

FOOD BANKS BC

Public Health Association of BC

Division of Community Engagement and Food Systems

(Re)Defining Dignified Food Access in BC:

What we learned from community members

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR) for providing the essential funding to carry out this work. Their support has been invaluable in enabling us to explore and understand the complexities of dignified food access in British Columbia. The Ministry's commitment to supporting initiatives that promote systemic change has been instrumental in paving the way for a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable food system for all residents of BC.

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The Public Health Association of British Columbia and Food Banks BC are provincial organizations and we acknowledge that our work goes beyond the places we live and impacts the lives of nations across British Columbia and Turtle Island.



Authors

Amber Heckelman, PhD
Senior Program Developer, Analysis, and Evaluation Consultant
Public Health Association of British Columbia

Angelina Sharma
Project Coordinator
Public Health Association of British Columbia

Faye Shao, MFRE
Project Analyst
Public Health Association of British Columbia

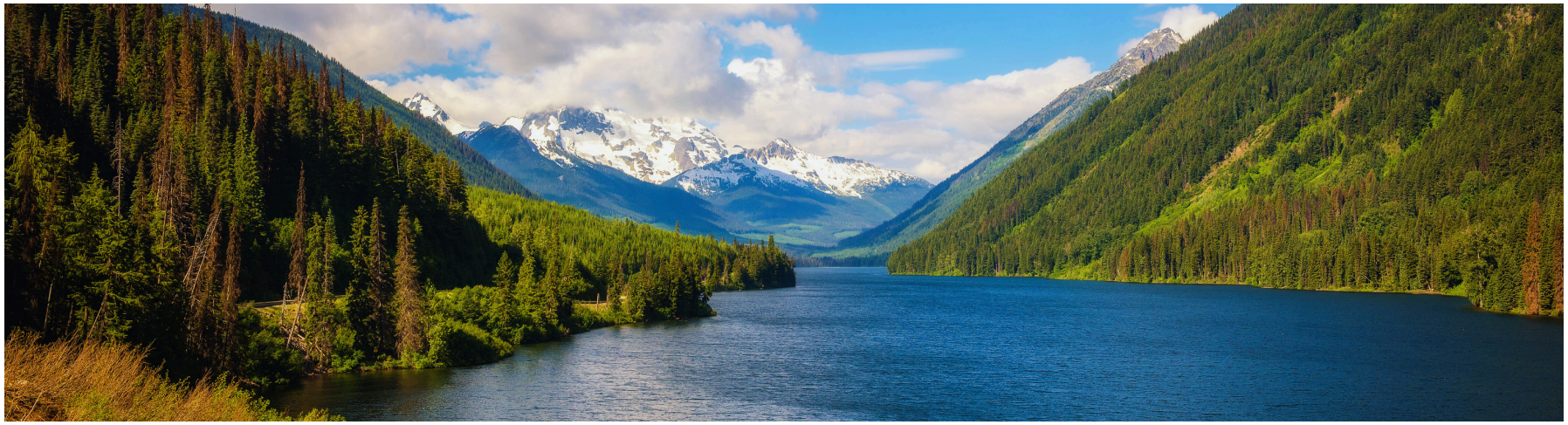
Laurel Burton, RD, MA
Consultant
Public Health Association of British Columbia

Julia Gellman, MEd
Food Systems Manager
Public Health Association of British Columbia

Richard Han, MPH
Director of Community Engagement and Food Systems
Public Health Association of British Columbia

Shannon Turner, PhD
Executive Director
Public Health Association of British Columbia

Dan Huang-Taylor
Executive Director
Food Banks British Columbia



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Foreword

We would like to begin by expressing our sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction for its commitment to improving the lives of British Columbians experiencing food insecurity.

Understanding the types of food security support community members need offers only a partial view of their broader context and lived experiences. Their encounters with food services, along with the accessibility of food and food programs, deeply shape these experiences and have a direct impact on their daily lives. These factors also influence the choices community members make moving forward.
When food service providers uphold the dignity of clients—culturally, socially, and organizationally—those accessing services report experiencing less distress and anxiety, along with a stronger sense of social connection and cohesion.

This investigation goes to the heart of effective food programming. It brings forward the stories of numerous population groups whose voices must be centered in this work. Ensuring safety, offering meaningful choices, and creating welcoming environments are all critical to fostering more dignified and inclusive service experiences.

Throughout this report, we have embedded the voices of community members. We hope we have honored their concerns and highlighted the solutions that work from their perspectives. This work is essential to building more responsive, equitable, and transformative food systems.

We are deeply grateful to all our partners and to the individuals who generously shared their personal stories, insights, and concerns with our team. Finally, to our research and project teams: your compassionate inquiry and thoughtful analysis illuminate a path toward more inclusive and just social programs. Thank you.

Executive Summary

This report delves into the concept of dignified food access in British Columbia, exploring how various food access organizations are working to create welcoming, respectful, and inclusive environments. The study highlights the importance of quality food choices, community connections, and advocacy in addressing food insecurity and promoting long-term food self-sufficiency.

In the Results section, beautifully designed graphic illustrations are included to represent the experiences, insights, and feedback shared by community members during the focus group discussions. These illustrations allow the reader to also visualize the perspectives and preferences of diverse communities accessing food programs. Through these illustrations, we hope to clarify and amplify community voices and ultimately inspire action.

We have also included a scrapbook of recipes that community members shared with us. These recipes highlight the profound significance of food beyond its nutritional value, emphasizing its role in culture, tradition, and personal memories. These recipes serve as a celebration of the connections and identities that food fosters, while inviting recognition of its central role in nurturing relationships and a sense of belonging.



Key findings from the study reveal that dignified food access in BC is characterized by:

Welcoming Places: Environments that prioritize warmth, friendliness, and genuine human connection, where community members feel recognized,respected, and supported.

Quality Food Choices: Access to fresh, diverse, and culturally relevant food options that support healthy eating.

Respectful Ways: Interactions that preserve individual dignity, offer genuine choice, and create an environment free from judgment.

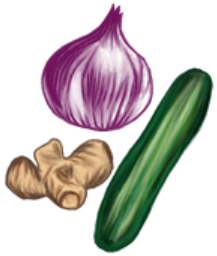
Advocacy: Efforts to address underlying causes of food insecurity, including socioeconomic and geographical challenges.

Collaboration: Emerged as a new quality, emphasizing the importance of educational support, enhanced community connection, and organizational partnerships to provide wrap around supports to community members.

The report also provides examples of dignified food access in action, showcasing organizations like the Galiano Community Food Program, Hope Community Services, Kingdom Acts Foundation, Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, Mount Paul Community Food Centre, and Sunshine Coast Community Services.

These organizations demonstrate innovative approaches to dignified food access, emphasizing community-driven solutions and partnerships to build a more equitable and sustainable local food system for all residents of BC.




Report Iconography

Community food systems transformation is a complex topic, and we wanted to make it more digestible through the use of visuals throughout this report. The icons you see at the bottom right corner of the report shows the different processes of community food systems transformation, from growing to composting.

We invite you to engage with the icons as you read through the report as flipbook icons that symbolize transformation and sustainable cycles. Below you can see the specific meanings of each icon.



Growing



Harvesting



Transporting



Processing



Packaging



Distribution



Food Access



Recovery



Eating



Composting

Glossary

Dignified food access can be defined in a number of different ways. At its core, it is a rights-based approach to food access programming that upholds individuals' inherent worth and dignity through four key elements: welcoming spaces that are physically and emotionally accessible; quality food choices that are nutritious and culturally relevant; respectful ways of service delivery that are non-judgmental, inclusive, and foster choice and autonomy; and advocacy efforts that promote systemic change to address food insecurity. [1] This approach emphasizes participant agency, self-determination, and choice while promoting long-term solutions that extend beyond immediate food provision.

Food access is the uncompromised physical access to adequate, acceptable food and is impacted by geography, climate and climate-related events, transportation, infrastructure, and physical mobility. [2] Access to food is a basic human right and should be attainable irrespective of socio-economic status, geographical location, cultural preferences, and other factors.

Food access organizations are community service organizations that offer food through programs such as food hampers, good food boxes, meal programs, community kitchens, or other programs designed to feed people. [3] Some food access organizations focus only on food provision, while some offer other types of programming in addition to food.

Food access service model is a framework that outlines how food programs and services are delivered to community members to better understand the differences between food banks, community meal programs, good food boxes and more. This includes differences in how foods are sourced and the various processes involved in connected community members to food.

Food assets are the resources, infrastructure, and practices that support and sustain local food systems. [4] These include natural or ecological assets like farms, gardens, and orchards; built environment assets such as community kitchens, farmers' markets, food banks, and food retail spaces; and social assets, which involve networks and informal practices like community bartering, cultural food traditions, and freeganism. [5]

Food insecurity exists when factors outside an individual's control negatively impact their access to enough foods to promote wellbeing. Economic, social, environmental, and geographical factors influence this access. Food insecurity is most acutely felt by those who experience the negative impacts of structural inequities, such as discrimination and on-going colonial practices. [2]

Food security means that everyone has equitable access to food that is affordable, culturally preferable, nutritious and safe; everyone has the agency to participate in, and influence food systems; and that food systems are resilient, ecologically sustainable, socially just, and honour Indigenous food sovereignty. [2]

Rural refers to areas with lower population density and limited infrastructure, typically located outside of census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations. [6] These areas generally have small population size, and may include small towns, villages, agricultural lands, and less developed regions. In BC, rural communities are covered by the Rural Practice Subsidiary Agreement, [7] and often face unique challenges in food access due to limited transportation infrastructure, fewer food retailers, and geographic isolation.

Remote refers to geographically isolated communities, including First Nations settlements located in northern BC or on small islands. In BC, these areas have limited social and physical infrastructure, relying heavily on natural resources and alternative transportation networks like ferries, which results in significant challenges for food distribution and access.

Urban refers to densely populated areas as census metropolitan areas with at least 1,000 people and a density of 400 or more people per square kilometre. [6] In BC, this includes cities like Vancouver, Victoria, and Kelowna. While urban areas offer diverse food retail options, they also face challenges of food insecurity related to affordability, income inequality, and high housing costs, particularly affecting marginalized populations.

Peri-urban refers to the transitional zone between rural and urban landscapes, typically found on the outskirts of cities in BC. These areas are characterized by a mosaic-like mix of urban and rural land uses, blending agricultural lands, developing residential zones, and expanding urban infrastructure. [8] Peri-urban regions experience ongoing transformations driven by urban expansion and rural-to-urban migration, creating unique challenges and opportunities for food systems and community development.

Reserve refers to lands defined under the Indian Act and held in trust by the Crown for First Nations communities in BC. [9] These communities often face unique food access challenges related to infrastructure, transportation, and the need to balance traditional food systems with modern food access needs. Many First Nations are working to advance indigenous food sovereignty by revitalizing traditional food practices while addressing contemporary food security needs.

Introduction

Dignified food access emerged as a concept and criteria that is used to address the stigma, shame, and dissatisfaction that is often associated with traditional charitable food programs.

The intention with the use of the term "dignified" is to (re)design and implement food access programming to centre the experiences, needs, and preferences of the diversity of community members who rely on emergency food support.

The food access sector in British Columbia (BC) is undergoing significant changes that are certain to affect community member experiences, particularly in terms of stigma and dignity. These changes are reflected in both the rise in users and the rise in alternative food initiatives operating alongside traditional charitable, emergency-based approaches.[10, 11, 12]

Although some studies exist on the attributes of dignified food access in the context of charitable food programs,[1, 11, 13, 14] studies in BC are somewhat limited,[16] focusing primarily on the experiences of community members in Vancouver.[17, 18, 19]



Significant insights can be gained from a province-wide investigation of the experiences and preferences of community members accessing the mosaic of food programs being offered in rural/remote, peri-urban, and urban communities across BC. The purpose of this study is to gather such insights by working collaboratively with community members, from across the province and representative of different demographic groups, to identify features of dignified food access in BC.

Doing so illuminates community member experiences and preferences for accessing food programs that are unique to BC, shedding light on how to design and implement programming that: is reflective of local conditions and community member priorities; and better connects community members to food in ways that are inclusive, caring, meaningful, and cultivates social capital in communities across BC.





Food Insecurity in British Columbia

Food insecurity is a pressing issue in BC and has been exacerbated by the compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation and cost of living, and climate-related disasters.[3] Marginalized and equity deserving communities have been disproportionately impacted, with significant disparities in access to nutritious food across the population.[20]

In 2022, the BCCDC's Food Costing Report revealed that the average monthly cost of a nutritious diet for a family of four in BC was $1,263.[21] Canada's Food Price Report projected a 2.8% increase in food prices in 2025, leading to an estimated annual food expenditure of $16,833.67 for a family of four residing in BC. [22] Consequently, purchasing nutritious food in BC will become increasingly difficult for residents, particularly those experiencing unemployment, houselessness, and the 11% of the population considered low-income; [23] but also, for employed community members, especially low wage earners, racialized workers, and those working multiple and/or short-term or precarious jobs.[24]

> "Food insecurity exists when factors outside an individual's control negatively impact their access to enough food to promote well-being. **Economic, social, environmental, and geographical factors influence this access.** Food insecurity is most acutely felt by those who experience the negative impacts of structural inequities, such as discrimination and on-going colonial practices.
> *– BCCDC, 2022*



Shifting Food Access Landscape in BC

Historically, food access programs were designed to provide temporary emergency food to those in need. Early food access programs were largely community-based, operating out of churches, community centers, and social service agencies. In BC, the first official food bank opened in 1982.[26]

These early iterations of food access programs collected surplus food, compiled the food into hampers, and gave them out to community members in need who often lined up to receive the food. Such programs are often associated with community members feeling ashamed, stigmatized, and dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of food, which has been identified as prominent reasons for why food access programs are underutilized by persons experiencing food insecurity.[10] Our recent investigation of the food access landscape in BC revealed a shift in how food programs and services are being (re)designed to promote community engagement, reduce stigma, foster a sense of belonging, support local food systems, as well as create more food assets in communities across BC.[12] We are interested in knowing whether the outcropping of innovative food programs are addressing issues of shame and lack of choice by providing dignified access to food that fosters agency and empowerment, community connectedness, and reciprocal relationships.[15] Or are they inadvertently being exclusionary, creating barriers to access or causing potentially harmful experiences for community members.[17, 29]

The fundamental question this project aims to explore is whether the shifting food access landscape in BC is leading to more dignified food access, improving the experience and meeting the needs and preferences of community members.

Defining Dignified Food Access

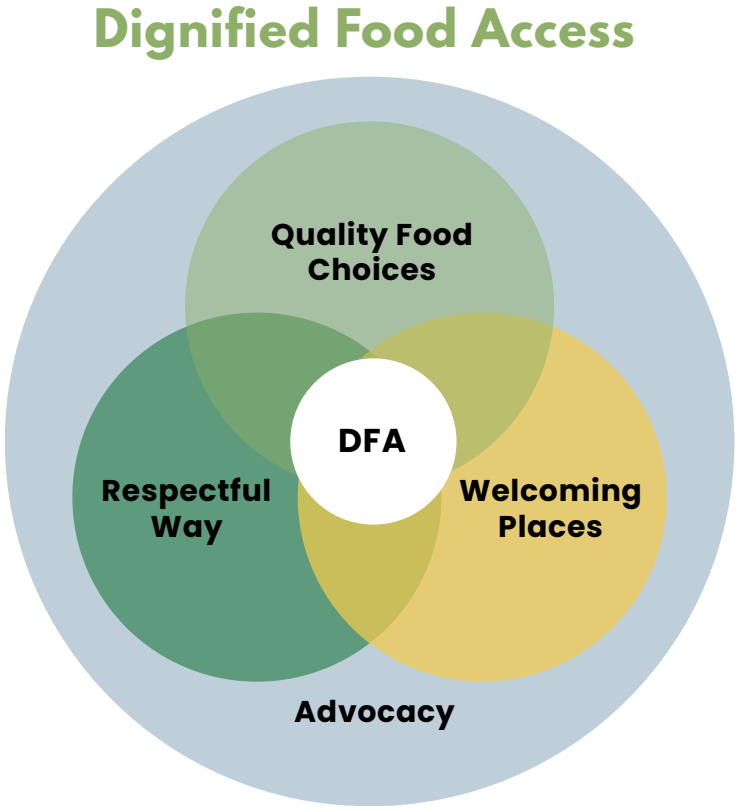
Food access refers to the physical access to adequate, acceptable food which is impacted by geography, climate and climate-related events, transportation, infrastructure, and physical mobility. [2] Uncompromised access to food is a basic human right and should be attainable irrespective of socio-economic status, geographical location, cultural preferences, and other factors.

Dignified food access is a concept that emphasizes the importance of providing food in a way that respects the dignity and autonomy of individuals. [30] It involves promoting choice, ensuring high-quality and culturally significant food options, and creating welcoming and inclusive environments. [31] As a framework, it provides guidance on how to remove the stigma associated with food assistance and foster a sense of community and connection. [31, 32]



Roots to Harvest worked with community members in Ontario to develop a Dignified Food Access: Framework for Action and Handbook for Organizations. [1] The resource identified four criteria for DFA: 1) Quality Food Choices offered in a 2) Respectful Way, in a 3) Welcoming Environment, backed by 4) Advocacy to fight the root causes of food insecurity. This definition and framework is used to inform our inquiry into community member perspectives on DFA in BC (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Criteria for Dignified Food Access



Adapted from Roots to Harvest, 2021





Project Objectives

The purpose of this project is to collect community member experiences and preferences in accessing food programming in BC and collectively identify features of dignified food access. To accomplish this requires the following:

1. Collect community member experiences to better understand the life circumstances and factors contributing to the shifting and growing demand for food access programs in BC
2. Work collaboratively with community members to identify features of dignified food access
3. Engage underrepresented groups to ensure their experiences and perspectives are included
4. Identify and spotlight innovative food programming models across BC that promote dignified food access

Project Design

This project was designed to be collaborative and builds on previous work by PHABC and FBBC.[3, 12] The project relies on both primary and secondary data in its investigation of DFA in BC (see Figure 2).

Table 1 presents the distribution of primary and secondary data collected, highlighting the number of food access organizations included in the environmental scan as well as the number of site visits to food access organizations, surveys administered to community members, and focus groups administered by region.

