. Many do not have the ability to provide the already limited, emergency food supplies that hungry Ontarians need to survive. In 2005, one in four food banks reported that they did not have enough food to meet the needs of those they serve. This trend can be clearly seen in graph five.

Food banks also continue to provide an emergency food supply for Ontarians in need. They cannot meet the entire nutritional requirements of those that they serve. Most food banks serve those in need once per month and provide between one and five days of food for each visit

In 2005, one in four food banks reported that they did not have enough food to meet the needs of those they serve.

in a food hamper. These trends can be seen in graphs six and seven.

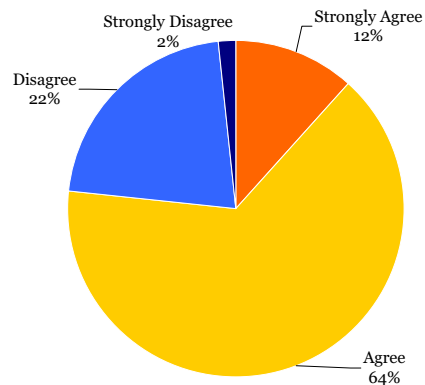
A number of continuing developments in the food industry have also presented challenges for food banks across Ontario. A greater proportion of food at chain grocery stores is frozen, meaning that food banks have to change their methods of storing and transporting donated food. This has put pressure on large and small food banks to obtain sizable freezer space and refrigerated trucking. Transportation providers like the Erb Group have played an outstanding role in meeting this need for food banks in the province. Moreover, “just in time” delivery processes by large grocers has increased the efficiency of the food industry, but has made it more difficult for food banks to obtain surplus food. An increased supply of reclamation has counteracted this trend, but demand still far exceeds supply.

Food banks across Ontario have

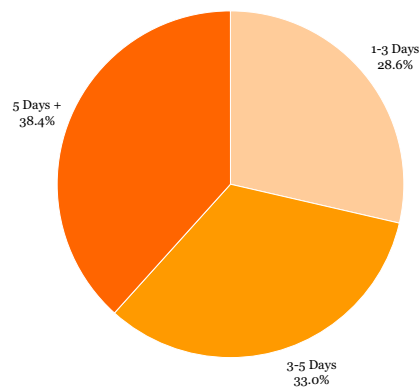
worked diligently to respond to some of these challenges. Another noticeable trend has been a movement for many food banks across the province to buy buildings, thereby making a huge commitment to their communities with these infrastructure investments. They have made this commitment in order to fill a tremendous gap in service left by all levels of government. However, this is not a commitment that they have the sole or even primary responsibility to fulfill. There are many pieces that need to fall into place in order to meet this promise. Food banks will have to improve their administrative capacity and networks with social service agencies and affiliated NGOs. However, this commitment can only be fulfilled in partnership with federal, provincial and municipal governments. The ultimate responsibility for the health and well-being of Ontarians rests with them. It is clear that they must also make a commit-

...this commitment can only be fulfilled in partnership with federal, provincial and municipal governments. The ultimate responsibility for the health and well-being of Ontarians rests with them.

Graph Five: Food Banks in Ontario Reporting that they have Enough Food to Meet the Needs of their Clients, 2005¹⁴



Graph Six: Amount of Food Provided per Hamper for Food Banks in Ontario, 2005¹⁵

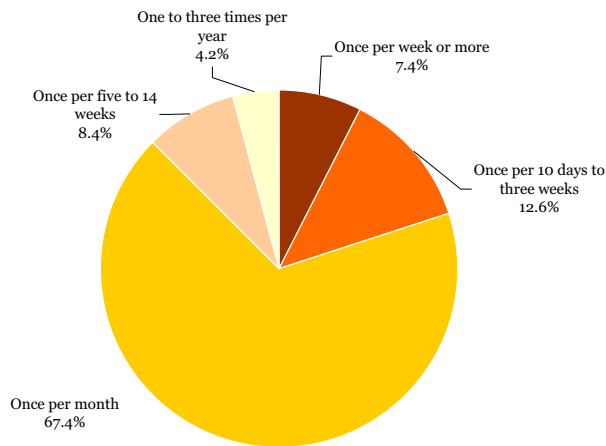


ment to serve hungry Ontarians.