Figure 2: Project design

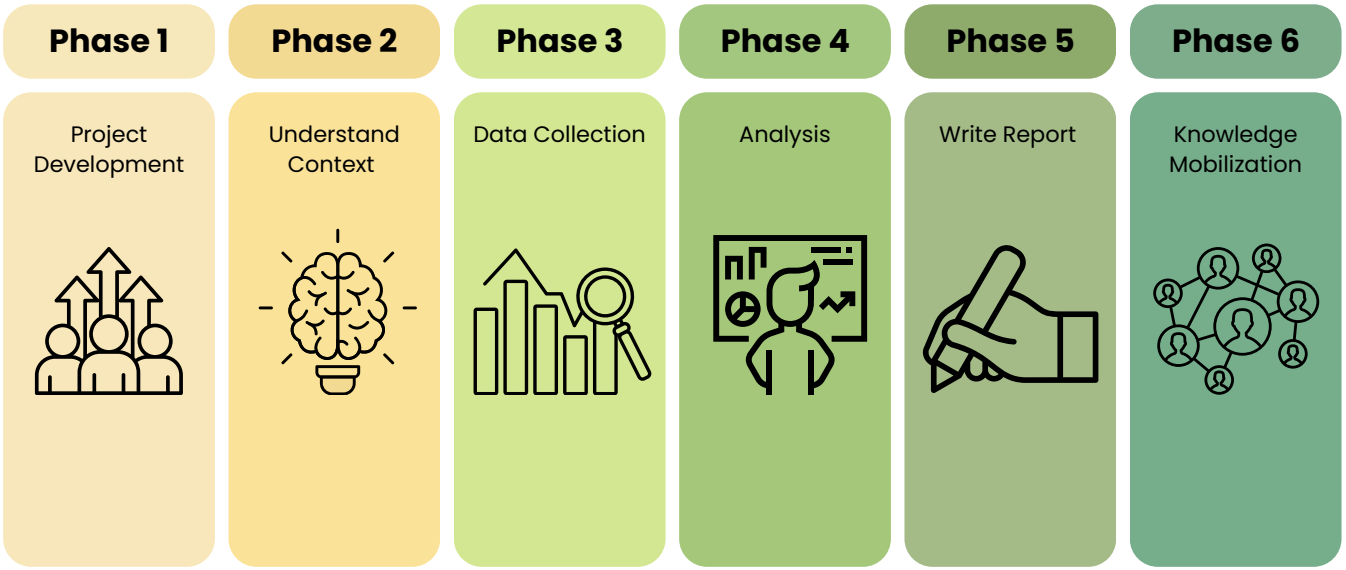


Table 1: Study Inclusion/ Participation by Region

Method	BC	Fraser	Interior	Island	Northern	Vancouver Coastal
Envi. Scan	27	6	3	9	1	8
Site Visits	25	3	6	6	3	7
Surveys	388	58	73	72	67	118
Focus Groups	7*	2	NA	1	1	4

*Focus groups represent 7 demographic groups: 2SLGBTQIA+, Families & Couples, Immigrants & Refugees, Indigenous, Older Adults & Seniors, Post-Secondary Students, and Unhoused.

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan was conducted to explore what DFA looks like on the ground and in the context of current programming in BC.

Using secondary data collected from various online resources (e.g. websites, podcasts, news articles, peer-reviewed articles, and reports), we explored the design and implementation of different food access programs across the province and noted features that reflect the four criteria of DFA previously identified: 1) welcoming spaces that are physically and emotionally accessible; 2) quality food choices that are nutritious and culturally relevant; 3) respectful ways of service delivery that are non-judgmental, inclusive, and foster choice and autonomy; and 4) advocacy efforts that promote systemic change to address food insecurity.[1]

We also searched for program features outside of these four criteria to determine whether there were additional and emergent features of DFA to consider as key in the BC context.

The four criteria of DFA outlined above also served as the criteria for selecting food access organizations to analyze as part of our environmental scan. A food access organization was included in our environmental scan if their programming exhibited features of providing a welcoming place, quality food choices, respectful ways, and advocacy (see Table 2).

For all selected food access organizations, secondary data characterizing features of DFA were compiled into an excel spreadsheet. Additional data that did not fit into the four criteria was also compiled into a fifth "other" category.



Table 2: Environmental Scan Selection Criteria

Criteria For DFA	Indicators
Welcoming Places	Reflect the physical and emotional accessibility of a food program – e.g. environments that make participants feel valued and comfortable; extent of operational hours; ease of access by public transport that ensures equitable access for all community members.
Quality Food Choices	The availability of fresh, culturally relevant, and safe food options – e.g. ensure food offerings support autonomy, honor cultural traditions, and meet nutritional needs.
Respectful Ways	Reflect an atmosphere of trust and inclusivity – e.g. program is free from stigma or surveillance; protects confidentiality; community members select food according to their preferences; and staff and volunteers participate in trainings on cultural sensitivity.
Advocacy	Efforts are made to advocate for broader food security and systemic change – e.g. support community members and create a community-wide support system; engagement in public awareness campaigns and with policymakers to address underlying causes of food insecurity; organization goes beyond providing immediate food assistance to promote long-term solutions.
Other	Any additional indicators/features that fall outside of the above four key elements of dignified food access.

Site Visits

25 site visits were conducted across the five health authorities in BC (i.e. Fraser, Interior, Island, Northern and Vancouver Coastal Health) to explore physical spaces, facilities, and operations of food access organizations. The primary purpose of the site visit was to gain a better understanding of their food programs and to strengthen relationships with the participating organizations.

Each site visit began with an hour dedicated to exploring the operational context of the food access program (see Appendix 1). This included touring the facilities, understanding the layout and logistics, engaging with staff and volunteers, and observing food access programs in action. The remaining two hours focused on surveying community members who were accessing food services from the host organization. With support from staff and volunteers, a separate space was arranged to ensure surveys were conducted privately, away from the main program activities.





Surveys

This report uses data collected from the Community Member Experience Survey, which was conducted across all five health regions in BC. The survey's objective was to gather insights into the experiences of individuals using food access services in communities across these regions (see Appendix 2). The respondents provided feedback on various aspects of their experience regarding dignity, accessibility, and overall satisfaction with the food access services available to them.

Surveys were administered both in-person, on-site at food access organizations and online through SurveyMonkey from June to September 2024. A maximum of 20 surveys were administered at each site. To ensure accessibility, the survey was available in English and translated into the seven most spoken languages in BC - Farsi, French, Korean, Punjabi, Spanish, Tagalog, Mandarin (Simplified and Traditional). For on-site translations, community members, volunteers, or staff who spoke the language assisted participants as needed. The data was then consolidated, reviewed for accuracy, and stored in an Excel spreadsheet to ensure completion before further analysis. The final dataset consisted of 388 responses, representing a diverse range of demographics across the health regions. It captures insights from individuals in various communities, providing a broad perspective on end-user experiences with food access services.

The data analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. For the quantitative data obtained through multiple-choice questions, we used R to conduct a detailed breakdown by region, age, Indigenous identity, and 2SLGBTQIA+ identity to identify specific needs for key demographic groups, such as older adults and seniors (51+ years old), Indigenous peoples, and the 2SLGBTQIA+ community members.



For the qualitative data, we summarized responses to open-ended questions and extracted significant takeaways regarding user experiences and suggestions for improvement. This qualitative data was also analyzed by age, Indigenous identity, and 2SLGBTQIA+ identity, allowing for a deeper understanding of how different demographic groups experience food access and how their feedback can inform best practices in delivering dignified food access across BC.



Focus Groups

Building upon the insights gathered from our initial community member survey, we conducted follow-up focus groups to delve deeper into the experiences, challenges, and preferences of specific demographic groups accessing food programs. These focus groups provided an invaluable opportunity to validate and explore the survey findings in greater detail, allowing participants to share more nuanced perspectives and elaborate on the key themes that emerged from the initial research.

These sessions provided a space for community members, particularly those who are historically underrepresented in food policy but overrepresented in accessing food support services, to share their experiences and feedback in a trusting, inclusive, and safe environment. By bringing together diverse community groups—including older adults, remote/indigenous communities, 2SLGBTQIA+ groups, immigrants, students, families and couples, and unhoused community

members—we were able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex realities surrounding dignified food access. Seven focus groups were held across the province, organized by demographic groups to better understand the unique perspectives and challenges different populations face when accessing food and whether they receive dignified care. The selection of these groups was based on their frequent or growing presence in these spaces but whose voices are often underrepresented in reporting and policy making.

The demographic groups included:

2SLGBTQIA+ community – represented by community members accessing a food bank intended for the queer community as well as survey participants from across the province that identified as 2SLGBTQIA+.

Families and couples – represented by survey participants and additional community members accessing a food market and identified as living in a household of 2 or more.

Immigrants and refugees – represented by survey participants and additional community members accessing a food bank that primarily serves BIPOC, new immigrants and refugees.

Indigenous community – were represented by community members accessing food programming on reserve.

Older Adults and Seniors – represented by survey participants and additional community members who access a community meal program and identified as 51+years old.

Post-secondary students – represented by students accessing a food pantry at a university.

Unhoused population – represented by survey participants and additional community members accessing a takeaway meal program that primarily serves individuals who are relational care clients who are unhoused, living in SROs, and living with substance use challenges.





While the focus groups were organized by demographic groups, there is intersectionality among participants, meaning individuals cannot be confined to a single category, nor does their inclusion in one group disregard their experiences with challenges faced by others.

For example, a community member may be unhoused, identify as Indigenous, and belong to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, while others may be part of a family or couple household and also be immigrants or refugees. Therefore, while the findings from each focus group are not exclusive to a single demographic, they offer deeper insight into the specific challenges different groups face.

For instance, a dignified food access space may provide multilingual services and translated materials which are an essential feature for non-English speaking members of the immigrant and refugee community.

Additionally, many community members who completed the survey do not fit into the demographic groups mentioned above. Future studies should capture these missing voices to develop a more comprehensive perspective on dignified food access.

During the first half of the focus group, participants were presented with preliminary findings from the survey and were invited to share their initial thoughts. These survey findings helped shape the discussion questions that explored why and when participants began using the program, the challenges they faced, and how the program has impacted their lives.

The second half of the focus group involved a participatory activity designed to explore the five features of dignified food access: welcoming spaces, quality food choices, feeling respected, advocacy, and what's missing. For more details regarding focus group questions and activities, please see Appendix 2 and 3.

Detailed notes were taken during the focus group and the team debriefed afterward to share impressions and key highlights of the discussion. The team also audio recorded each focus group and generated transcripts using SpeakAI, an AI tool. The transcripts were reviewed and edited for quality assurance, removing filler words and minor errors.

Both the debrief notes and final transcriptions were used to identify shared features across all demographic groups and distinctive characteristics unique to each group.





Limitations and Challenges

An important limitation of our environmental scan is that organizations that exemplified DFA were selected based on their online visibility. This included websites, social media, and other forms of media that highlighted program features aligning with the four criteria for DFA. As a result, smaller or less digitally visible food access programs were not captured in the scan.

The majority of programs identified through this method were located within the Vancouver Coastal Health and Island Health regions, while fewer programs from Fraser, Interior, and Northern Health were represented due to their limited online presence. The focus on online visibility meant that programs without a strong digital presence were underrepresented in the scan.

Throughout the study, limitations were encountered at various stages of primary data collection. During on-site survey administration, food access organizations were asked to help identify participants, as they were familiar with community members who regularly used the program and would be willing to participate.

While this approach helped demonstrate a commitment to collaboration with the host organization, it also potentially favoured individuals that staff knew well or liked who may not be representative of general food access program users. At sites where staff were unable to assist in selecting participants, there were more participants who engaged minimally, providing only yes-or-no responses and skipping many of the questions, which impacted the depth and quality of the data collected.

To protect confidentiality, surveys were conducted away from the main food access service areas. However, since staff members were still present nearby, some participants may not have felt completely comfortable providing honest responses, worried they might be overheard by staff on site. During survey administration, while efforts were made to use simple and easily translatable language, this sometimes led to ambiguity and varied interpretations. For example, when asked whether they had to wait in line, some participants responded "yes" even if their food access site did not use a lineup system.

Similarly, questions about food choice yielded inconsistent responses—some participants selected "no" even if they had some degree of choice, but were unable to select the exact items they wanted (e.g., wanting two dairy products but being limited to one, or accessing a market-style program with restricted options). These responses reflect how perception and choice is not “black and white” but rather a spectrum based on individual experience.



Another limitation is the disproportionate number of site visits and surveys conducted in the Vancouver Coastal Region compared to other health authorities. Given the concentration of food access programs in high-density areas like Vancouver, this imbalance was difficult to avoid. Several efforts were made to engage with smaller food access organizations across other health authorities, including Indigenous-led initiatives. However, establishing these relationships within the project's timeframe proved challenging. Recognizing that meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities requires time to build trust and reciprocity, we acknowledge the limitations of our approach.

With many Indigenous community members feeling over-surveyed and studied which can be seen and felt as extractive, this can perpetuate further harm. Therefore, we sought to amplify Indigenous voices through representation in traditional food programming while respecting that this study remains grounded in conventional colonial practices. Acknowledging that for true representation and engagement to occur, a more comprehensive and long-term process is essential to foster mutual respect, trust and meaningful collaboration with Indigenous community members.





Finally, limitations also occurred during the focus group stage. Community members who participated were primarily those who had indicated interest in further study activities through a question at the end of the survey. However, when interest within a specific demographic group was low, we asked food access organizations to promote the opportunity to their members to increase participation.

As a result, some focus group participants had not completed the initial survey, which may have impacted their ability to engage in the participatory analysis of the survey results.

Additionally, some organizations that received the online survey were unable to gather responses from their community members due to various challenges. These included limited organizational capacity to send out the survey before the closing date and external circumstances, such as shifting priorities in response to a natural disaster.

Results

We learned from our environmental scan that in terms of creating welcoming places, many food access organizations prioritized dignity, comfort, and community connection.

Environmental Scan

Welcoming Places

Programs incorporated strategies such as operating in familiar and accessible locations, ensuring cleanliness and organization, and providing flexible hours to accommodate diverse schedules.

Among all the selected organizations, many spaces were intentionally designed to foster inclusivity through multilingual signage, child-friendly areas, and opportunities for social interaction.







Features of welcoming places:

- Sunshine Coast Community Services Society operates food hubs in convenient locations like Sechelt and Pender Harbour, creating accessible spaces where community members could engage in both food access and community-building activities.

- Food Stash Foundation designed its Rescued Food Market with uplifting music, murals, and translated signage to create an inclusive and dignified shopping experience.

- Victoria Community Food Hub improved accessibility for participants by situating food distribution in familiar, community-friendly settings.

Quality Food Choices

We learned that food access organizations are working to provide quality food choices in their communities by providing high-quality, nutritious, and culturally relevant food. Many organizations have established partnerships with local farms and food producers to source fresh and nutrient-dense options, ensuring a steady supply of produce, proteins, and dairy.

Food access organizations are demonstrating a commitment to accommodating diverse cultural traditions and dietary restrictions, enabling participants to access food that aligned with their preferences and values.



Features of quality food choices:

- Quest Non-Profit Grocery Markets prioritizes fresh, high-quality, and culturally diversefood through initiatives such as the Essentials Program, which provided nutrient-dense foods like proteins and dairy, and the Repack Program, which enhanced accessibility by repackaging bulk donations into smaller portions.

- The Greater Vancouver Food Bank implemented the Community Market Program, providing a wide variety of fresh produce, proteins, and whole grains to support balanced nutrition. Additionally, tailored programs like Baby Steps and Seniors' Packs addressed the unique nutritional needs of infants and older adults, ensuring these vulnerable groups had access to high-quality food.

- Archway Food Bank of Abbotsford offered culturally relevant items through its Seva Food Pantry, including staples like rice, lentils, and halal meat.

Respectful Ways

In terms of creating respectful ways for connecting community members to food, some food access organizations prioritized dignity, autonomy, and empathy in their service delivery, ensuring that participants felt respected and valued. Programs often emphasized client choice, allowing individuals to select food items that aligned with their dietary preferences and cultural needs.

Many organizations also adopted policies that minimized stigma, such as avoiding proof-of-income requirements and maintaining privacy during food distribution. Staff and volunteers were trained in cultural sensitivity and empathetic communication, fostering environments that promoted mutual respect and trust.

Features of respectful ways

- Greater Vancouver Food Bank provided grocery-style markets that reduced stigma and empowered clients by offering them control over their food choices.
- Food Stash Foundation's Rescued Food Market adopted a "pay-what-you-feel" model, which eliminated income verification requirements and fostered respect through anonymous, stigma-free access to food.
- Galiano Community Food Program organizes and hosts community potlucks and soup lunches, which reduces stigma and fosters inclusivity and social connection. They also offer frozen meal programs for seniors, which ensured that elderly clients received nutritious, prepared meals while maintaining their independence and dignity.







Advocacy

Food access organizations are engaging in advocacy efforts that centre on systemic change, public awareness, and long-term solutions to food insecurity. Many organizations partnered with local stakeholders, policymakers, and advocacy networks to amplify their impact.

Efforts included campaigns for poverty reduction, media outreach, and collaboration with agricultural and environmental groups to foster sustainable food systems. Organizations also raised awareness through educational initiatives and engaged the public to advocate for equitable food access.



Features of advocacy:

- Sunshine Coast Community Services demonstrated comprehensive advocacy through its partnerships with the Good Food Organizations network and its leadership in the Coast Wide Food Bank Coalition. These initiatives tackled systemic barriers by promoting income-based solutions, amplifying fundraising, and fostering collaboration across the region. Public presentations and media campaigns further raised awareness of the need for poverty reduction policies to address root causes of food insecurity.

- The Cranbrook Food Bank Society advocated for policy changes in food distribution and accessibility by engaging with local organizations and government stakeholders to address poverty and food insecurity issues regionally.

- Cowichan Green Community hosts educational programs on sustainable farming, seed saving, and gardening. These workshops activate community members to contribute to food security efforts and emphasize the importance of local, sustainable food systems.

Other: Collaborative

Many organizations appear to be exhibiting a fifth quality of dignified food access, where efforts are being made to engage community members in program design and implementation, often providing spaces and opportunities for knowledge sharing and personal development. Food access organizations are also linking up with a network of other food and social service organizations to share knowledge and resources, as well as provide wrap around services to community members.



Examples:

- The Greater Vancouver Food Bank, through its Community Agency Partners, takes a tailored food distribution approach by partnering with local agencies to provide culturally appropriate foods and better meet diverse cultural and dietary needs of community members.

- Galiano Community Food Program prioritizes community resilience through education and collaboration. Food literacy initiatives such as gardening workshops and cooking classes are used to promote knowledge sharing and food self-sufficiency.

- Victoria Community Food Hub, through its Farmbucks Subsidy Program, promotes access to fresh local produce while also facilitating community engagement in supporting local farmers.

For a full summary of the environmental scan, see Appendix 5.

Site Visit Summary

Figures 3-7 below provide an overview of the 25 site visits conducted by the team across the province. These visits included three sites in Fraser Health (Burnaby, Surrey, and Hope); six sites in the Interior (Lytton, Kamloops, Shuswap, Golden, Nelson, and Cranbrook); six sites in Island Region (Galiano, Cowichan Valley, Greater Victoria, and Gabriola), three sites in Northern Health (Prince George, Quesnel); and seven sites in the Vancouver Coastal Health region (Sechelt, Squamish, East Vancouver, and the Downtown Eastside).



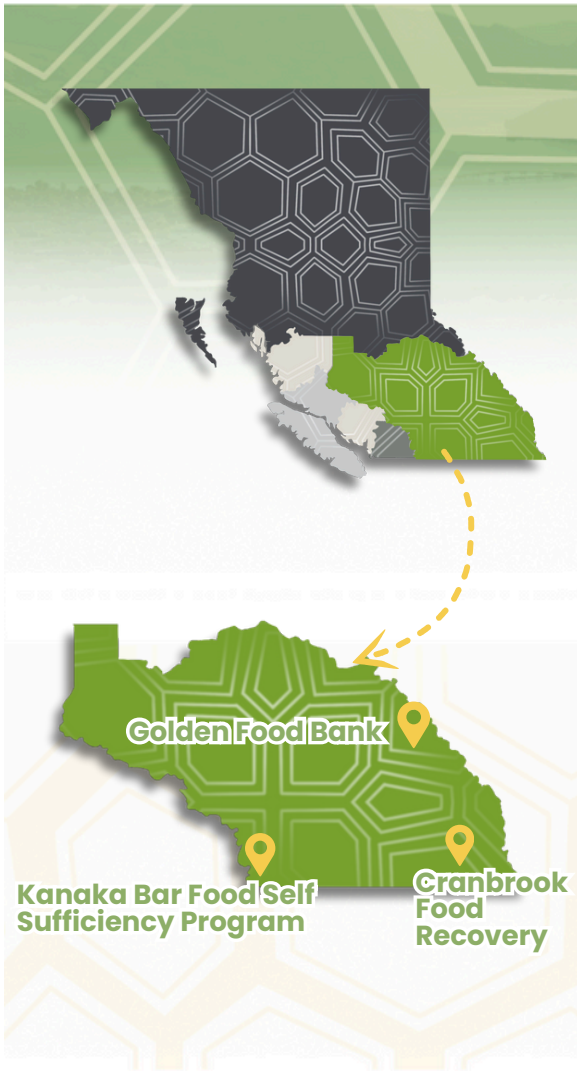


Figure 3: Overview of Sites Visited - Fraser



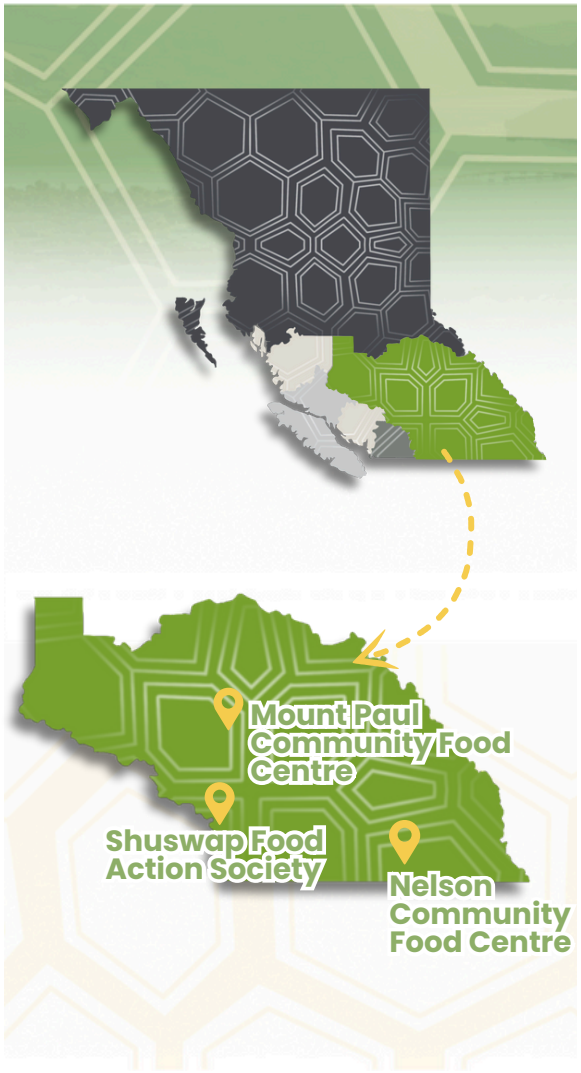
Organization	Hope Community Services	Kingdom Acts Foundation	Simon Fraser University Food Pantry
Area	Hope, Rural	Surrey, Urban	Burnaby, Peri-Urban
FBBC Member	Yes	No	No
Number of Staff; Volunteers	4; 30+	6; 100	2; 10-12
Food Access Programming	Food Hampers Food Pantry Meal Kits Community Meals Community Gardens	Food Bank	Food Pantry Community Fridge

Figure 4: Overview of Sites Visited - Interior (1 of 2)



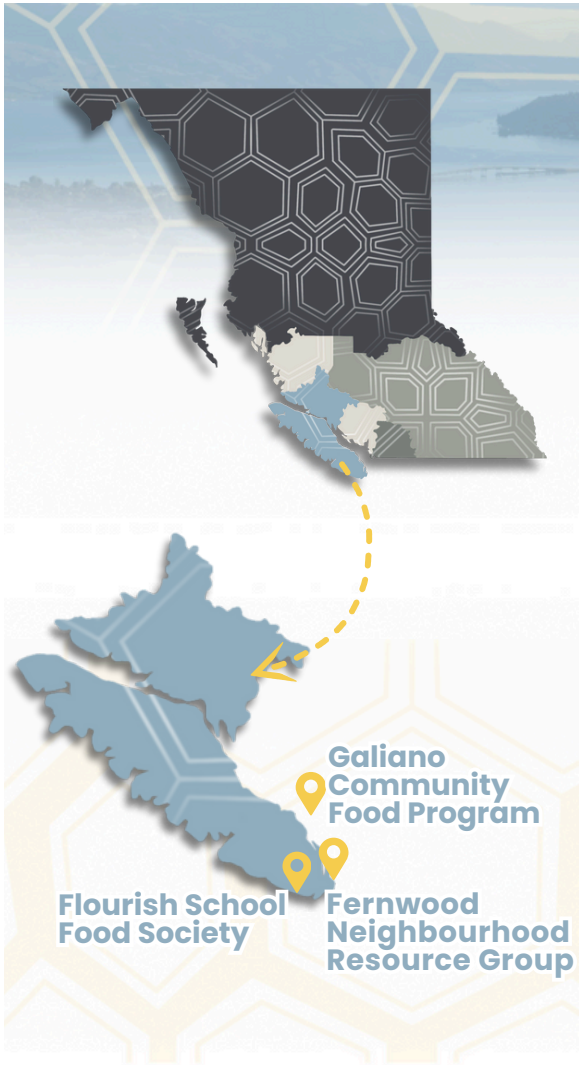
Organization	Cranbrook Food Recovery	Kanaka Bar Food Self Sufficiency Program	Golden Food Bank
Area	Cranbrook, Rural	Lytton, Reserve	Kootenays, Rural
FBBC Member	No	No	Yes
Number of Staff; Volunteers	5; 25	5	4; 18
Food Access Programming	Food Hampers Community Meals Community Gardens	Community Meals Community Gardens Food Forest Traditional Foodways	Food Hampers Food Pantry Affordable Market Community Meals

Figure 4: Overview of Sites Visited - Interior (2 of 2)



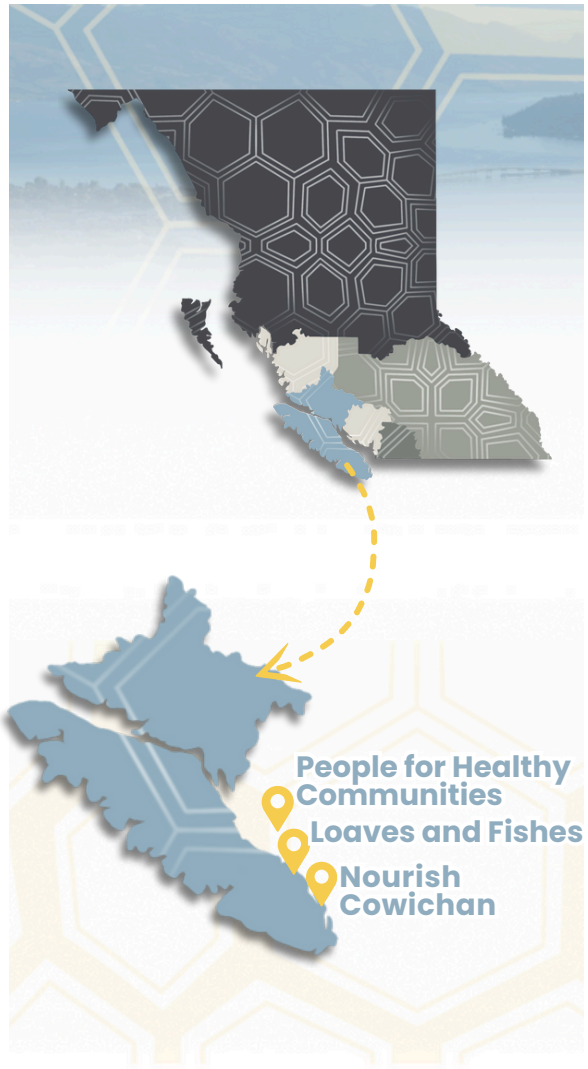
Organization	Mount Paul Community Food Centre	Nelson Community Food Centre	Shuswap Food Action Society
Area	Kamloops, Peri-Ubran	Nelson, Rural	Shuswap, Peri-Urban
FBBC Member	No	No	No
Number of Staff; Volunteers	6; 200	6; 36	6; 50
Food Access Programming	Food Hampers Food Pantry Affordable Market Community Meals Community Fridge Community Gardens	Food Hampers Bread Program Food Pantry Community Meals Community Gardens	School Food Program

Figure 5: Overview of Sites Visited - Island (1 of 2)



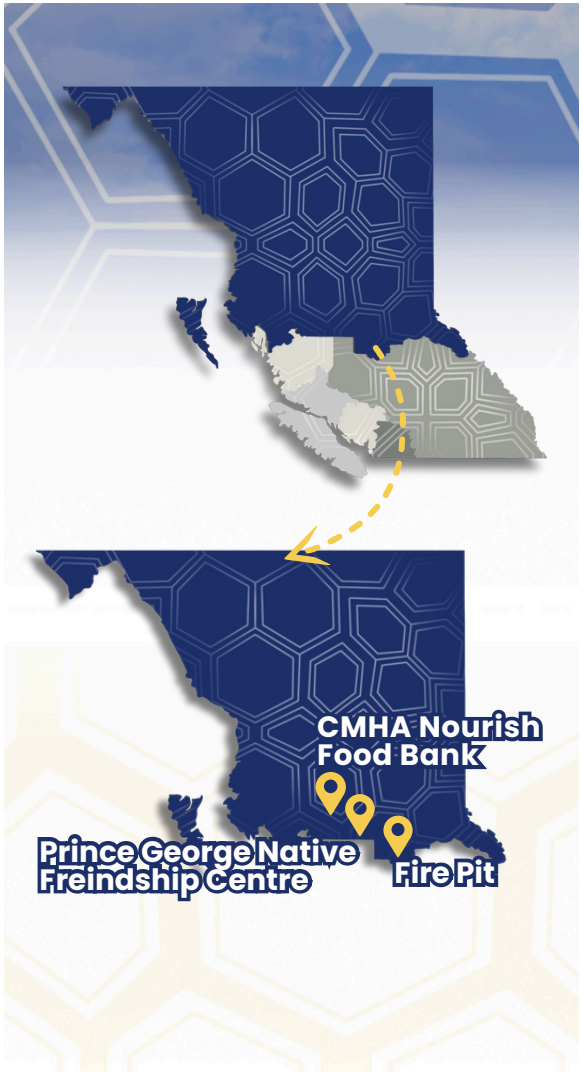
Organization	Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group	Flourish School Food Society	Galiano Community Food Program
Area	Victoria, Urban	Victoria, Urban	Galiano Island, Rural
FBBC Member	No	No	No
Number of Staff; Volunteers	9; 50	13; 15	3; 70
Food Access Programming	Food Hampers Community Meals Community Gardens Mothers Groups Daycare meals	School Food Program School Gardens	Food Pantry Affordable Market Community Meals School Food Program Meal Kits School Gardens Community Gardens

Figure 5: Overview of Sites Visited - Island (2 of 2)



Organization	Loaves and Fishes	Nourish Cowichan	People for Healthy Communities
Area	Nanaimo, Urban	Cowichan Valley, Peri-Urban	Gabriola Island, Rural
FBBC Member	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of Staff; Volunteers	50; 230	3; 70	12; 30
Food Access Programming	Food Hampers Food Pantry Affordable Markets	Food Hampers Community Meals School Food Programs Community Garden	Food Hampers Food Pantry Community Meals School Food Programs Community Gardens

Figure 6: Overview of Sites Visited - Northern



Organization	Fire Pit	Prince George Native Freindship Centre	CMHA Nourish Food Bank
Area	Prince George, Rural	Prince George, Rural	Quesnel, Rural
FBBC Member	No	No	No
Number of Staff; Volunteers	4; 4	2; 10	2; 10
Food Access Programming	Meal Program	Food Hampers	Food Hampers

Figure 7: Overview of Sites Visited - Vancouver Coastal (1 of 3)



Organization	City Reach Care Society	Food Stash	Kilala Lelum Health and Wellness Cooperative
Area	Vancouver (Renfrew), Urban	Vancouver (East Vancouver), Urban	Vancouver (DTES), Urban
FBBC Member	Yes	No	No
Number of Staff; Volunteers	7; 100	7; 80	20; 0
Food Access Programming	Food Hampers Community Meals School Food Program	Food Hampers Affordable Market	Food Hampers Food Pantry Community Meals Traditional Foodways

Figure 7: Overview of Sites Visited - Vancouver Coastal (2 of 3)



Organization	Kiwassa Neighbourhood House	Sole Food Street Farms
Area	Vancouver (Hastings-Sunrise), Peri-Urban	Vancouver (East Vancouver), Urban
FBBC Member	No	No
Number of Staff; Volunteers	3; 20	6; 2
Food Access Programming	Food Hampers Affordable Market Community Meals School Food Program Community Kitchen and Workshops	Affordable Market Community Meals CSA Boxes Community Farm Beehives

Figure 7: Overview of Sites Visited - Vancouver Coastal (3 of 3)



Organization	Squamish Climate Action Network	Sunshine Coast Community Services Society
Area	Squamish, Peri-Urban	Sunshine Coast, Rural
FBBC Member	No	Yes
Number of Staff; Volunteers	9; 100	3; 35
Food Access Programming	CSA Boxes School Food Program School Farm Community Gardens	Food Hampers Affordable Market Community Meals Community Garden Voucher Program

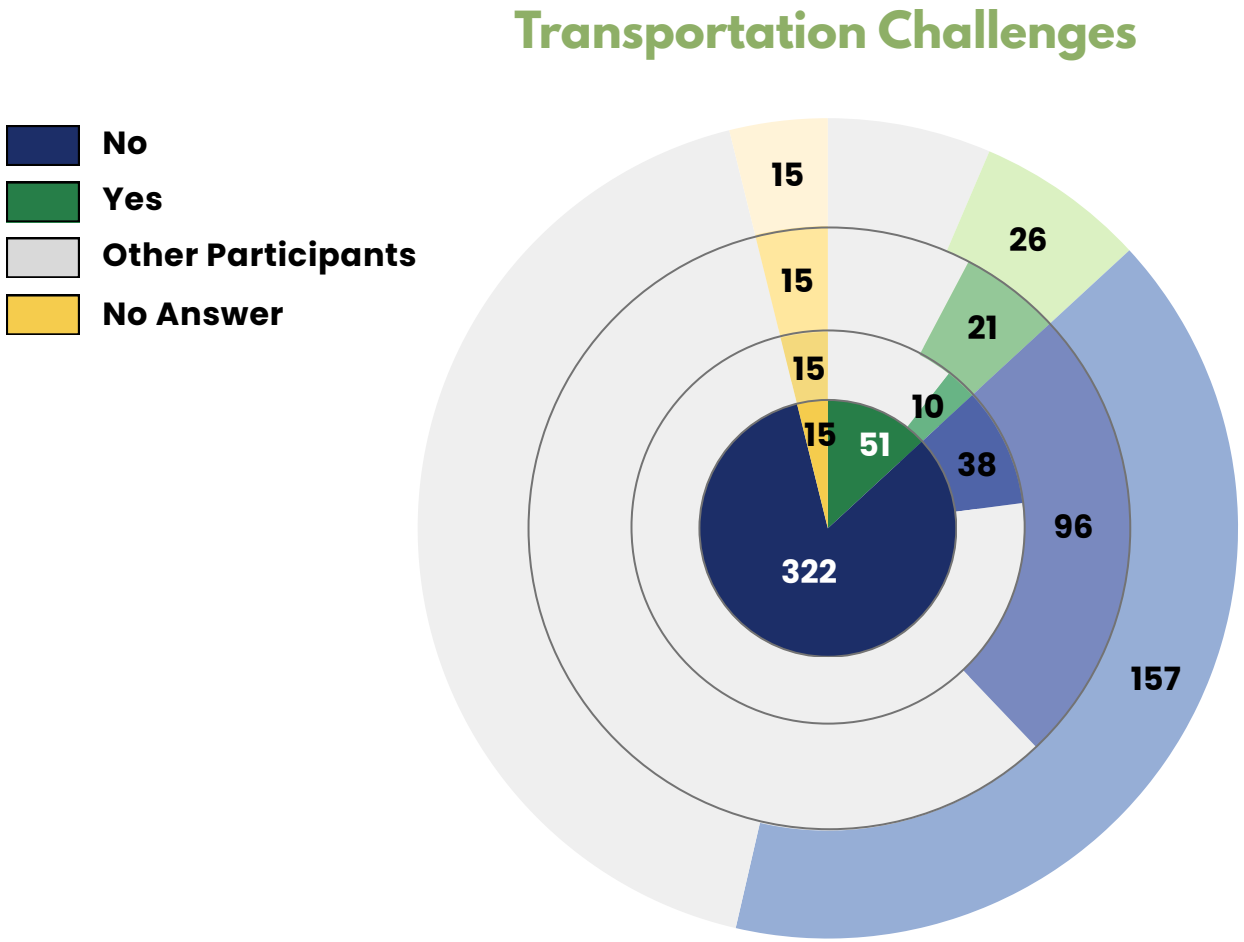


Community Member Survey

Getting To and From Food Access Programs
Approximately 13% of survey participants indicated experiencing challenges going to and from food access program sites. Public transportation poses challenges for 16% of 2SLGBTQIA+ participants who identified transportation barriers, alongside mental and emotional obstacles, such as social anxiety, which further complicated their use of public transit.

Among Indigenous community members, 16% reported transportation challenges, including inconsistent access to reliable transportation, parking shortages, long walking distances, and limited availability due to timing conflicts. Similarly, 13% of older adults experience challenges getting to and from sites. Many reported facing long wait times and additional costs, such as high gas prices and expenses related to ride-sharing services. Some also reported that the physical strain of carrying heavy groceries or navigating long distances exacerbates existing health conditions, such as arthritis or back pain.

For a breakdown of how many survey participants reported experiencing challenges with getting to and from food access program site, see Figure 8.



Source: Community Member Survey 2024

Figure 8: Responses to whether community members experience transportation challenges. Centre circle represents all participants. Second layer represents 2SLGBTQIA+ participants. The third layer reflects responses from Indigenous participants. The fourth and outer layer represents the older adult and senior participants.

Welcoming and Supportive Environment
The survey also provided insights into what constitutes a welcoming and supportive environment. Participants emphasized the importance of staff and volunteer interactions, with friendly, helpful, and respectful approaches creating a sense of safety and belonging. This is reflected in the high levels of satisfaction reported across demographic groups: 98% of all participants, 87% of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, 94% of Indigenous community members, and 96% of older adults feel welcomed at the food program (see Figure 9).

Similarly, 92% of all participants, 80% of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, 87% of Indigenous community members, and 92% of older adults feel a sense of belonging to the community, underscoring the program's success in fostering inclusivity (see Figure 10).