There have also been changes in the way food is distributed to food banks in Ontario. Given the tremendous need, there was a clear impetus to improve the distribution of major donations. One of the first major steps in improving distribution was the South West Ontario HUB, initiated by the Food Bank of Waterloo Region in coordination with the Ontario Associa-

tion of Food Banks (OAFB). Since 2002, over ten million pounds of food were acquired and distributed to 95 food banks in South Western Ontario. Over 40 new donors are also now supplying Ontario's food banks. Given the project's success, there is a clear need to move this model to a provincial level in partnership with the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) and other community partners.

Graph Seven: Frequency of Service by Food Banks to Those in Need in Ontario, 2005¹⁶



factors affecting food bank usage: recent trends

The trends above are quite clear. There are more hungry Ontarians, more hungry children, more working poor in greater need, and many food banks are finding it difficult to cope with the increased demand.

But why? Clearly, it is important to understand and directly identify hunger in communities across Ontario as reflected by food bank usage. However, it is just as important to try to understand the underlying problems that cause hunger and impact food bank usage.

There are a number of recent trends with respect to income, employment and household expenses that may offer a glimpse into factors that have affected food bank usage, and will continue to affect food banks in Ontario into the near future.

INCOME: INADEQUATE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

The siren song of inadequate social assistance is not new. Social assistance rates have declined in value by about 35 per cent in Ontario over the last 11 years when taking inflation into account.¹⁷ Between 1992 and 2004, benefits for many have declined sharply. For a couple with two children, assistance has decreased by \$11,123 over that period.¹⁸ In absolute dollars, there is certainly much less for families in need.

However, the recent trend is one of relativity. It appears that currently, the amount of money provided by social assistance to families and individuals falls well below virtually every low-income standard of all

Between 1992 and 2004, benefits for many have declined sharply. For a couple with two children, assistance has decreased by \$11,123 over that period.

Average incomes for individuals in many Ontario cities have decreased even more, leaving a larger gap. For example, a person living in Ottawa with an annual income of \$24,000 would have experienced a one year decrease in purchasing power of \$768.

community sizes in Ontario. This trend can be clearly seen in graph eight.

Although not reflected on the graph, this is also the case for Ontarians with disabilities. A single person with a disability receives more than the standard amount (\$11,987), but still far less than the low-income standard for any community.

This inadequacy is reflected in those served by food banks in Ontario. Over half (50.2 per cent) of those served declare social assistance as their primary source of income.²²

It should be noted that there have been recent changes to this program in Ontario. In 2005, the provincial government implemented the first increases to social assistance in a decade through a three per cent increase to the basic needs allowance and shelter allowance for Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Payments (ODSP).²³ However, these changes do not address the significant gap in need that exists.

**INCOME:
DECREASING MEDIAN
INCOME FOR ONTARIANS**

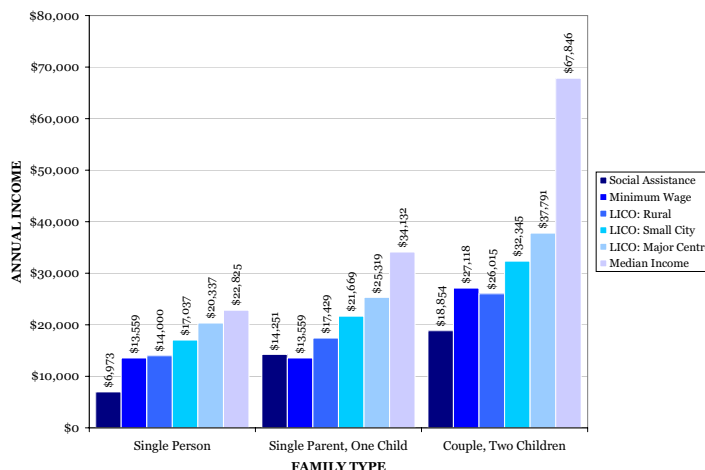
Income trends have also affected persons who are not on social assistance in Ontario. According to data from Statistics Canada, many Ontarians are actually earning less,

while the cost of everyday items has continued to increase. Across Canada, median employment income for individuals has decreased by 0.7 per cent, while inflation has increased by two per cent. Average incomes for individuals in many Ontario cities have decreased even more, leaving a larger gap. For example, a person living in Ottawa with an annual income of \$24,000 would have experienced a one year decrease in purchasing power of \$768.