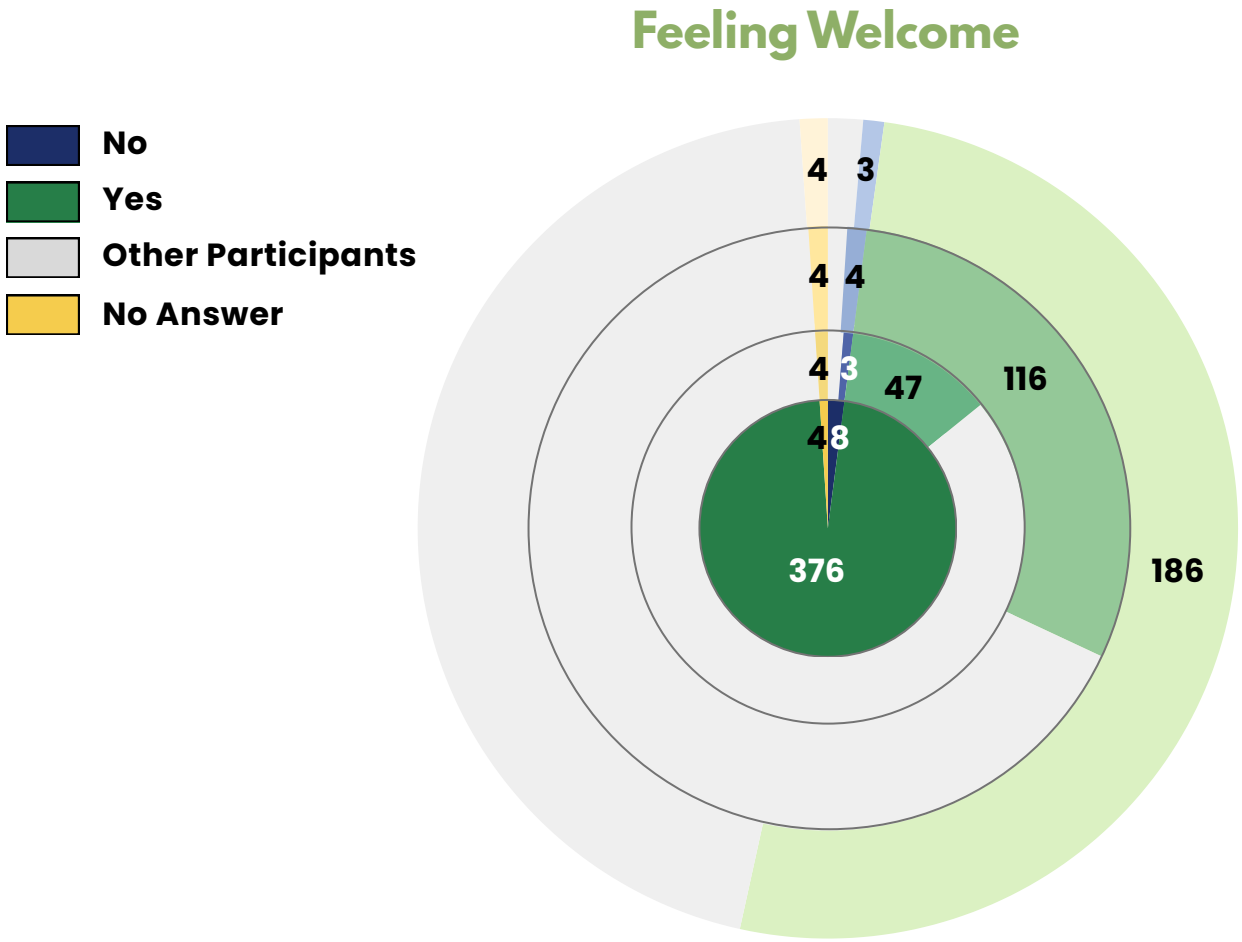
However, community member responses also revealed complex social dynamics that can make food access spaces challenging. Many community members reported feeling uneasy in crowded environments, with some groups expressing specific concerns about feeling judged or experiencing exclusion. Many older adults prefer calmer, less chaotic spaces.

There was also tension around how unhoused individuals were perceived by others using food access spaces. Indigenous community members highlighted the importance of being treated with respect, particularly for Elders, and expressed a desire for social gatherings that foster community connections.



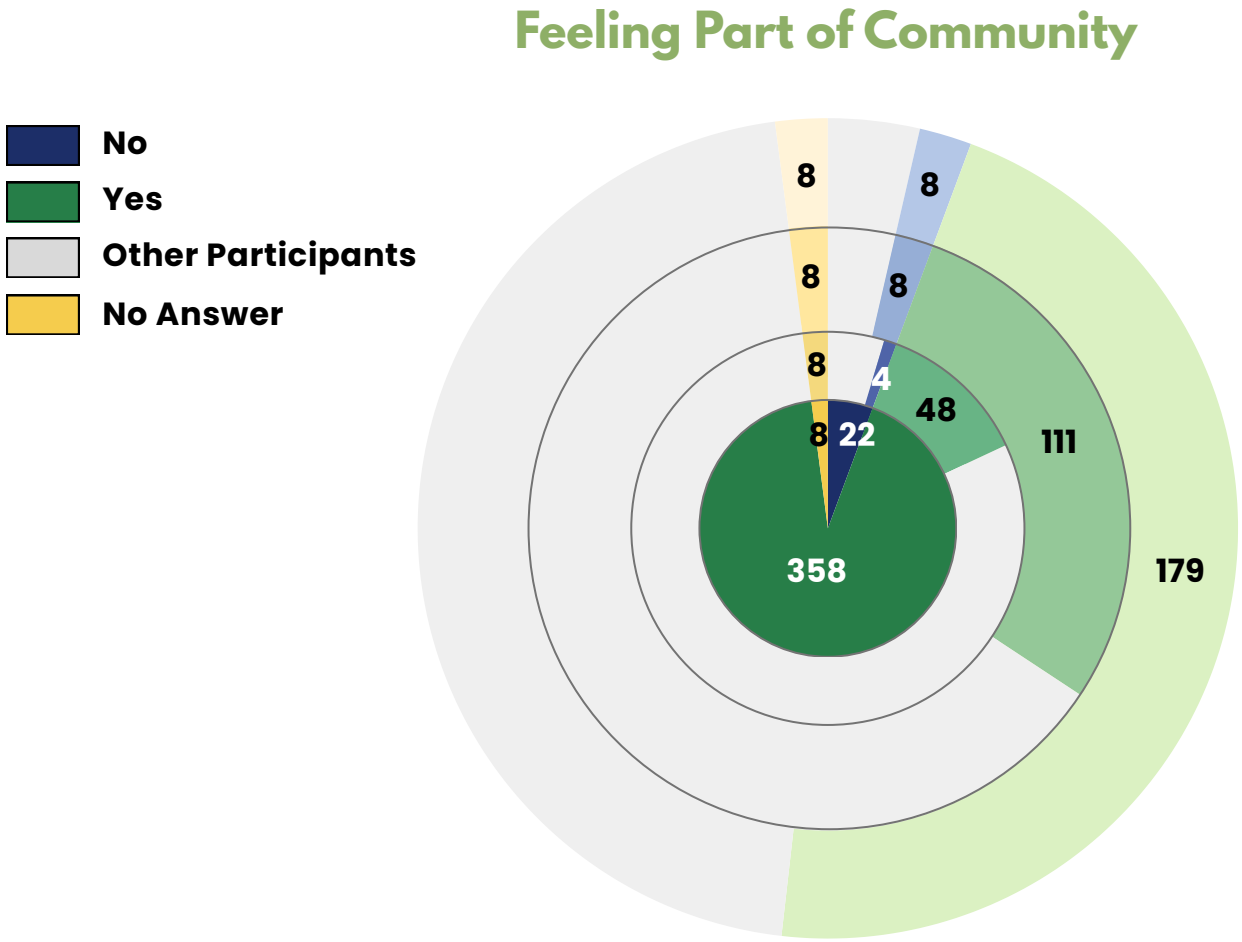






Source: Community Member Survey 2024

Figure 9: Responses to whether community members feel welcome. Centre circle represents all participants. Second layer represents 2SLGBTQIA+ participants. The third layer reflects responses from Indigenous participants. The fourth and outer layer represents the older adult and senior participants.



Source: Community Member Survey 2024

Figure 10: Responses to whether community members feel like they are part of community when accessing food programs. Centre circle represents all participants. Second layer represents 2SLGBTQIA+ participants. The third layer reflects responses from Indigenous participants. The fourth and outer layer represents the older adult and senior participants.





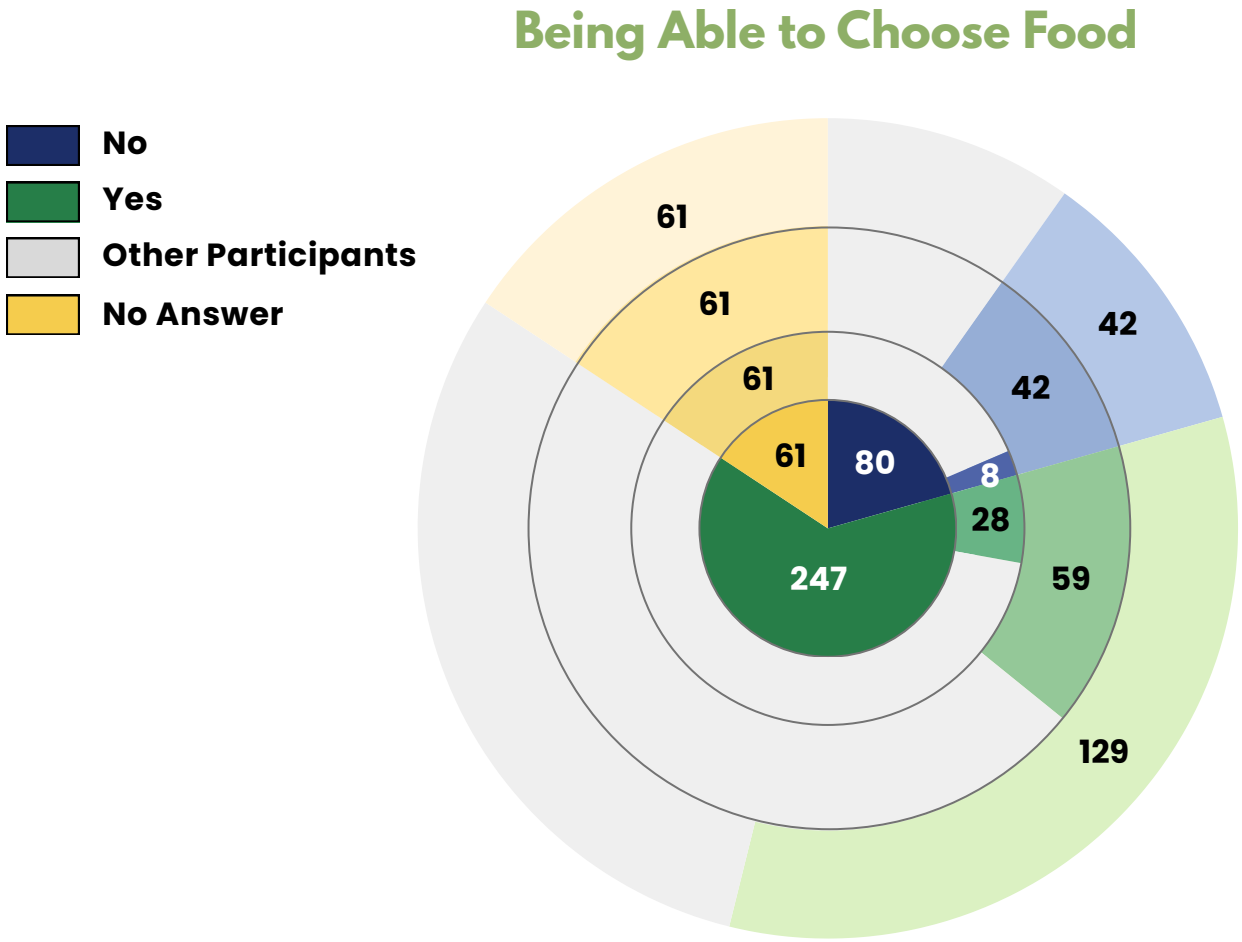
Food Quality and Choice

Food quality and choice emerged as a significant concern across all surveyed groups. While participants expressed deep appreciation for food programs the ability to choose preferred foods varied notably among different communities (see Figure 11).

2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and Older Adults reported similar levels of food choice satisfaction (76% and 75% respectively), while Indigenous community members reported significantly lower satisfaction with food choice (36%).

Many Indigenous participants specifically expressed a desire for more fresh and organic foods, including garden-grown produce, as well as greater access to protein sources like meat, fish, and seafood. Some also noted that available foods did not always align with their dietary needs, such as diabetic-friendly or dairy-free options.

Additionally, gaps in food pairings —such as receiving pasta without sauce or cereal without milk —added to frustrations, making it more difficult to prepare balanced meals.



Source: Community Member Survey 2024

Figure 11: Responses to whether community members have choice. Centre circle represents all participants. Second layer represents 2SLGBTQIA+ participants. The third layer reflects responses from Indigenous participants. The fourth and outer layer represents the older adult and senior participants.

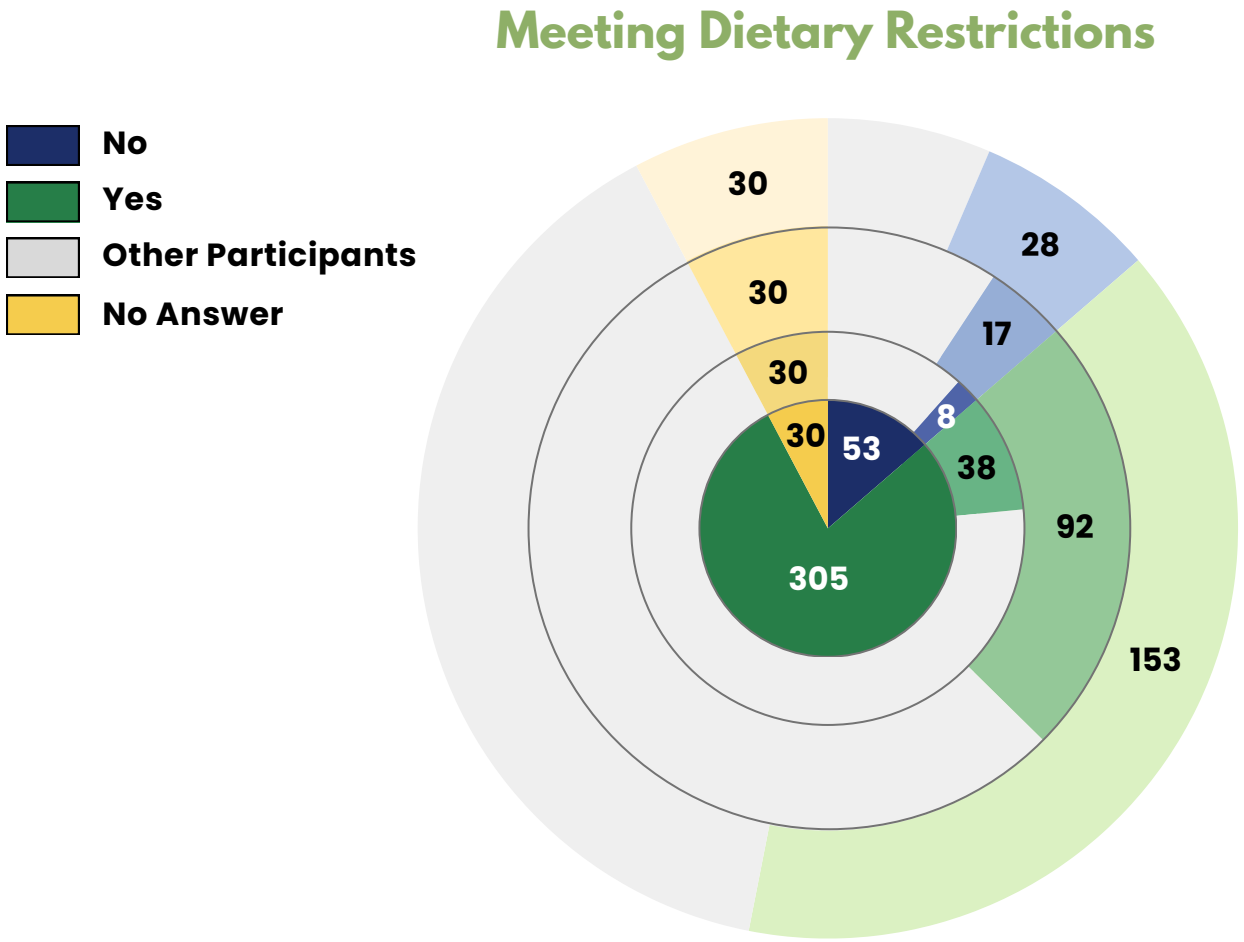
When asked specifically about whether the provided foods met their dietary restrictions 79% of participants reported that the programs met their dietary restrictions (see Figure 12).

Yet responses from specific demographic groups reveal that some groups are far less satisfied, as only 50% of 2SLGBTQIA+, 66% of Indigenous, and 73% of Older Adult participants reported that the foods received met their dietary restrictions. Several participants consistently noted dissatisfaction with insufficient quantities and limited variety. There was a strong demand for more fresh produce, including organic options.

Different community groups expressed unique nutritional needs: older adults sought variety and appreciated farmers' market coupons; Indigenous community members requested more nutritious options and meat coupons; while 2SLGBTQIA+ participants expressed interest in more vegan choices, gluten-free bread, and additional items like cooking oil and condiments.

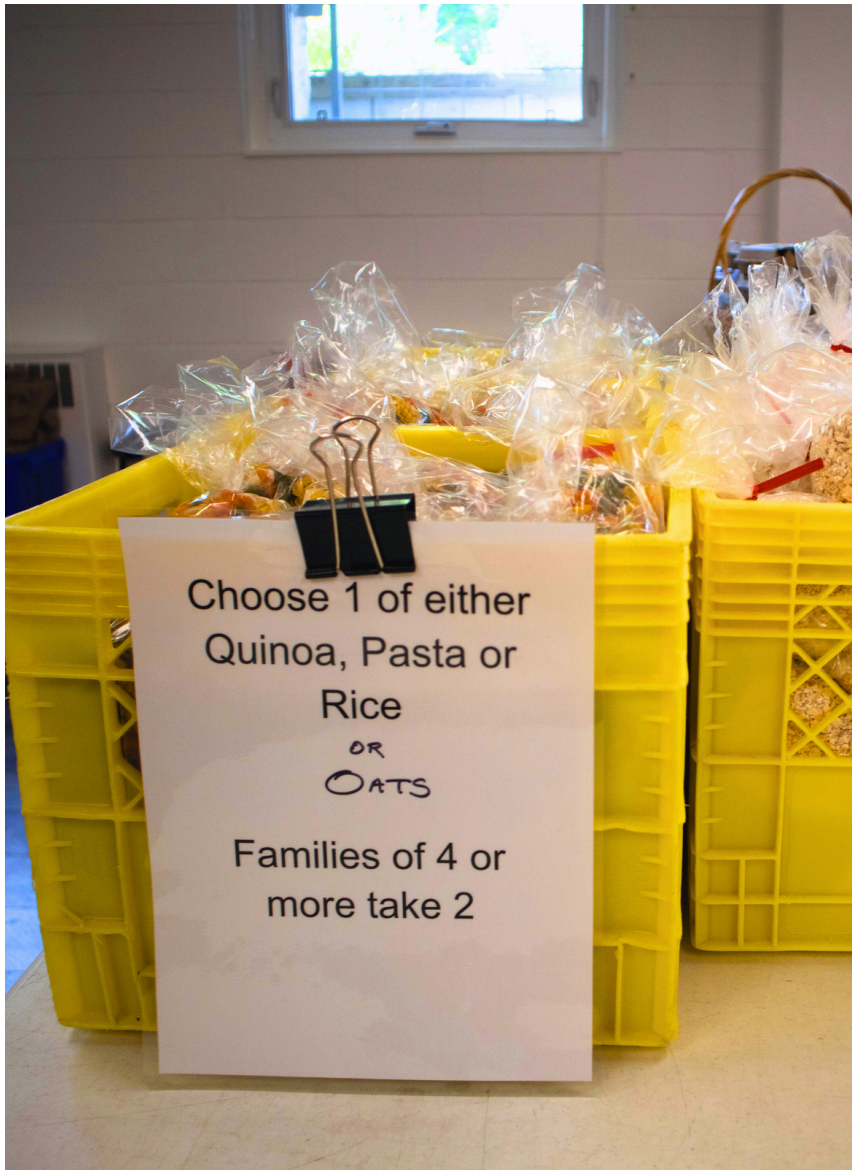
Across all groups, there were requests for more protein-rich foods, plant-based options, and clearer food labeling to address allergies and dietary restrictions.