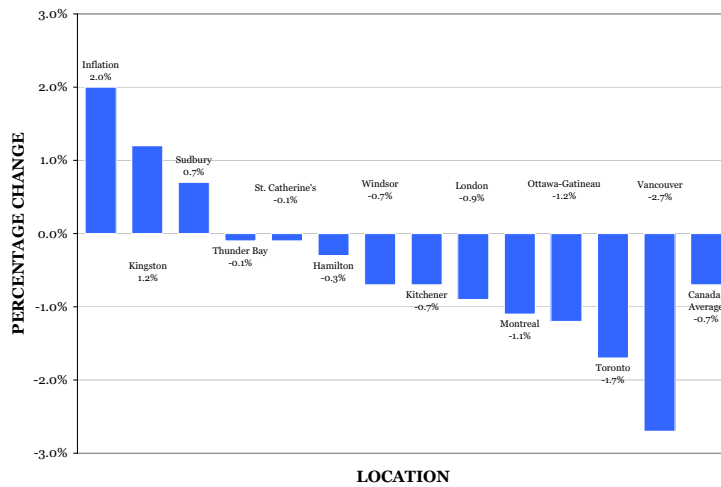
**EMPLOYMENT:
MANUFACTURING ON THE
DECLINE**

Beyond income, there are emerging employment trends that will affect the number of Ontarians served by food banks. Due to a number of factors, including a stronger Canadian dollar, manufacturing and associated sectors are in significant decline. In between January and September 2005, employment in manufacturing across Canada has experienced a significant year-over-year decline, from 0.6 per cent growth in January to a drop of five per cent in September. Employment in utilities and logistics has also experienced significant year-over-year decreases that have matched and exceeded these decreases. These trends can be clearly seen in graph ten.

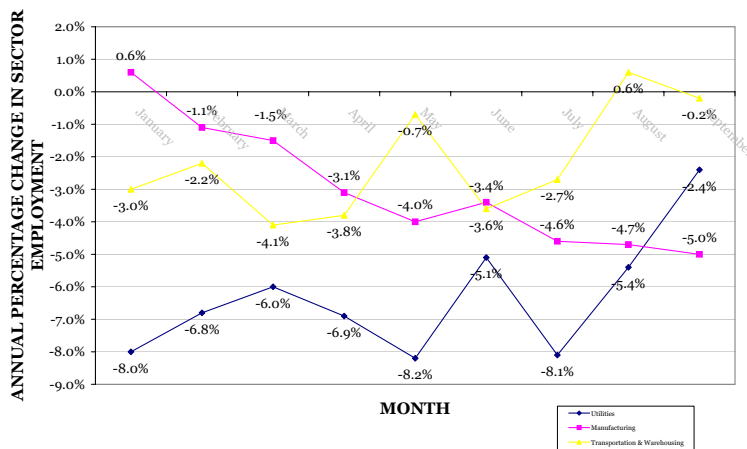
Graph Eight: Income Comparison for Ontario Households, 2004^{19,20,21}



Graph Nine: Annual Change in Median Employment Income, 2003²⁴



Graph Ten: Employment Trends in Manufacturing, Utilities and Logistics in Canada, January to September 2005



The reason that this employment trend is important is simple. Many Ontarians work in these sectors. 22.3 per cent of Ontario's workforce is in manufacturing, utilities, transportation, and trades.²⁵ This employment decline will also affect certain major centres more than others. In Windsor and Kitchener, roughly 30 per cent of their workforce is comprised of individuals involved in manufacturing, utilities and associated sectors. Trends by major centre can be seen in graph eleven. Job losses and the risk of continued decline in this sector will certainly affect the number of Ontarians who will need to be served by food banks across the province.

**HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES:
ENERGY PRICES SKYROCKETING**

The increasing cost of gas and

electricity is no longer a casual conversation at the water cooler. A swirling storm of factors have driven the price of energy to impossible levels for many Ontarians. Between this time last fall and today, the price of energy has increased at a rate over six times greater than inflation. The cost of gasoline has increased at a rate over ten times greater than average inflation. These trends can be clearly seen in graph twelve.

The soaring cost of energy has really hit home for many low-income Ontarians. Between fall 2004 and fall 2005, the price of furnace oil has increased by between 28 and 34 per cent for major Ontario centres. This also reflects a nationwide trend that has impacted cities across Canada, and can be seen in graph thirteen.

Between fall 2004 and fall 2005, the price of furnace oil has increased by between 28 and 34 per cent for major Ontario centres.

...in the GTA, food bank clients spend an estimated 75 per cent of their income on rent.

Although this recent trend that has caused great distress for low-income Ontarians, the long-term picture is just as difficult. Across Canada, the cost of utilities has increased by 43.6 per cent in the past twelve years.²⁹ The cost of furnace oil has increased by 136 per cent in the past decade in Toronto.³⁰

This trend forces many Ontarians to make difficult choices, and ask difficult questions. Heat or eat? Although there have been offers of relief from the federal government through grants for low-income individuals, it is evident that these funds will be insufficient to cover the rising costs, and that a one-time allocation will not be able to meet the demands placed continued increases.

inflation and the ability of many families to pay. In between January and August 2005, the cost of shelter was consistently greater than the rate of inflation in the province. Over the summer, the cost of food and shelter spiked to roughly twice the rate of increase for other consumer products. This trend can be clearly seen in graph fourteen. This puts great pressure on many Ontarians, and represents an increasing proportion of household costs. For example, in the GTA, food bank clients spend an estimated 75 per cent of their income on rent.³¹

These trends are also long-standing. In Toronto, in the last five years of reported data, the cost of rent has increased at a rate 28 per cent greater than inflation.^{32,33,34}

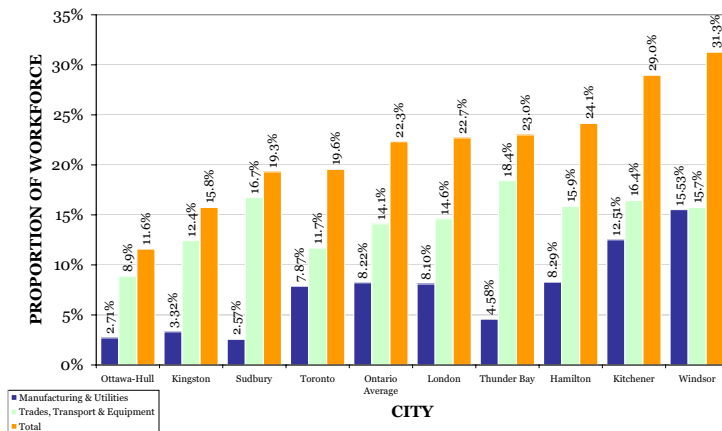
HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES: HOUSING

The cost of housing in Ontario also continues to increase beyond

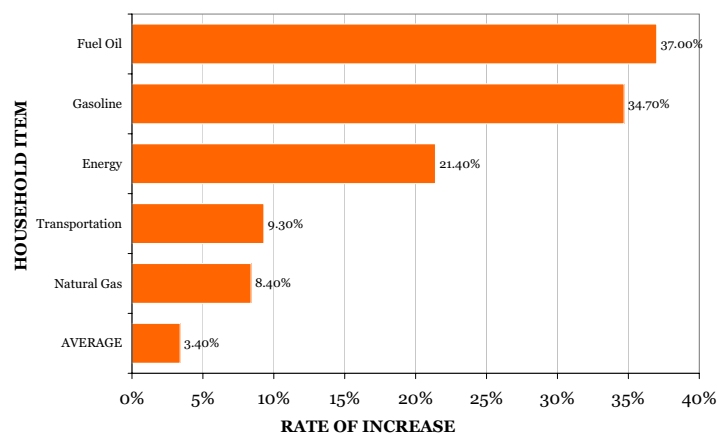
HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES: NOT ENOUGH FOR FOOD

After hydro and rent, many Ontarians struggle to find enough money

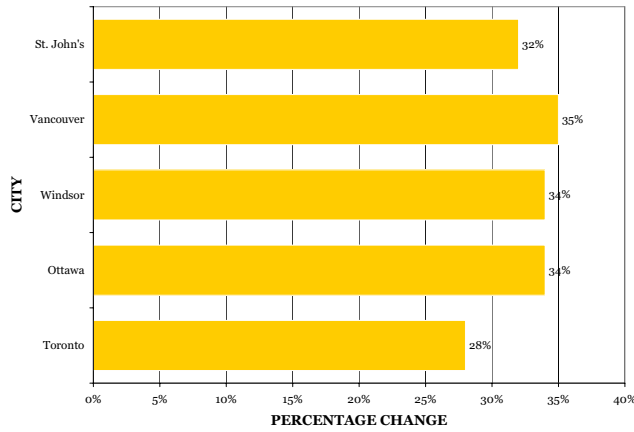
Graph Eleven: Select Labour Types by Population of Total Workforce in Major Ontario Cities, 2001²⁶