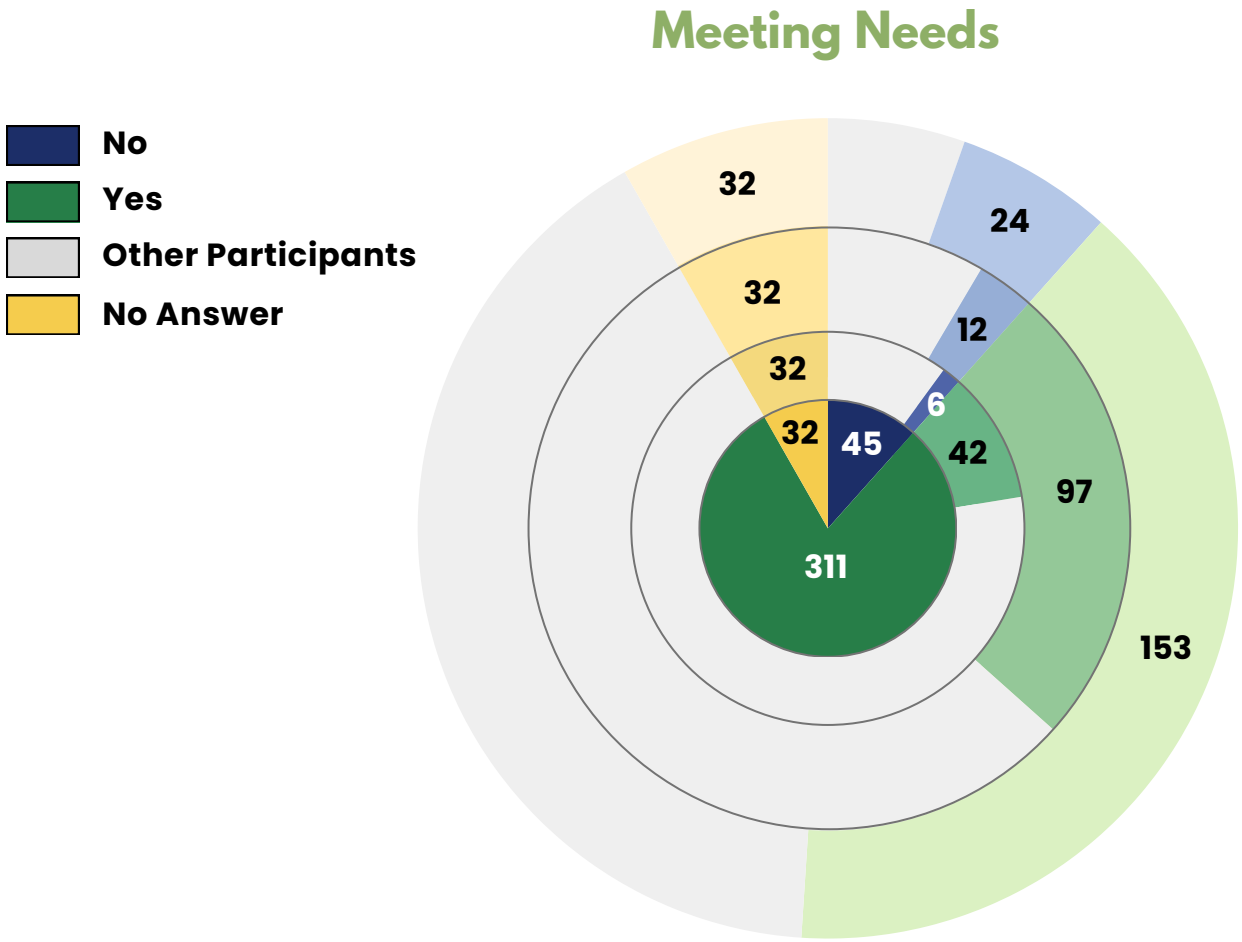
Source: Community Member Survey 2024

Figure 12: Responses to whether food access programs are meeting dietary restrictions. Centre circle represents all participants. Second layer represents 2SLGBTQIA+ participants. The third layer reflects responses from Indigenous participants. The fourth and outer layer represents the older adult and senior participants.



Overall, 80% of survey participants reported that food access programs met their and/or their family's needs (see Figure 13). Yet, responses from 2SLGBTQIA+, Indigenous, and Older Adult participants reveal far less satisfaction, with only 53% of Indigenous, 69% of Indigenous, and 73% of Older Adults reporting that food access programs met their and/or their family's needs.

The survey revealed that effective support goes far beyond connecting community members with food as participants valued programs that offered holistic support, including mental health resources, housing assistance, and employment support. Limited operating hours and lack of program organization were critical concerns, with many community members expressing frustration with long wait times, limited communication, and inconsistent item availability.



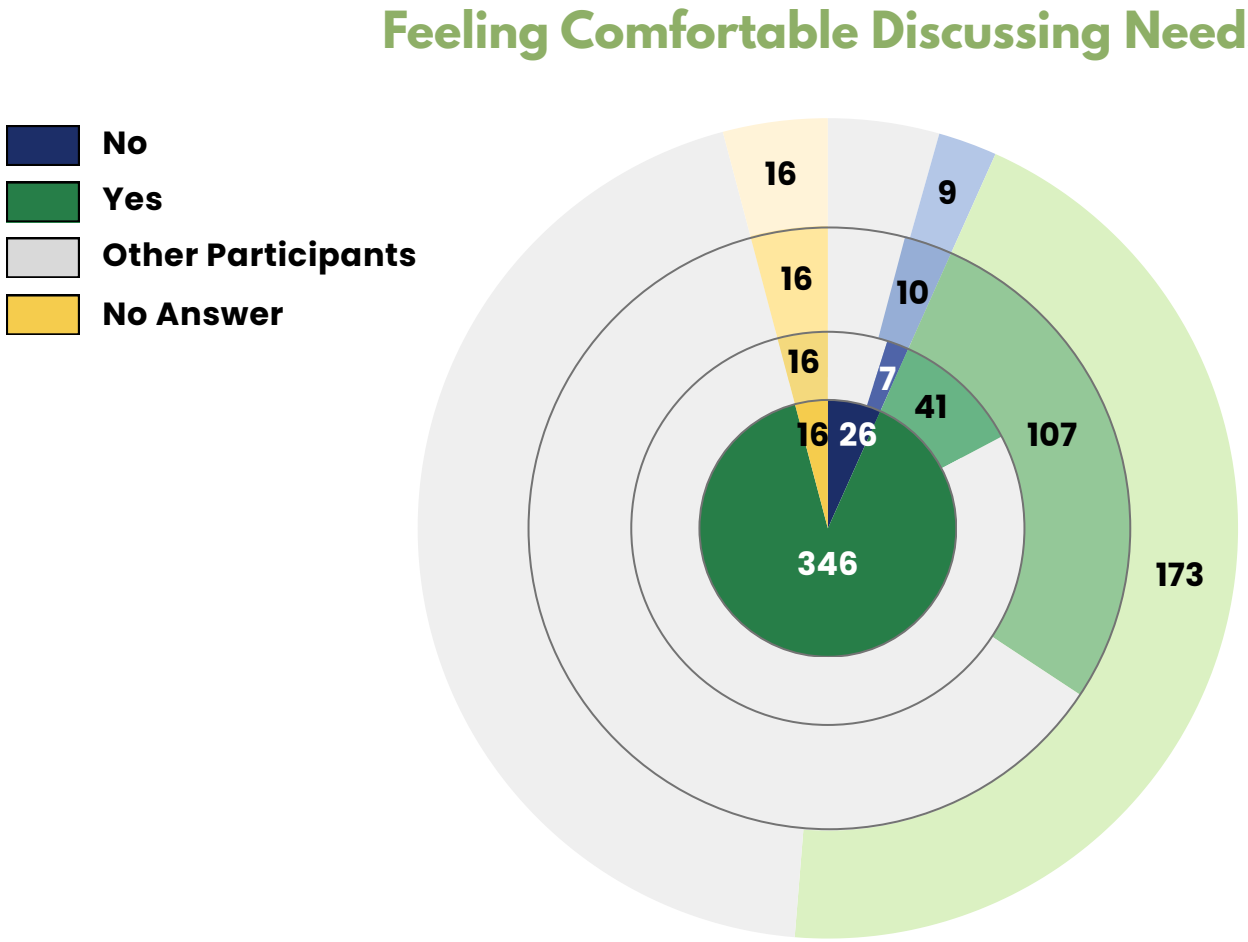
Source: Community Member Survey 2024

Figure 13: Responses to whether food access programs are meeting community member needs. Centre circle represents all participants. Second layer represents 2SLGBTQIA+ participants. The third layer reflects responses from Indigenous participants. The fourth and outer layer represents the older adult and senior participants.

The majority of participants (89%) indicated feeling comfortable discussing their needs with staff or volunteers (see Figure 14), and this feeling of comfort was shared by 64% of 2SLGBTQIA+, 80% of Indigenous, and 87% of Older Adult participants. Many community members appreciated opportunities for social interaction, viewing food programs as more than just a source of nutrition.

These spaces were seen as potential venues for community building and mutual support, especially by older adults and Indigenous community members. However, the survey also revealed potential barriers to these connections, including social anxiety, feelings of judgment, and concerns about exclusion.





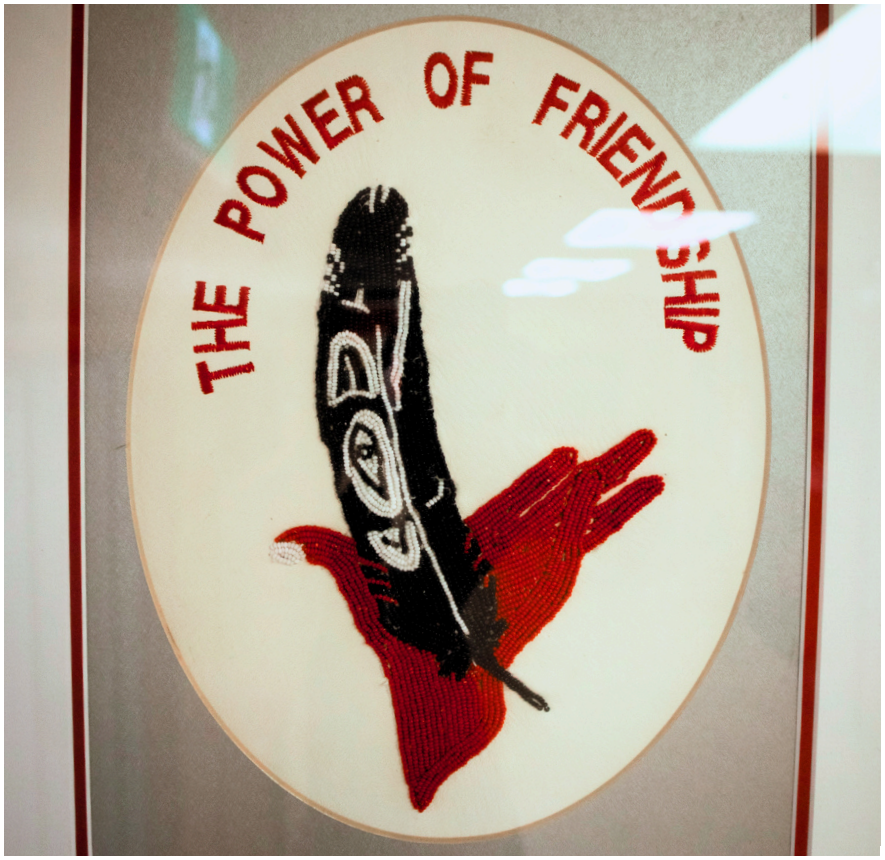
Source: Community Member Survey 2024

Figure 14: Responses to whether community members feel comfortable discussing their needs. Centre circle represents all participants. Second layer represents 2SLGBTQIA+ participants. The third layer reflects responses from Indigenous participants. The fourth and outer layer represents the older adult and senior participants.

The findings point to the need for a comprehensive approach to food access that addresses physical, emotional, and social needs. Community members are seeking more than just food– they want programs that provide respect, choice, support, and a sense of belonging.

The survey reveals the importance of listening to diverse community voices, understanding unique challenges, and developing valuable approaches to food security that honor individual and community experiences.





Focus Group Graphic Facilitation

The results of the focus group are shared in a three-part graphic facilitation that is designed to be innovative, accessible and visually-appealing representations of the insights shared by each focus group.

The first part covers the life challenges or circumstances that brought people to access food programs and describes how these programs are valued by community members and the impact it has had on their lives. It also provides participant perceptions on the four key criteria of dignified food access (i.e. Welcoming Place, Quality Food Choices, Respectful Way, and Advocacy) as well as contains "Other" potential criteria of dignified food access, capturing any additional insights shared by community members.

The second part provides a sampling of direct quotes embedded in a graphic illustration that directly highlights the voices and visions of community members who participated in our focus group discussions. The many types of food, services, infrastructure, and larger social and physical setting captured in the illustrations are based on the conversations and feedback we collected from community members, and represent both their experiences and recommendations for how to design





dignified food access programs. In this way, the graphic illustrations demonstrate the ideal food access model, based on the real life experiences of the participants. The sketch design emulates the imagined ideal scenes, and the photography exemplifies the diversity of participants while protecting their identities.

The third and final part, describes the "recipe for dignified food access" by summarizing the "key ingredients" that emerged for each demographic group. For this section, you gain a sense of the unique differences and similarities between each demographic group's reflections on dignified food access.

Many of the photos used in the graphic facilitation are stock photos, while others are AI-generated photos. We wanted to capture the breadth of the participants involved, while ensuring an equitable and dignified representation of participants. We acknowledge that the use of AI highlights the need for more equitable photos within the media landscape. AI is by no means an equitable solution; we prefer to support real people, and we also acknowledge that the current AI landscape lacks robust equitable measures.

Our goal is to visualize ideal food access models in the most accessible means, to ensure readers can digest the material and produce worthwhile solutions in response to the research.

2SLGBTQIA+ Community

Region: Mix
Area: Mix
Program: Food Bank
# of participants: 5

Life Challenges
Financial constraints and financial instability were major reasons why 2SLGBTQIA+ community members rely on food access programming. For one participant, the financial challenges they were dealing with were a result of being attacked due to their queer identity, which resulted in an injury that reduced their ability to work, causing a significant drop in income. Everyday tasks like grocery shopping became daunting—not just because of physical pain but also due to the mental and emotional toll of the incident. Beyond the financial struggle, 2SLGBTQIA+ community members faced additional barriers. Navigating public spaces is difficult due to the fear of discrimination. For example, using public transit sometimes triggers anxiety, which makes accessing food programming challenging.

Impact
For many 2SLGBTQIA+ participants, the food program has been more than just nourishment. It has been a critical support system during challenging times in their lives. One participant shared that their financial situation reached a crisis point, and the shifting job landscape post-COVID only made it worse. The food program introduced them to a tight-knit community.

Welcoming Place
Representation and visibility are really important to 2SLGBTQIA+ community members.
Pride flags, volunteers and staff who reflect the community's diversity, and an overall festive atmosphere were critical to them feeling welcome. Community members sought environments where they could see themselves represented, feel safe expressing their identity, and experience a sense of genuine belonging. One participant shared that the community space isn't just about getting fresh vegetables—it's about connection.

Quality Food Choices
2SLGBTQIA+ participants expressed a desire for more health-conscious food choices that also accommodate dietary preferences – e.g. gluten-free, vegan, and culturally diverse options. They expressed concern with the nutritional value and presence of chemicals in processed foods and a preference for organic produce.

Respectful Way
2SLGBTQIA+ participants defined respect through comprehensive inclusivity and active accommodation of individual needs. Respect meant having staff who could suggest food preparation methods, share exciting weekly offerings, and provide flexible pickup options. Community members sought environments that recognized diverse identities and offered support without making individuals feel singled out.

Advocacy
Advocacy is a priority for 2SLGBTQIA+ community members, with an explicit focus on diversity, inclusion, and empowerment. They sought organizational commitments to decolonization and developing resources that support marginalized and equity deserving populations.

Other
2SLGBTQIA+ participants expressed interest in life skills training, job resource networks, emergency information, and creating spaces that offer support beyond immediate food access. Community involvement in programming design and implementation was also viewed as important. One participant shared that they found purpose in volunteering with a food delivery service, helping others who, like them, faced challenges accessing food.

Direct Quotes
2SLGBTQIA+ Community

Respectful Way:
I've found that for community based or lower cost food programs, there's been a kinship when I've known it to be neighborhood based. Regardless of someone's socio-economic situation, there's something about being neighborhood based, we all have this one shared experience.

Advocacy:
Bring diverse workers and offer people opportunities to volunteer… They should have clear commitment to decolonization and empower Indigenous clients.