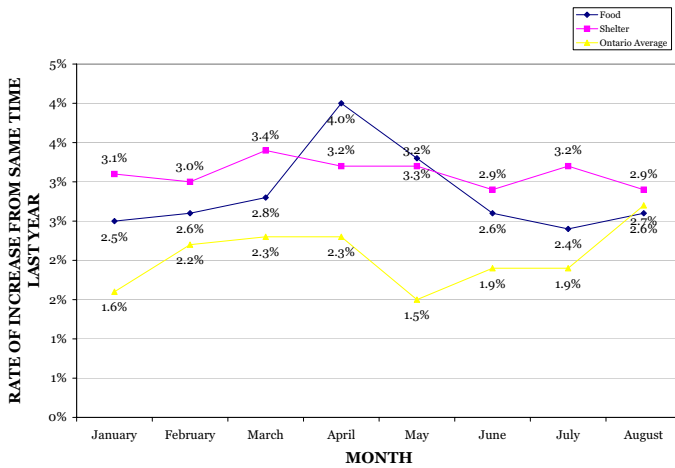
Graph Twelve: Cost of Living for Select Consumer Items, Fall 2004 to Fall 2005²⁷



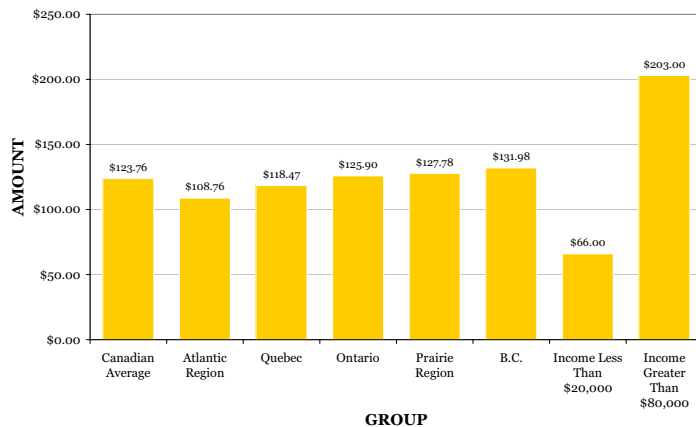
Graph Thirteen: Annual Change in Furnace Oil Costs, Fall 2004 to Fall 2005²⁸



Graph Fourteen: Cost of Food and Shelter vs. Inflationary Average in Ontario, January to August 2005



Graph Fifteen: Weekly Food Expenditures for Families in Canada by Region and Income Groups³⁵



Households with an income below \$20,000 only have \$66 per week to buy their groceries.

for food. And even without taking into account recent changes to energy, low-income Ontarians have to stretch their dollars for groceries, or skip meals altogether. The average household in Ontario spends roughly \$125 per week on food. The wealthiest households have much more for food, spending \$203 per week. Low-income households must struggle to come

up with a healthy, safe supply of food. Households with an income below \$20,000 only have \$66 per week to buy their groceries. This can be clearly seen in graph fifteen.

In total, there are approximately 259,035 families that earn less than \$20,000 per year in Ontario.³⁶ It should also be noted that welfare income and minimum wage income falls below this amount.

In total, there are approximately 259,035 families that earn less than \$20,000 per year in Ontario.

factors affecting food bank usage: ongoing trends

Between 1980 and 2000, the proportion of new Canadians (living in Canada less than five years) who find themselves below the low-income cut off has increased from 24.6 per cent to 35.8 per cent.

Beyond the recent trends in income, employment and household expenses, there are also a number of ongoing trends that affect food bank usage in Ontario. These ongoing trends include new Canadians, intergenerational mobility, long-term increases in key consumer items, continued poverty of many single parents and children, and the erosion of benefits.

MORE NEW CANADIANS WITH LOWER INCOME

Canada, and subsequently, its major centres in Ontario, have been seen as a land of opportunity and unhindered potential for immigrants arriving from countries around the globe. In the mid-twentieth century, Canada's post-war economy was fueled by many new Canadians from Western Europe. Many of these individuals advanced quickly and acquired significant disposable income in a variety of professions.

It would appear that the conclusion to the new Canadian success story has changed. Many now struggle to have their credentials recognized, or to even find employment. A clear indicator of the

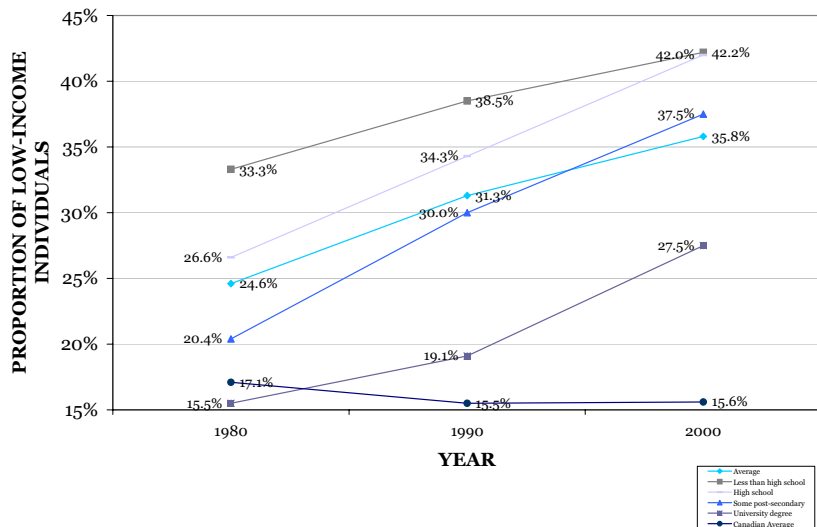
roadblocks to their success is the substantial increase in low-income rates over the past twenty years. Between 1980 and 2000, the proportion of new Canadians (living in Canada less than five years) who find themselves below the low-income cut off has increased from 24.6 per cent to 35.8 per cent. And this trend has not only affected low-skilled immigrants. The proportion of new Canadians with a university degree living below the poverty line has almost doubled, jumping from 15.5 to 27.5 per cent. This rate used to be below the average for all Canadians, and now stands well above it. This trend can be clearly seen in graph sixteen.

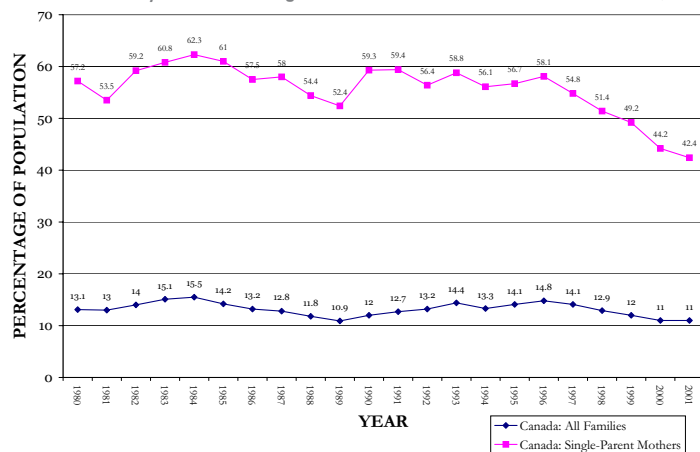
This ongoing trend is a particularly difficult prospect when considering the federal government's plan to increase immigration by 35 per cent, to 300,000 new Canadians per year.³⁸

INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY & EDUCATION

The cycle of poverty is still a significant problem in Ontario. In many ways, this is a function of income and parental education. Educational attainment affects one's fu-

Graph Sixteen: Low-income Rates Among New Canadians by Educational Attainment, 1980 to 2000³⁷



Graph Seventeen: Poverty Rates for Single-Parent Mothers in Canada & Ontario, 1980 to 2001⁴³

ture earning potential. In other words, the higher level your level of education, the greater your income. For example, in 2001, the median household income in families in which the primary earner had a university degree was 51 per cent greater than households where the primary earner had a high school diploma.³⁹ And many Ontarians do not even graduate from high school. Nearly one-third of all Ontarians drop out before they complete secondary studies. This presents tremendous challenges in terms of employable skills.

We also continue to fall behind other countries in terms of basic literacy. For adults who have not completed secondary school, Canadian adults ranked 13th, 14th and 15th respectively in prose, document and quantitative skills among 30 OECD countries in a recent test of literacy.⁴⁰ Without these skills and educational background, it is extremely difficult for Ontarians to get a job. And this cycle of poverty of qualifications and income is transferred to the next generation. According to Statistics Canada, youth with at least one parent with post-secondary education are 13 per cent more likely to pursue further studies than families where no parent had higher education credentials. This affect may also be felt to a greater degree by families living in rural areas. In areas beyond commuting distance from a university, students with

parents who have a university degree are almost three times as likely to attend as those who do not.⁴¹