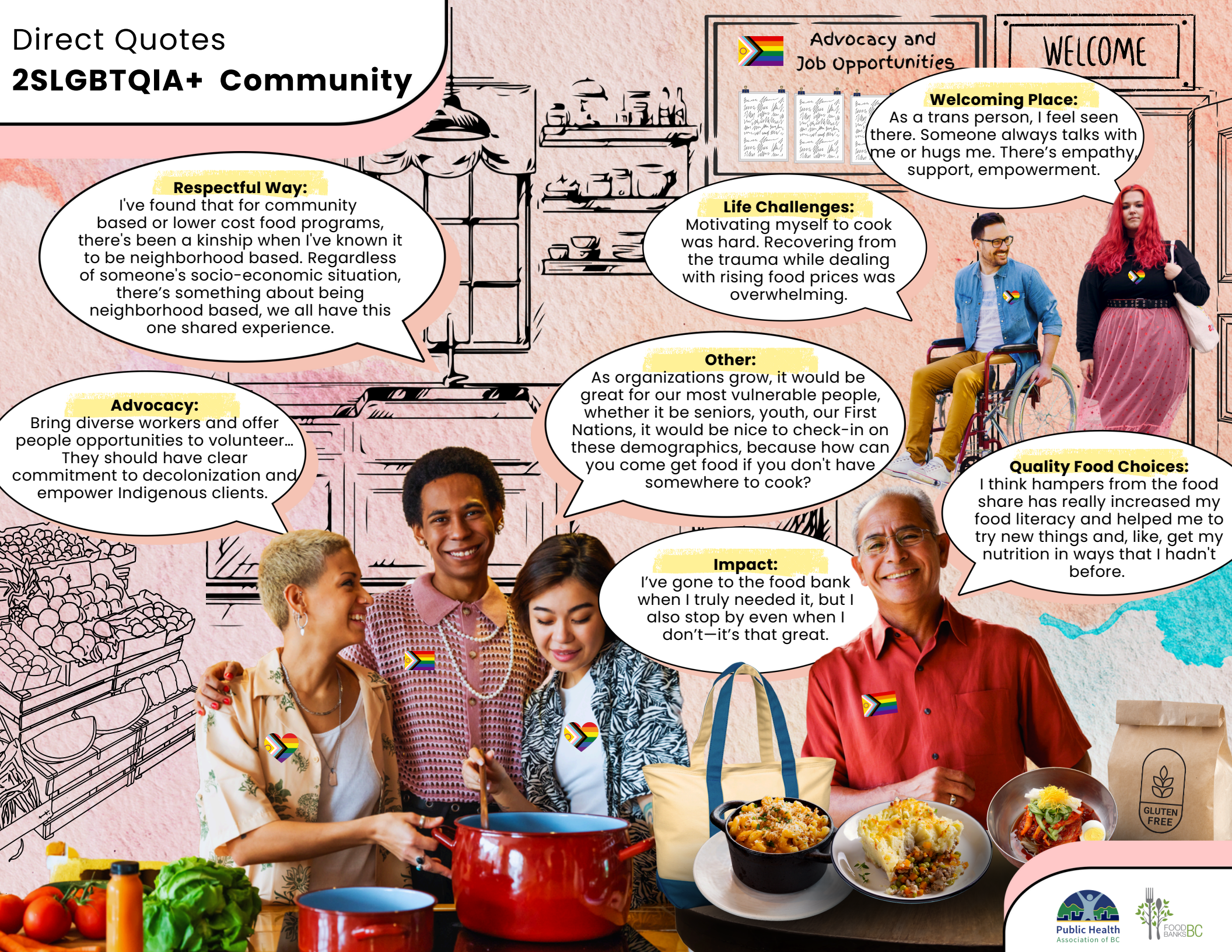
Life Challenges:
Motivating myself to cook was hard. Recovering from the trauma while dealing with rising food prices was overwhelming.

Welcoming Place:
As a trans person, I feel seen there. Someone always talks with me or hugs me. There's empathy, support, empowerment.

Other:
As organizations grow, it would be great for our most vulnerable people, whether it be seniors, youth, our First Nations, it would be nice to check-in on these demographics, because how can you come get food if you don't have somewhere to cook?

Impact:
I've gone to the food bank when I truly needed it, but I also stop by even when I don't—it's that great.

Quality Food Choices:
I think hampers from the food share has really increased my food literacy and helped me to try new things and, like, get my nutrition in ways that I hadn't before.



Public Health Association of BC

FOOD BANKS BC

Recipe for Dignified Food Access:
2SLGBTQIA+ Community

Region: Mix
Area: Mix
Program: Food Bank
# of participants: 5



For many participants, the food program has been more than just nourishment. It has been **critical support system during challenging times in their lives.**



One participant shared that they **found purpose in volunteering with a food delivery service,** helping others who, like them, faced challenges accessing food.



Beyond the financial struggle, 2SLGBTQIA+ community members faced additional barriers. **Navigating public spaces are difficult due to the fear of discrimination.**



2SLGBTQIA+ participants placed a unique emphasis on representation and visibility within welcoming spaces. Pride flags, volunteers and staff who reflect the community's diversity, and an overall festive atmosphere.



Community members sought environments where they could see themselves represented, feel safe expressing their identity, and experience a **sense of genuine belonging.**



2SLGBTQIA+ participants expressed a desire for more health-conscious food choices that also accommodate dietary preferences – e.g. gluten-free, vegan, and culturally diverse options.



Advocacy is a priority for 2SLGBTQIA+ community members, with an explicit focus on diversity, inclusion, and empowerment.



2SLGBTQIA+ participants expressed interest in life skills training, job resource networks, emergency information, and **creating spaces that offer support beyond immediate food access.**

Families and Couples

Region: Vancouver Coastal
Area: Urban
Program: Food Bank
# of participants: 9

Life Challenges
Families and couples seek food support due to inadequate income and the need to stretch thin budgets. One participant uses the market program to help lower monthly expenditures. Two other participants shared that the food program helps them stretch their income and manage financial stress. One mother who is also a newcomer to Canada has been participating in food access programming for six months as a way to ensure that her children have consistent access to fresh foods when income is limited. Managing food costs has been stressful for families with children.

Impact
For many participants, the food access program isn't just about food — it's about a sense of security amid unpredictable income and financial constraints. The food program has helped them stretch their budget, ensuring they don't have to make difficult choices about groceries every week. The structured nature of the food program has helped many manage their finances better, reducing the constant burden of meal planning and shopping. Participants are finding that they now have more flexibility to offer different foods to their families without the same financial risk. In a phase of life where time and money are equally scarce, the program has made a real difference, giving people peace of mind and an ability to balance nutrition and budgeting while navigating the unpredictable eating habits of young children.

Welcoming Place
Families and couples viewed welcoming spaces through the lens of family-friendliness. Child-friendly environments, staff who engage with entire families, and spaces that accommodate different family configurations were crucial. They sought environments where children felt comfortable and parents did not feel additional stress while accessing food support. Many shared that the support is more than just financial, it's about the sense of community and kindness they've encountered along the way.

Quality Food Choices
Participants were most concerned with reducing food waste and accommodating children's potentially selective eating habits. They sought diverse options that could be incorporated into family meals, with an emphasis on items that could be used flexibly and might encourage children to try new foods.

Respectful Way
Families and couples saw respect through the lens of practical support and non-judgmental assistance. Respectful interactions meant staff who understood the complexities of family nutrition, offered flexibility, and provided support without questioning individual circumstances or making recipients feel uncomfortable.

Advocacy
Families and couples were particularly interested in advocacy that addressed environmental sustainability, food waste reduction, and creating more flexible, responsive food support systems that accommodate diverse family needs.

Other
Participants expressed interest in online recipe-sharing platforms, increased recipe literacy, community kitchen opportunities, and mechanisms for connecting with other community members.

Direct Quotes
Families and Couples

Other:
Perhaps an optional online community or Facebook group for the cohort to share recipe ideas. Maybe it's an option to take some food in a different day, maybe weekend.

Welcoming Place:
I can look around and see young, old, and not all white people the same age… Unwelcoming can be not friendly or not children oriented.

Advocacy:
Donate to existing food or meal programs. Continue to advocate [to address] the food scarcity experienced, [talk] with government agencies who could better support

Life Challenges:
Honestly, kids eat a lot, we don't have so much money to buy everything they want, especially fruits

Impact:
I really like the concept of not having to think about what to make and then buy the ingredients, I think that actually ends up making you spend more money.

Respectful Way:
Not having to declare your income status, prove your need. They will accept you however you are. It feels really dignified when the organization focuses on food waste and that you are helping prevent food waste by being a member rather than just accessing it because you're in need.

Quality Food Choices:
While I know expired things are okay sometimes, but sometimes it's too expired to feed my kids. For me, it's okay. But if it's too expired and I tell the person at the front, sometimes they try to convince me that it's fine. Kids with stomach issues are no joke.



Public Health Association of BC

FOOD BANKS BC

Recipe for Dignified Food Access:
Families and Couples

Region: Vancouver Coastal
Area: Urban
Program: Food Bank
# of participants: 9



For many participants, the food access program isn't just about food—**it's about a sense of security amid unpredictable income and financial constraints.**



Families and couples were interested in **community kitchen opportunities**, and mechanisms for **connecting with other community members.**



Families and couples sought environments where children felt comfortable and **parents did not feel additional stress while accessing food support.**



Families and couples viewed welcoming spaces through the lens of family-friendliness. Child-friendly environments, and **spaces that accommodate different family configurations were crucial.**



Families and couples sought diverse options that could be **incorporated into family meals,** with an emphasis on items that could be used flexibly and might encourage children to try new foods.



Respectful interactions meant **staff who understood the complexities of family** nutrition, offered flexibility, and provided support without making recipients feel uncomfortable.



Families and couples were interested in advocacy that addressed **environmental sustainability, food waste reduction,** and creating more **flexible, responsive food support.**



Families and couples had an interest in **online recipe-sharing platforms**... Getting advice from community members, striking up conversations about food, and making it fun.

Immigrants and Refugees

Region: Fraser Health
Area: Urban
Program: Food Bank
# of participants: 9

Life Challenges
Many immigrant and refugee participants shared unique, yet interconnected experiences related to financial constraints, difficulty accessing government services, difficulty finding employment, and the rising cost of living. Unemployment has also left community members vulnerable to food insecurity. One participant discussed the age discrimination and language barriers he faced in trying to seek employment. Other participants discussed the heavy burden that inflation places on low-income families. With the cost of living soaring, the food program has been a huge help. One participant is retired but does not have enough savings to afford his living expenses, so the food access program has been vital for him. Another participant shared that her disability income is inadequate, so the program helps her have access to food.

Impact
The food program has become a lifeline for many participants, navigating an uncertain landscape where putting food on the table is not always guaranteed. One participant is a retiree who is struggling with health issues while also struggling to afford necessities like food. The food program has been an important asset, helping to ensure some stability. Similarly, another participant has relied on the savings incurred through accessing the food program. Another participant started coming to the food program when they began accessing disability supports. Navigating both a reduced disability payment and the challenge of finding culturally appropriate food options has been challenging, and the food program has provided essential support.

Welcoming Place
Multilingual support and equal treatment are key aspects of a welcoming environment for immigrants and refugees. Translation services, staff who greet people equally, and an atmosphere that breaks down linguistic and cultural barriers were particularly important. They valued spaces that acknowledged diverse backgrounds without making individuals feel singled out or different.

Quality Food Choices
Immigrant and refugee participants emphasized the importance of variety and agency in food choices. They appreciated being able to select culturally relevant and fresh items, which allowed them to meet their dietary needs and preferences.

Respectful Way
Many participants defined respect as equitable treatment and linguistic accessibility. Respectful interactions meant being greeted politely, provided translation support, and treated without discrimination. They valued environments where everyone was treated equally, regardless of language proficiency or cultural background.

Advocacy
Immigrant and refugee participants viewed advocacy through economic and systemic lenses, emphasizing the need to address inflation, acquire more funding for food support, and create pathways for community integration and support. They also stressed the need for greater government involvement to address growing demand for food support services and address logistical challenges such as transportation and food delivery.

Other
Participants valued platforms for sharing their experiences and ideas, expressing a strong desire for their voices to be heard through publications and community discussions. They also mentioned logistical challenges, such as limited and paid parking, and called for solutions to improve accessibility.

Direct Quotes
Immigrants and Refugees



Other:
We're trying to do publications. I'm part of the voices of the people; it encourages people to come out and bring their ideas. We want to publish them so their voices can be heard, and we can learn from them

Welcoming Place:
Welcome all people. Help with translation. When you walk into a place, and they don't look down on you and the community members. They accept you for who you are.

Advocacy:
The inflation rate is high. Things are getting harder for families, communities, and all that. We have few organizations like this. Such organizations need to be encouraged… the government needs to look for ways of encouraging them.

Respectful Way:
They give me the opportunity to select what I need. They don't say you can't take this or this. Unlike other foodbanks where you line up, they line up everything and I choose what I want. This place is pretty special for me in particular.

Impact:
This place is a lifeline for me. It's a difference between whether I eat or go famished. I've been coming here for three years.

Life Challenges:
When I came to Canada as an immigrant, I was told that at my age no one would hire me. My language is not good. I needed to eat… I searched for food and found this place. They give me not only to me, but to anyone coming here.

Quality Food Choices:
We can choose anything. Milk, bread always. Bread, milk, vegetarian, apple, banana. Different stuff to choose for kids. Sometimes we take 2 bags, 3 bags.

Public Health Association of BC

FOOD BANKS BC

Recipe for Dignified Food Access:
Immigrants and Refugees

Region: Fraser Health
Area: Urban
Program: Food Bank
# of participants: 9



Participants discussed the heavy burden that inflation places on low-income families. **With the cost-of-living soaring, the food program has been a huge help.**



Immigrant and refugee participants mentioned l**ogistical challenges**, such as limited and paid parking, and called for **solutions to improve accessibility.**



Immigrant and refugee participants valued spaces that acknowledged diverse backgrounds **without making individuals feel singled out or different.**



Immigrant and refugee participants emphasized the importance of variety and agency in food choices. They appreciated being able to select **culturally relevant and fresh foods.**



Immigrant and refugee participants defined respect as **equitable treatment and linguistic accessibility.**



Immigrant and refugee participants viewed **advocacy through economic and systemic lenses**, emphasizing the need to address inflation, acquire more funding for food support, and create pathways for community integration and support.



Immigrant and refugee participants stressed the need for **greater government involvement, growing demand for food support services and logistical challenges** such as transportation and food delivery.



Immigrant and refugee participants valued platforms for sharing their experiences and ideas, expressing a **strong desire for their voices to be heard** through publications and community discussions.

Indigenous

Region: Northern
Area: Reserve, Remote
Program: Multiple Food Programs
# of participants: 3

Life Challenges

The Indigenous group shared that accessing food programs is a necessity driven by the rising cost of living and limited number of food producers and retailers in the area. High gas prices and transportation challenges make purchasing food from out-of-town grocers both costly and time-consuming. Others, like a grandmother raising three grandchildren on a limited income, rely on community food support to stretch their resources and avoid long trips to the grocery store. Participants discussed the challenges associated with limited incomes, food access in rural communities, and access to traditional foods. One participant discussed the balancing act at the grocery store, selecting foods she can afford while ensuring her children have the nutritious food they love. Parents often go without eating to prioritize their children's needs and ensure they have fresh fruit and nutritious lunches.

Impact

Through the food program, participants have found stability. The food program has been a lifeline. One participant shared she now travels less frequently to grocery stores, and can stretch her resources further. In addition to that support, the food program helps ensure her grandchildren have enough food. Having access to these resources means she can focus on providing stability for her grandkids without the added stress of constant travel and high expenses. The food program has given her the ability to navigate the challenges of raising her grandchildren with dignity, ensuring that they are fed and cared for. Beyond financial relief, the program provides a sense of support and connection in the community. One participant shared that the rising cost of living has been a huge weight to carry, especially when living off reserve. Moving back to the community and having access to supports has provided some relief.

Welcoming Place

For Indigenous participants, welcoming spaces were perceived as being warm, familiar, and clean. Positive, professional staff who greet individuals and offer clear guidance were essential. They praised spaces that offer coffee, tea, and communal seating to create an inviting and stigma-free environment. One participant shared the significance of living on reserve, where she can receive support from both family and the Nation to raise her grandchildren, demonstrating the importance of programs being embedded in the communities they serve.

Quality Food Choices

Indigenous participants valued fresh, diverse, and culturally relevant food options. Programs that incorporated traditional practices such as butchering, canning, and foraging were highly appreciated for fostering a connection to cultural traditions. They also identified gaps in dietary accommodations for children with unique needs, as well as challenges in accessing fresh produce in remote locations and the need for transportation support to reach better food options. In reflecting on the program, one participant hopes for even more traditional food options to be incorporated into the program, recognizing the importance of cultural food practices.

Respectful Way

Indigenous community members emphasized the importance of community-led programming that respected traditional knowledge and practices. They particularly valued approaches that recognized the diversity of Indigenous food traditions, noting that respectful service delivery must avoid making assumptions about Indigenous food practices as one homogeneous category.

Advocacy

The Indigenous group prioritized advocacy for Indigenous food sovereignty and local food production through collaboration with other organizations and councils. They identified transportation and logistical support as critical gaps due to geographic isolation limiting access to fresh, affordable food. They also emphasized the need for streamlined, stigma-free processes and systemic efforts to restore traditional food systems impacted by colonialism.

Other

The Indigenous group expressed interest in community gathering spaces, offering volunteer opportunities, and conducting surveys to understand community needs. They also called for dedicated roles to oversee programs and emphasized integrating traditional and contemporary education to sustain cultural practices.

Direct Quotes
Indigenous



Quality Food Choices:
With all the diabetes and all that sickness from the other foods, I'd like to see more of the traditional ways on the reserve.

Impact:
I felt like I was on my own. I didn't have the support that I get now. I really appreciate it.

Life Challenges:
It's so hard nowadays. You go to the store to buy a few things, and it's $100. It's hard to make it stretch. I usually go without the stuff I really want, just so I can make sure the kids have good lunch food.

Respectful Way:
In our traditions, we get taught visually. When it comes to cooking and foods, we're taught visually. That's what this program is doing, it's showing us visually. You're doing it instead of hearing it. As a kid, that's how I remember getting taught.

Welcoming Place:
[A food access organization] has coffee and tea, and you can grab whatever, and they have the sitting area. That's welcoming when you go in.

Other:
When community members get together, they can have power.

Advocacy:
Communities need to prioritize sovereignty. Other nations actually have people that are specifically hired for food sovereignty. They oversee the programs, apply for grants, they do all that kind of thing. The groups that are listed on the grants should really be working together and spearheading this in a certain direction. A department should be spearheading and organizing all of the food funding that's going through that community. Really focusing on the services - instead of working in silos, working together.

Public Health Association of BC

FOOD BANKS BC

Recipe for Dignified Food Access:
Indigenous

Region: Northern
Area: Reserve, Remote
Program: Multiple Food Programs
# of participants: 3



The Indigenous group emphasized the need for **streamlined, stigma-free processes and systemic efforts to restore traditional food systems** impacted by colonialism.



Programs that incorporated **traditional practices such as butchering, canning, and foraging** were highly appreciated for fostering a connection to cultural traditions.



The Indigenous group praised spaces that offer coffee, tea, and communal seating to **create an inviting and stigma-free environment.**



Participants also identified gaps in **dietary accommodations for children with unique needs**, as well as challenges in accessing **fresh produce in remote locations**.



The group particularly valued approaches that **recognized the diversity of Indigenous food traditions**, noting that respectful service delivery must avoid making assumptions about Indigenous food practices as one homogeneous category.



One participant shared the **significance of living on reserve**, where she can receive support from both family and the Nation to raise her grandchildren, demonstrating the **importance of programs being embedded in the communities they serve.**



The Indigenous group suggested **creating community gathering spaces**, offering volunteer opportunities, and conducting surveys to understand community needs.



They also called for **dedicated roles to oversee programs** and emphasized integrating traditional and contemporary education to sustain cultural practices.

Older Adults/ Seniors

Region: Island
Area: Rural/ Remote
Program: Meal Program
# of participants: 8

Life Challenges
Older adults and seniors stated they first came to the meal program to see neighbours and have a convenient meal, and stayed for the sense of belonging it creates. For many, the meal program provides a vital opportunity to stay engaged, especially in a small island setting where social interactions can otherwise be limited. It serves as a vital touchstone for those who might otherwise feel isolated. One resident shared that working from home can be isolating. Another longtime participant, having moved from Vancouver where they felt invisible, cherishes the small gatherings. Another participant moved to Galiano over 30 years ago and relished in the spirit of volunteerism that birthed the food program and shared a sense of pride that the meal program was built by the community, for the community.