Unfortunately, the overall affordability of education, which is arguably one of the most powerful tools to counteract hunger and poverty, has decreased over the past decade. The cost of education and education-related items has increased by 78.7 per cent in the past twelve years, which is a rate three times greater than inflation.⁴²

SINGLE PARENTS REMAIN MIRED IN POVERTY

Single parents in Ontario are hungry for change. For well over twenty years, single parents, particularly mothers, have experienced hunger and poverty at a level that is far greater than any other population group. In fact, single-parent mothers in Canada are roughly four times as likely to live below the poverty line when compared to the national average. In 2001, 42.4 per cent of single-parent mothers found themselves below the low-income cut off. It is likely that this is a contributing factor to the high proportion of single Ontarians and children using food banks. This long-term trend can be seen in graph seventeen.

CHILD POVERTY REMAINS AT HIGH LEVEL

Despite our collective prosperity, thousands of children in Ontario re-

We also continue to fall behind other countries in terms of basic literacy. For adults who have not completed secondary school, Canadian adults ranked 13th, 14th and 15th respectively in prose, document and quantitative skills among 30 OECD countries in a recent test of literacy.

The current child poverty rate across Canada is actually equal to the rate of 14.9 per cent in 1989, when the House of Commons voted unanimously to end child poverty by 2000. This rate is much greater than many other developed nations. When compared to the world's richest countries, Canada falls in the bottom quartile for child poverty, ranking 19 of 26 nations.

main trapped in poverty. In 2001, 355,000 children lived in poverty in the province, or roughly one in eight children.⁴⁴ This means that in many cases, they live in homes where breakfast or lunch can be a luxury, and nutritious meals are special occasions.

This is a national trend that our country has borne silent witness to over the past decades. The current child poverty rate across Canada is actually equal to the rate of 14.9 per cent in 1989, when the House of Commons voted unanimously to end child poverty by 2000.⁴⁵ This rate is much greater than many other developed nations. When compared to the world's richest countries, Canada falls in the bottom quartile for child poverty, ranking 19 of 26 nations.⁴⁶ This trend can be seen in graph eighteen.

Unfortunately, government programs that have been designed to assist children living in poverty in Ontario have not met their intended aim. 119,066 families on social assistance in Ontario were eligible for the National Child Benefit in March 2004. The maximum value of that benefit payment for a two parent family with two children across Canada would be \$5,139 in 2004.

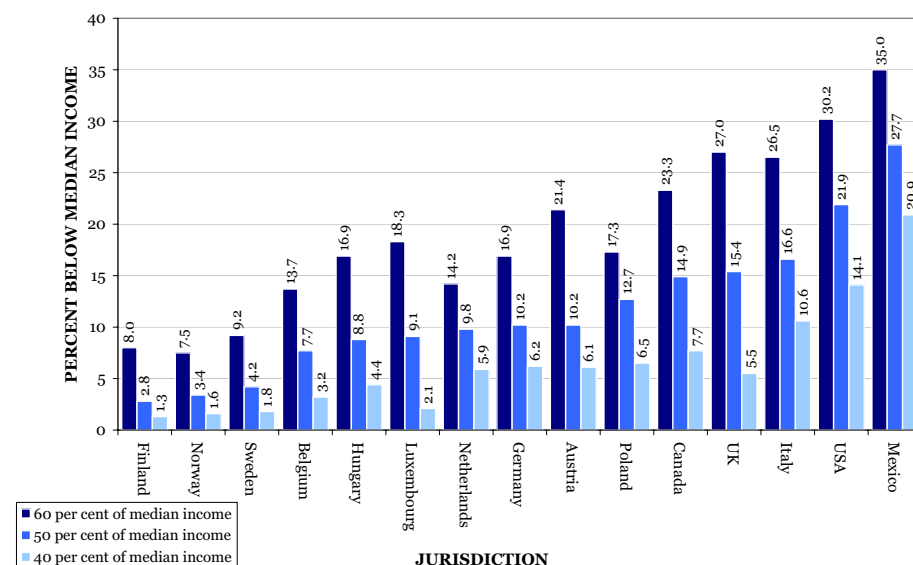
All of these families had that benefit clawed back.⁴⁸

EROSION OF BENEFITS

Many Ontarians have experienced erosion in their benefits for basics such as health care. The erosion of benefits is reflective of the changing labour dynamic in Ontario and nation-wide. The percentage of Canadians who are self-employed, or do contract work, has increased in the past twenty years.⁴⁹ There has also been a move by a number of corporations to limit hours and benefits to staff.

This erosion has also occurred at a public level, through the delisting of services such as eye care. All Canadians now pay much more for health care in relation to public support. In Canada, individuals cover 30 per cent of their own health care costs.⁵⁰ Consequently, 17 per cent of Canadians stated they gone without care primarily because of the costs, primarily through limiting or eliminating prescription drugs and dental care. This once again places difficult choices for those in need, between tools to ensure or improve their own health or that of their children, or putting food on the table.

Graph Eighteen: Child Poverty: Children Living Below Median National Income, 2005⁴⁷



the impact of hunger

The impact of widespread hunger on Ontario's families can be devastating. It has severe health impacts on individuals, particularly women, as well as impacts on childhood development.

HUNGER & HEALTH

In many ways, food is the best medicine. It is inexpensive, widely available and is directly related to one's future health. Consequently, the impact of hunger on the health of Ontarians in need can be dangerous. Individuals in food insufficient households are more likely to rate their health as poor or fair, having restricted activity, poor functional health, suffering from multiple chronic conditions, and having major depression and distress.⁵¹ Individuals in food insufficient households are also significantly more likely to report having heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and food allergies.⁵² Hunger also hinders the ability to manage the dietary requirements of these conditions, increasing risk of further complications.⁵³

Women are particularly susceptible to the impacts of hunger on health. Women in food insufficient households are less likely to be normal weight and more likely to be morbidly obese.⁵⁴ A U.S. study of elderly disabled women also determined that iron deficiency anemia was 2.9 times more likely among women reporting hunger.⁵⁵ Severity of hunger or food insecurity has been found to be related to poorer self-rated health, activity restrictions and chronic conditions among low-income women in Canada.⁵⁶ Canadian studies have also shown that mothers are at greatest risk for the health impacts, as they are the first to carry the burden of hunger.⁵⁷

HUNGER & CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

A missing breakfast, skipped lunch and meagre dinner has more impact on a child than the pangs of hunger. Malnutrition in early childhood development can affect the development of the nervous system and causes problems for emotional and cognitive development, including problem solving, concentration, and organizing memories.^{58,59}

Unfortunately, many hungry children are also missing key nutrients in their diets. Problems such as zinc deficiency cause anorexia and stunts childhood growth. Severe zinc deficiency causes multiple birth defects.⁶⁰ This is particularly problematic given that two Canadian studies of dietary intakes found that high-risk members of food insecure households showed a high estimated prevalence of inadequacy for a number of nutrients including folate, iron, zinc, and vitamin A.⁶¹ It has also been proven that many children below the poverty line suffer from iron deficiency, which has negative impacts throughout a pregnancy, and long-standing negative developmental effects on children.⁶²

Malnutrition in early childhood development can affect the development of the nervous system and causes problems for emotional and cognitive development, including problem solving, concentration, and organizing memories.

The spectre of hunger is very real for many Ontarians. It is also a growing concern across the province. A significant increase in food bank usage reflects an ongoing trend of increased demand, pushing the number of Ontarians served by food banks to almost 340,000. Many food banks have struggled to respond to these changes, but have remained committed to serving their communities.

A complex set of factors appears to drive this continued increase in the number of Ontarians served by food banks. Recent trends include inadequate social assistance relative to the poverty line, decreasing incomes, employment cutbacks, and rapidly rising household expenses, particularly energy costs. Ongoing trends include a continued increase in new Canadians in poverty, limitations on intergenerational mobility, poverty among single parents and children, and the erosion of benefits. Each of these trends forc-

es many Ontarians to make difficult choices between their necessities in life. The result for many is hunger.

The impact of that hunger can be devastating. It has negative impacts on the health of individuals, particularly women, and limits the potential of young Ontarians.

The underlying causes and impacts of hunger continue to drive those involved in food banks. But these community institutions cannot meet the full needs of Ontarians, and demand has stretched many beyond their limitations. Food banks exist to provide emergency food relief. They are not the ultimate solution or panacea. There is a clear need for broader, long-term solutions to the underlying issues of hunger and poverty. Ontario must engage in a renewed conversation on the fight against hunger in our communities with a commitment to arrive at solutions that will truly help those in need. Thousands of Ontarians are hungry for change.

Ontario must engage in a renewed conversation on the fight against hunger in our communities with a commitment to arrive at solutions that will truly help those in need. Thousands of Ontarians are hungry for change.

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“The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