Impact
For many, the meal program is a place to stay socially engaged. What they found was more than just a warm meal; they found a community that embraced them, offering not just sustenance but connection. One participant describes it as a "no-brainer" —a space where volunteers pour their time, creativity, and energy into providing home-cooked meals while fostering a sense of community. The diversity of food programs offered brings families together in a way that transcends digital distractions. Parents get a well-deserved break from cooking, while kids immerse themselves in board games and conversation. It's not just about the food; it's about weaving the social fabric of the island.

Welcoming Place
For older adults and seniors, a welcoming place meant consistent reliability and a sense of community continuity. They valued weekly events with familiar faces, long tables that encouraged sitting together, and clear signage that explicitly welcomed all ages. The regularity and predictability of the program created a sense of comfort and belonging that extended beyond mere food access.

Quality Food Choices
Older adults and seniors prioritized locally sourced, fresh produce and home-cooked meals. They appreciated programs offering fresh fruits, green vegetables, and soups prepared on-site. The quality of food was intrinsically linked to its freshness and local origin, with a strong preference for items that reflected the community's agricultural context.

Respectful Way
Beyond weekly meals, the program hosts festivals and seasonal events that foster both celebration and food self-sufficiency. Winter solstice brings the community together over turkey dinner, while the Nettle Festival in early spring highlights the bounty of local, wild-grown food. The program's reach extends into the community more broadly. During apple season, the program organizes volunteers to help elderly community members harvest apples from their trees. Older adults and seniors appreciated when respect was demonstrated through personal recognition and meaningful engagement. Being known by name, provided with proper utensils, and offered opportunities to provide feedback were key indicators of respectful treatment. They appreciated programs that acknowledged different cultural norms and created spaces for genuine dialogue.

Advocacy
Older adults and seniors emphasized advocacy for food security initiatives that promote self-sufficiency. They also highlighted the need for formal transportation networks.

Other
Participants indicated a need for community outreach, including message boards to enhance program accessibility and engagement. They also expressed interest in more community building and collaboration with local organizations, as well as educational programs like foraging and equipment sharing.

Direct Quotes:
Older Adults/ Seniors

Impact:
The breadth of this program is astonishing. It's not just about feeding people; it's about ensuring that no resource, no connection, no opportunity to care for one another goes to waste.





Other:
We're on the young end of seniors, and I think, what am I going to do when I don't feel comfortable driving anymore? I do think about that. The meal program is just fabulous, there are volunteers that will drive the food to feed people.

Respectful Way:
The Christmas, winter solstice. We get 250 people in here, whole turkey dinner, the whole thing. We have nettle fest, a summer picnic, and a blackberry festival and mushroom picking.

Life Challenges:
Back then, we didn't have the Community Food Program, but the spirit of volunteerism was already strong… We now have an extraordinary program where we can share in fine food, and it all comes back to gathering around the table.

Quality Food Choices:
I live on my own and take meals home. They are the decent meals I eat…often at night when I'm tired, a bowl of cereal would do. Now I can have Shepherd's Pie.



Advocacy:
The festivals take place here in the central space, and they bring in experts; we've got our own now. The programs are more towards how people can be self-sufficient.



Welcoming Place:
[Meal Program] is such a wonderful community program. I don't think I ever came in to sit down and have soup before I started volunteering. It makes me happy to see everyone and all the different age groups there, and the babies sitting on their highchairs, and the little preschoolers running around. And the old guys. It's a wonderful cross section of the community, and it's the best thing.

Public Health Association of BC

FOOD BANKS BC

Recipe for Dignified Food Access:
Older Adults/ Seniors

Region: Island
Area: Rural/ Remote
Program: Meal Program
# of participants: 8



Older adults and seniors stated they first came to the meal program to see neighbours and have a convenient meal, and stayed for the sense of belonging it creates. For many, **it's a vital opportunity to stay engaged.**



For older adults and seniors, a welcoming place meant **consistent reliability and a sense of community continuity.** Parents get a well-deserved break from cooking, while kids immerse themselves in board games and conversation.



They valued weekly events with familiar faces, long tables that encouraged sitting together, and clear signage that explicitly welcomed all ages. **The regularity and predictability of the program created a sense of comfort and belonging.**



Older adults and seniors prioritized locally sourced, fresh produce and home-cooked meals. They appreciated programs offering **fresh fruits, green vegetables, and soups prepared on-site.**



The quality of food was intrinsically linked to its freshness and local origin, with a strong preference for items that reflected the **community's agricultural context.**



Key indicators of respectful treatment included: being known by name, proper utensils, and opportunities to provide feedback.



Older adults and seniors appreciated when respect was demonstrated through **personal recognition and meaningful engagement.**



Older adults and seniors indicated a **need for community outreach**, including message boards to enhance program accessibility and engagement, and educational programs like foraging and equipment sharing.

Post-Secondary Students

Region: Fraser
Area: Peri-Urban
Program: Food Pantry
# of participants: 7

Life Challenges

Post secondary students access the food pantry primarily due to the high costs associated with education and living expenses. International students highlighted that financial challenges associated with steep tuition fees and relocation costs make it difficult to afford both rent and food, even while working multiple jobs. Additionally, the rising price of groceries, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables, makes it challenging for students to maintain a balanced diet. On-campus food prices are also high and the pantry serves as an essential resource that helps students manage their expenses while continuing their studies. Student participants shared having to decide between buying food and covering other essential costs. One international student works two jobs, which still isn't enough to cover school and living costs. Another student discussed the high cost of relocating from another country, which led to financial stresses before classes even began. With the rising cost of groceries, fresh and nutritious food has become unattainable for many students.

Impact

The food pantry has become an important support system, allowing students to focus on their studies without constantly worrying about food. For many students facing overwhelming financial burdens, the food pantry has been invaluable. This is especially true for international students who pay extremely high tuition fees and often support family members back home. One international student who volunteers at the food pantry has seen firsthand how many of his peers turn to the service in their third year, when financial stress reaches its peak. Students are grateful for the food they receive, especially the access to fresh produce, a sentiment echoed by many who have used the pantry. The food pantry provides an important safety net, ensuring students don't have to choose between rent and food.

Welcoming Place

For students, a welcoming place meant peer-driven support and an absence of institutional formality. They preferred environments staffed by fellow students who could relate to their experiences, with affirming quotes and signs that created a sense of community. The ability to engage in casual conversations and feel supported by peers was paramount. One challenge with the program is its location, especially for those at the Burnaby campus. Revealing the significance of decentralized programming that is accessible and embedded in community.

Quality Food Choices

Students focused on practical food choices that supported varied cooking skills and lifestyles. They preferred fresh produce, non-perishable ingredients, and foods that could be easily prepared with minimal specialized equipment. Brand variety and the ability to choose items that could be transformed into multiple dishes were particularly valued.

Respectful Way

Students viewed respect as normalizing food access and reducing associated stigma. Respectful interactions meant being treated like any other grocery shopper, engaging in casual conversations, and creating a sense of community. They appreciated staff who remembered personal details and made interactions feel genuine and supportive. Students also sought additional resources like gift cards for off-days, expanded pantry locations, delivery options for those with disabilities, and support mechanisms to help transition out of food insecurity.

Advocacy

Students focused on advocacy that destigmatizes food insecurity, increases awareness, and creates educational opportunities. They discussed the logistical challenges such as delivery options for those with disabilities and the need for resources to transition out of food insecurity. They also highlighted social stigma as a significant barrier, suggesting more education and staff training to mitigate these issues.

Other

Students valued collaborations with student-run organizations and emphasized the need to integrate food security initiatives into broader institutional programming. They suggested making the food pantry more visible through school events and expanding its reach across multiple campuses. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of consistent food access by proposing solutions such as grocery store gift cards and larger pantry spaces.

Direct Quotes:
Post-Secondary Students

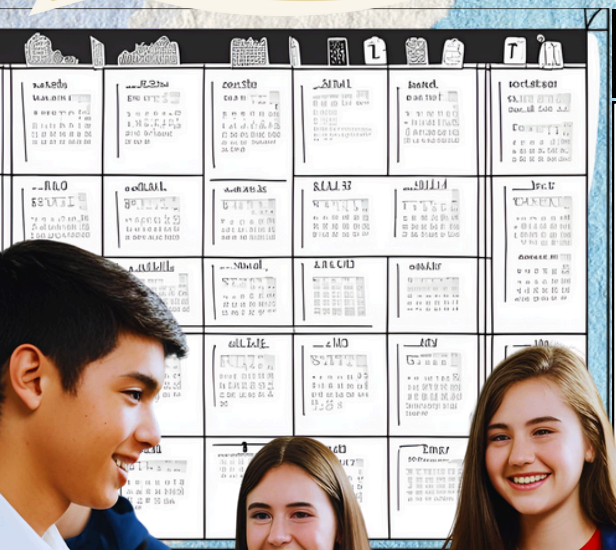




Other:
Collaborate with student-run organizations... Put the pantry more front and centre by weaving it into more school programming such as Welcome Day or Clubs Day.

Welcoming Place:
Considering how these programs are utilized by people who may not have access to cars that easily, it would be nice to have the pantry open throughout the week, so whenever they are on campus, they can grab food and be on their way.

Advocacy:
Social stigma, feeling ashamed, depression, or anxiousness could be barriers for people using food programs. To mitigate that social stigma, more education to increase awareness of how food insecurity is a prevalent problem, and training staff to be empathetic.





Quality Food Choices:
I have access to instant food on my own [...] If the [food pantry] can support us leading healthier lives and offering us better options [i.e. fresh food] to have us be on a better path to general health, it would feel a lot nicer.

Respectful Way:
Respect is treating an individual with dignity, never making them feel less than for their choice to use such facilities.

Impact:
I'm really grateful for the food pantry. After going, it felt like a burden lifted off my shoulders. One less thing to worry about. I felt supported by the school and the local community too.

Life Challenges:
Even when I do work two jobs to pay [tuition fees], I also have to send some money back to my parents to support them.



Public Health Association of BC

FOOD BANKS BC

Recipe for Dignified Food Access:

Post-Secondary Students

Region: Fraser
Area: Peri-Urban
Program: Food Pantry
# of participants: 7



The food pantry provides an important safety net, ensuring students **don't have to choose between rent and food.**



Students preferred environments **staffed by fellow students who could relate** to their experiences, with affirming quotes and signs that created a sense of community.



For students, a welcoming place meant **peer-driven support and an absence of institutional formality.**



Students preferred **fresh produce, non-perishable ingredients**, and foods that could be easily prepared with minimal specialized equipment.



Respectful interactions meant **being treated like any other grocery shopper, engaging in casual conversations, and creating a sense of community.**



Students also sought additional resources like gift cards for off-days, expanded pantry locations, delivery options for those with disabilities, and support **mechanisms to help transition out of food insecurity.**



Students focused on advocacy that **destigmatizes food insecurity, increases awareness, and creates educational opportunities.**



They suggested making the food pantry **more visible through school events** and **expanding its hours and reach across multiple campuses.**

Unhoused

Region: Vancouver Coastal
Area: Urban
Program: Meal Program
# of participants: 6

Life Challenges

Many unhoused community members are on low or fixed income. Income challenges and housing instability are the primary reasons participants access food programs, with some relying on meal programs due to not having access to kitchen appliances. For instance, one participant cited inadequate housing and the inability to store food and manage their expenses. Living in an SRO (single-room occupancy), they feel caught between being "half homeless and half housed." The instability of their living situation is compounded by the practical limitations of their tiny space. The takeaway meal program ensures community members always have a meal which brings relief to many participants. Another participant shared that grocery shopping became overwhelming as prices rose. The fear of not having enough has led her to withdraw from food shopping altogether.

Impact

For many community members, the meal program has become a lifeline, offering access to food without the financial strain or the stress of grocery shopping. Participants described how the meal program is more than just a resource —it's a dependable, daily safety net. One participant spoke to the reliability of the program, that no matter how tight things get, they can fall back on the program.

Welcoming Place

The unhoused group emphasized the need for welcoming spaces that prioritize empathy, flexibility, and trauma-informed approaches. Pet-friendly environments and staff who express genuine care and concern were particularly valued, while rigid rules and judgmental attitudes created barriers. One participant pointed out that other food programs are also getting more challenging to find, indicating how important it is to have community embedded programs that are easily recognizable and accessible.

Quality Food Choices

The unhoused group highlighted the importance of access to fresh produce, shelf-stable foods, and market-style setups that allow personal choice. They expressed significant concerns about food quality and distrust in some sources due to experiences with spoiled or unsafe items. They also identified several gaps in current food programs, primarily tied to the unique challenges of SRO living. Limited food storage and cooking facilities means unhoused community members require regular access to fresh meals and non-perishable foods. One participant shared that she severely lactose intolerant, making it difficult to find affordable food options that meet her dietary needs, so having access to lactose free options is critical.

Respectful Way

The unhoused community strongly opposed practices that objectified their circumstances, particularly rejecting programs that took photos or videos for promotional purposes without consent. They emphasized the importance of being treated as equal community members rather than charity recipients, with particular sensitivity to staff behaviors that suggested ownership or control over donated resources. They valued environments where their dietary needs were taken seriously without making them feel ungrateful for requesting accommodations. Another participant worries about the high cost of food, but also her unpredictable income. Her pension comes at the end of the month, but her circumstances are such that the payment is sometimes delayed. While the payment delay restricts her income, the food program staff are extremely accommodating and make sure she always has a place to come and food to eat.

Advocacy

The unhoused group advocated for systemic changes to address root causes of food insecurity. They encouraged advocacy efforts that focus on addressing the high cost of living and housing, which directly impacts food security. Participants also pointed out disparities in how resources are allocated, with families and seniors often prioritized over other vulnerable groups. They stressed the need for structural changes to bridge these gaps and create a more inclusive and equitable food support system.

Other

The unhoused group proposed decentralized food access through community food hubs and highlighted the value of resource maps that make food programs more accessible. They emphasized the need for stronger government involvement, noting that real change must come from policymakers rather than just advocacy organizations. They also expressed frustration with systemic inefficiencies since existing programs often support organizations more than individuals in need. They called for standardized and more effective food distribution to ensure resources are truly accessible and meet diverse needs.

Direct Quotes:
Unhoused

Respectful Way:
He knows when I haven't got my pension. He will stock up a bag or one of those crates with whatever he can find for me until I get my pension.

Quality Food Choices:
The problem with some of these [other] free food places that give out free groceries that get donated to them is that they'll put produce out that is rotten. It's like a slap in poor peoples' faces when they give you rotten produce and stuff like that. If they're receiving rotten food, it should be thrown out. That's a big issue with [other food programs]; they're putting out rotten food. When we say something about it, we're made to feel like we're ungrateful, but they wouldn't eat it themselves. It's gonna make people sick. It's a huge problem.



Other:
Something is up in the government there, It's just wrong. They think they're helping us, but they're not really helping us. They're helping the organizations that are getting it from them. That's all they're really helping. They're not really helping the average Joe over here.

Life Challenges:
Being in an SRO, I'm half homeless and half housed. I have a special diet, so when buying groceries you don't have a freezer; there are mini fridges.

Impact:
I'm grateful to this place here, I can fall back here no matter what. It's seven days a week for breakfast or for lunch. I know in the back of my head it's here.

Welcoming Place:
What about the people? Some places treat it like it's coming from their own pocket. This place doesn't make you feel that way at all. You can come here, get a good meal, the people are polite. It's nice to not be treated like lowlife poor people waiting to die.

Advocacy:
Access to knowledge [of various food programs] is not well given, and that's the problem too... it needs to be more accessible to get that information, so you know where they're at. A lot of organizations are confusing. There are quite a few restaurants... you get a discount if you're a senior. Having that information would help us.

Public Health Association of BC

FOOD BANKS BC

Recipe for Dignified Food Access: **Unhoused**

Region: Vancouver Coastal
Area: Urban
Program: Meal Program
# of participants: 6



For many community members, **the meal program has become a lifeline**, offering access to food without the financial strain or the stress of grocery shopping.



Income challenges and housing instability are the primary reasons participants access food programs, with some relying on meal programs due to not having access to kitchen appliances.



Pet-friendly environments and staff who express genuine care and concern were particularly valued, while rigid rules and judgmental attitudes created barriers.



The unhoused community **strongly opposed practices that objectified their circumstances**, particularly rejecting programs that took photos or videos for promotional purposes without consent.



They emphasized the importance of being treated as **equal community members rather than charity recipients,** with particular sensitivity to staff behaviors that suggested ownership or control over donated resources.



The unhoused group highlighted the importance of **access to fresh produce, shelf-stable foods, and market-style setups** that allow personal choice. They expressed significant concerns about food quality and distrust in some sources.



They valued environments where their **dietary needs were taken seriously** without making them feel ungrateful for requesting accommodations.



They emphasized the need for **stronger government involvement, noting that real change must come from policymakers** rather than just advocacy organizations.

Key Findings

The results of our study contributed to our understanding of what dignified food access looks like on the ground, in diverse settings, and under different contexts and conditions in BC.

(Re)Defining dignified food access

Taking a closer look at various food access programs and services across the province, we gained a better sense of the different features of DFA, and the diversity of ways food access organizations are creating Welcoming Places, Quality Food Choices, and Respectful Ways, as well as engaging in Advocacy. We also explored other potential qualities and features of dignified food access and found that Collaboration emerged as a theme that supported dignified access.

Across all demographic groups, participants consistently described **Welcoming Places** as environments characterized by warmth, friendliness, and genuine human connection. The fundamental elements of a welcoming space transcended individual group differences, with participants universally valuing spaces where they felt recognized, respected, and supported.



Volunteers and staff who greet individuals with genuine smiles, offer clear guidance, and create an atmosphere of inclusivity emerged as critical components of a welcoming environment. Participants across all groups emphasized the importance of having someone available to direct them, answer questions, and provide assistance without making them feel uncomfortable or judged.

Participants also had a perception of **Quality Food Choices** that extended beyond nutritional value. They consistently sought fresh, diverse, and culturally relevant food options that provided genuine choice and supported healthy eating. The ability to select foods rather than receive predetermined packages was universally important, with participants valuing programs that treated food access as a dignified experience of personal selection rather than a one-size-fits-all distribution model.

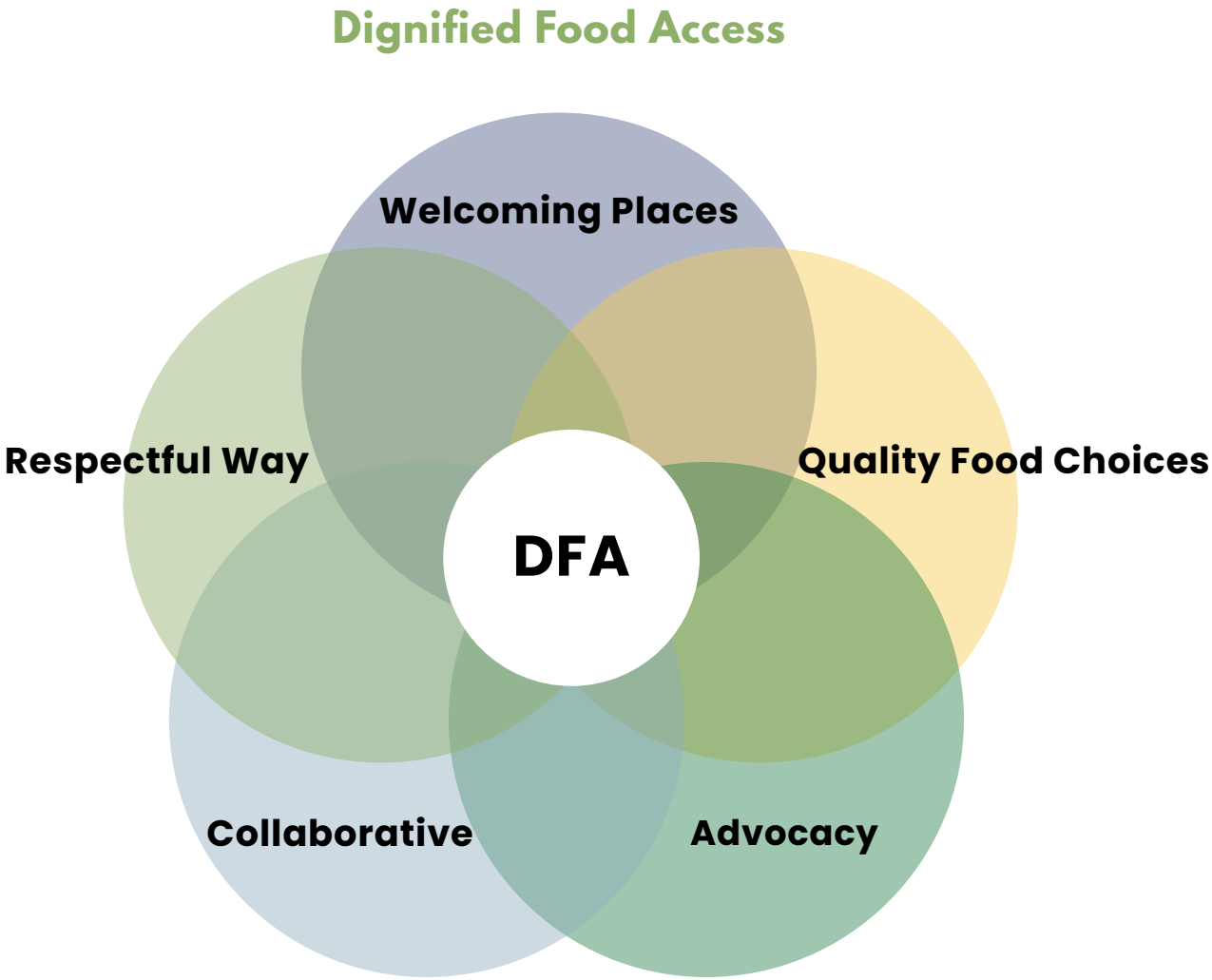
We learned from community members that **Respectful Way** was conceptualized as a holistic experience that went far beyond transactional food distribution. Participants consistently described respectful interactions as those that preserve individual dignity, offer genuine choice, and create an environment free from judgment.

The core elements of respect included staff and volunteers who communicate warmly, provide clear information, and treat recipients as valued community members rather than passive recipients of food supports.

Across all demographic groups, **Advocacy** was understood as a comprehensive approach to addressing systemic challenges surrounding food insecurity. Participants consistently expressed desires for organizations to engage beyond immediate food distribution, advocating for broader social changes that address root causes of food insecurity. This included addressing economic challenges, reducing food waste, supporting vulnerable populations, and creating platforms for community empowerment and education.

Finally, we identified a new and emergent quality of dignified food access: **Collaborative.** Participants consistently identified gaps in current systems that could be addressed through greater collaboration. Common themes included desire for increased educational support, more flexible service delivery, enhanced community connection, and proactive and comprehensive strategies to address underlying socioeconomic challenges.

Figure 15: Dignified Food Access in B.C.





Examples of dignified food access in BC

Galiano Community Food Program, Galiano Island
The Galiano Community Food Program (GCFP), is a non-profit organization founded in 2008, that serves the residents of Galiano Island and neighbouring island communities. Its mission is to cultivate a thriving, food-secure community where residents are welcome and empowered to participate actively in their local food system.

The Galiano Community Food Program offers diverse food programming focused on access, food literacy and community engagement. Programs include weekly soup and bread, frozen meals, a food bank, school lunch programs and gardens, and gleaning programs. Their food literacy activities include gardening workshops and an equipment lending library.

Their community events incorporate food in a social way such as potlucks, picnics and annual festivals. One of the most pivotal programs is the weekly soup and bread meal, which operates on a donation/ pay-what-you-can model. Members enjoy a bottomless bowl of homemade soup alongside fresh bread while sharing the company of neighbours, friends and newcomers at the local hall.

How Galiano Community Food Program creates DFA:

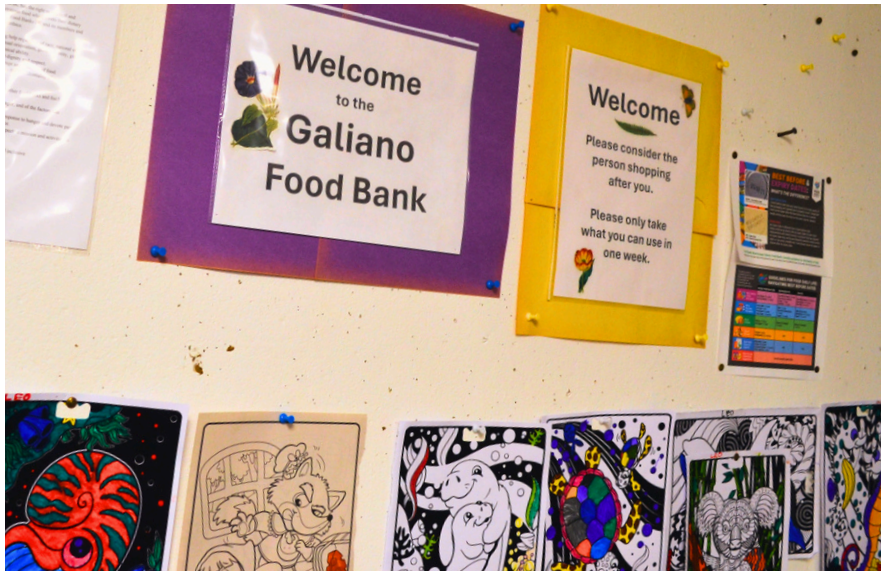
Welcoming Places
Creating an environment where food access extends beyond a meal. For many residents, the weekly soup and bread program is not just about receiving a meal but about sharing experiences, meeting new people, and strengthening relationships.

Quality Food Choices
Soup meals are made with fresh, local ingredients. Many community members consider homemade soup and bread their favourite meal of the week. Dietary accommodations are available, including dairy-free, vegetarian, and vegan options. The bottomless soup model allows participants to enjoy additional servings without any stigma.

Respectful Ways
As people line up for the soup and bread meal the atmosphere remains friendly and communal, with conversations flowing naturally among participants, volunteers, and staff. There is no distinction between community members receiving a meal and those volunteering.

Advocacy
Is at the heart of all GCFP's programming as their mission is to empower community members to become less reliant on emergency food assistance. Through their other food programs GCFP is teaching community members how to grow their own food, harvest and support themselves to be less reliant on emergency food assistance and create a sustainable food source.

Collaboration
Is essential to developing and empowering a community-driven food system. As a small island program, its growth and success rely heavily on partnerships with local farmers, neighbouring islands, local organizations and food programming assistance and grants provided by programs such as Farm to School BC.


Welcome
to the
Galiano
Food Bank
Welcome
Please consider the person shopping after you.
Please only take what you can use in one week.







Hope Community Services, Hope

Hope Community Services (HCS) is a non-profit multi-service agency founded in 1979, they are dedicated to supporting children, families, seniors, and individuals in Hope. Their mission focuses on sharing hope, helping others, and strengthening the community through various programs and resources. Hope Community Services offers a range of food programming aimed at addressing food security and fostering community engagement.

HCS' multi-component food program includes a market-style food bank, community meals, after-school food packs, food literacy workshops, a community garden, and meal delivery programs. Additional food services include online ordering, senior lunch programs, cooking classes, and a recently introduced family meal kit delivery program. Their grocery-style market allows members to come in and choose the foods that best suit their individual needs.







How Hope Community Services creates DFA:

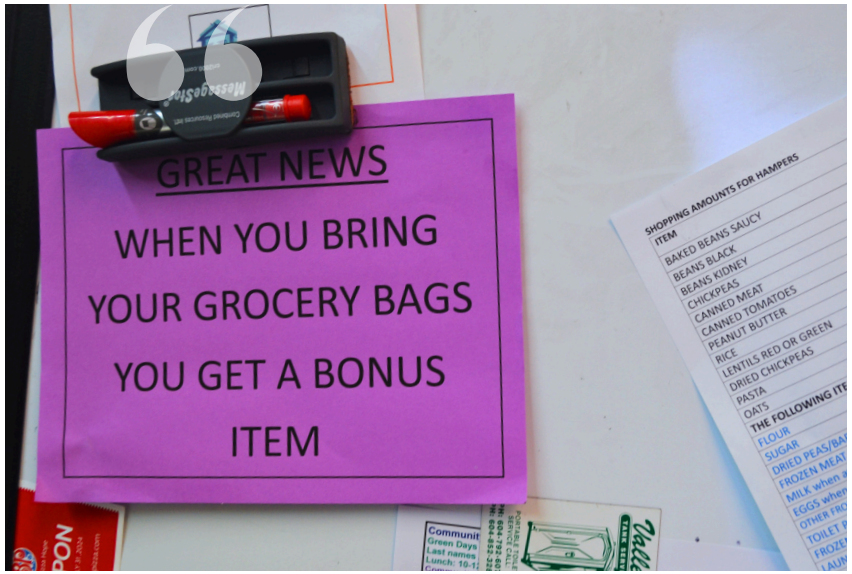
Welcoming Places
By offering community members a chance to enjoy coffee and meals while they wait for their number to be called instead of lining up for the market. Allowing community members using the market program to shop freely and take their time, while a staff member is fully present and able to assist them. Ensuring that spaces are inclusive and welcoming to all demographic communities through signage and flags.

Quality Food Choices
Are prioritized in the market-style food bank with fresh produce, canned goods, and dairy products available. In addition to food staples, HCS offers essential non-food items, such as feminine hygiene products, toiletries, and even birthday cake kits, ensuring that members have access to a well-rounded selection of necessities.

Respectful Ways
Ensuring a fair and equitable system for all members accessing the food bank. Their approach includes flexible scheduling for food bank access, allowing members to visit at different times throughout the month. By rotating assigned groups, all members have an opportunity to access food on the days that best suit their availability.

Advocacy
Through recognizing systemic issues and challenges that affect the community. Such as providing childcare for families participating in food literacy workshops and cooking programs, as there are limited childcare options in Hope preventing new parents and families from being able to participate in events and find employment.

Collaboration
Demonstrated through the development of new food programs that respond directly to community needs. For example, the meal delivery program was introduced after members inquired about food delivery options. Similarly, the cooking program was created after members expressed uncertainty about how to prepare the foods they received from the shopping market. The newest meal delivery initiative emerged when HCS observed that community members were contributing funds to help seniors pay for meals.





Kingdom Acts Foundation, Surrey
Kingdom Acts Foundation (KAF) is a nonprofit organization based in Surrey, BC, dedicated to serving BIPOC, new immigrants, and refugees through a range of multifaceted programs. Their mission is to address the intersecting challenges that come from inefficient immigrant resettlement processes and socioeconomic inequities while empowering communities to thrive. As Surrey is the second-largest city in the province and has the highest number of immigrant and refugee settlements, KAF plays a vital role in supporting these populations.



The organization offers capacity-building programs, including youth leadership and mentoring, crisis counselling, a women's network, resettlement support services, and a foodbank.The food bank operates twice a week and is open to all community members without requiring memberships or proof of income or legal status. Individuals line up on designated days and, upon reaching the front, select the food items they need with the assistance of staff and volunteers.

The food bank primarily relies on rescued and donated food, that is either delivered or KAF is traveling throughout Metro Vancouver to collect supplies from businesses and organizations. Additionally, meals and snacks are integrated into all KAFprograms.

Any surplus food that the organization cannot utilize is redistributed to othercharities and organizations within Surrey. KAF also supports communities through essential items such as toy drives, clothing hampers, athletic supplies for youth, basic necessities such as toiletries, feminine hygiene products and more.

Beyond providing emergency food access, KAF actively addresses food equity and the root causes of emergency food insecurity. It is a strong advocate for immigrant and refugee communities, engaging with post-secondary institutions and government agencies to drive systemic change.

How Kingdom Acts creates DFA:

Welcoming Places
Ensuring that staff and volunteers create a supportive and inclusive environment. Many volunteers are current or former members of KAF's services, choosing to give back to an organization from which they received support. A deep mutual respect exists among community members, volunteers, and staff, who prioritize relationship-building and connection.

Quality Food Choice
KAF strives to provide dignity through food selection and culturally relevant options for BIPOC communities. While donations determine the available food, members are given the autonomy to choose what best suits their needs based on availability and family size.

Respectful Way
Maintaining a judgment-free space where members are not required to present income statements or legal status. The organization actively empowers its community through a variety of programs that extend beyond food assistance. Volunteers receive training on respect and collaboration, ensuring a supportive environment for all.

Advocacy
A central value of KAF's mandate is that it works to address the systemic barriers that impact immigrant and refugee communities. The organization recognizes that resettlement is closely linked to challenges such as employment, housing, mental health, and poverty. Understanding that food access alone does not resolve these issues, KAF takes a systemic approach to community empowerment, aiming to help members transition away from emergency food assistance.

Collaboration
KAF forges strong partnerships with local businesses, food donors, government agencies, and other food access programs. They are an active participant at the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Land and Food Systems, hosting post-secondary students for hands-on learning about food access and equity for BIPOC communities. The organization also recognizes the need for a more structured approach to food recovery and distribution—not only for its operations but to benefit other food access organizations within Surrey. This includes advocating for shared storage systems for rescued and donated food and equitable food distribution processes. KAF is also a member of the United Way Food Hub in Surrey, reinforcing its commitment to collaborative and community-driven food access solutions.







Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, East Vancouver
Kiwassa Neighbourhood House (KNH) has been serving children, youth, adults, seniors, and families in East Vancouver for the past 60 years. Its multi-service programming model offers employment and settlement services, housing support, community-building initiatives, childcare programs, career planning, and food programs.

Fifteen years ago, KNH established a community-based food program to centralize and enhance its food services, ensuring better support for in-house community members. The food program now plays a crucial role in sustaining the organization, generating half of KNH's funding and directly supporting many of its initiatives.

KNH's food programming focuses on increasing access to high-quality food and promoting community well-being through food justice and social connection. Key initiatives include a low-cost produce market, in-house meal services for children's programs (such as meals, snacks, and breakfast clubs for after-school activities and events), and community gatherings like monthly lunches and picnics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, KNH began operating as an emergency food bank. Over time, its focus shifted toward food resource distribution, leading to the development of an emergency food hamper program.

Online cooking workshops were introduced, teaching participants how to prepare meals using the ingredients provided in the hampers. Following the pandemic, KNH launched an outdoor market in the park, which operated weekly for two years. This initiative later transitioned into the Neighbourhood House Market, which now runs once a week. The market is free to access, with no registration required, and offers fresh fruits and vegetables at reduced, affordable prices.



How Kiwassa Neighbourhood House creates DFA:

Welcoming Places
By welcoming anyone in the area or those accessing the market, KNH fosters a sense of belonging through community boards, signage, and special community-based events like the Pride Month Market. Cooking workshops are designed around community members sharing their favourite dishes from their culture and teaching them to the group.

Quality Food Choice
The vegetables and fruits available at the market are high-quality, rescued, and donated from local food banks and farmers. The setup allows members to choose the foods they need in the quantity they require, with no restrictions or limitations. Additionally, the produce is often as fresh—or even fresher—than what is available at chain grocery stores.

Respectful Ways
Food programs are built on collaboration between staff and the community. KNH is working to create a community advisory board to explore new ways of engaging with residents, gathering feedback, and conducting meaningful program evaluations. While they are always responsive to community input, they aim to further amplify voices and ensure direct engagement.

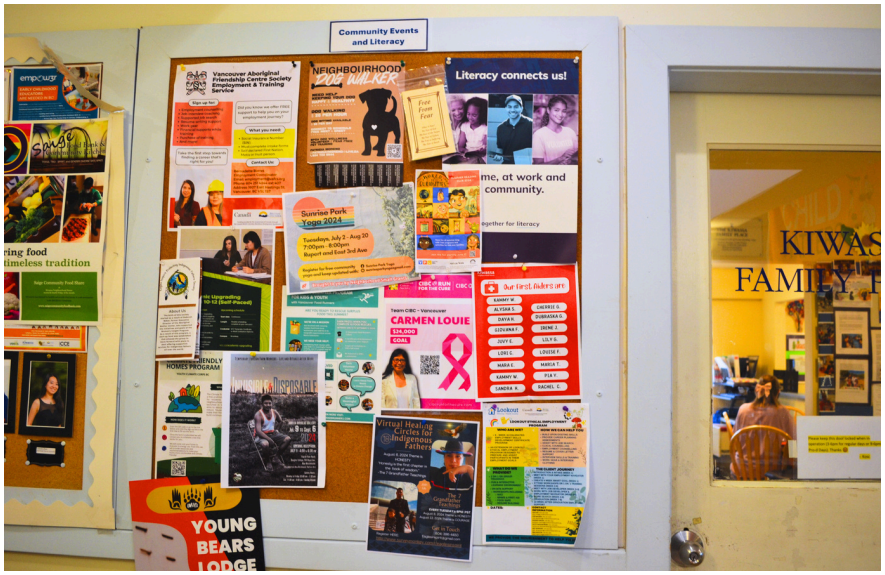
Advocacy
Recognizing the demographic shifts in the surrounding neighbourhoods—where million- dollar homes exist alongside supportive housing—KNH acknowledges food as a powerful tool for bringing people together. They are embedding services using a multidisciplinary approach and brainstorming ways to expand their reach, such as mobile markets, partnerships with other organizations, and reducing duplication of existing food programs. There is also a focus on incorporating more local food while respecting farmers' rights.

Collaboration
KNH actively engages in networks such as the Hasting Sunrise Community Food Network and collaborates with local food programs like Vancouver Urban Food Forest and Saige Food Bank. They are intentional about community engagement, ensuring resources reach the right people by forming partnerships with local Indigenous organizations like the Aboriginal Mother's Society.


KIWASSA NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE
COMMUNITY LUNCH
SUMMER LUNCH
CALENDAR
JULY - SEPTEMBER 2024
FRIDAY, JULY 5
BARLEY SOUP
BEEF OR TOFU BIBIMBAP
STRAWBERRY SHORT CAKE
FRIDAY, JULY 19
GARDEN SALAD
BEEF OR VEGGIE BURGER
FRESH FRUIT
FRIDAY, AUG 2 HAPPY PRIDE
PRIDE LUNCH
GAYZPACHO
TACOS
RAINBOW JELL-O
FRIDAY, AUGUST 16
CUCUMBER SALAD
SPEGHETTI & MEATBALL
ICE-CREAM
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6
TOMATO BASIL SOUP
CHICKEN CAESAR WRAP
PEACH COBBLER CRISP


Avocado
$1.25
Carrots
$2.00
Apples
.75¢ each
or
2 for $1
Potatoes
$2.00
bag


Honey dew
$3.50


Community Events and Literacy
Literacy connects us!
me, at work and community.
Sunrise Park Yoga 2024
CARMEN LOUIE
YOUNG BEARS LODGE

Mount Paul Community Food Centre, Kamloops
Mount Paul Community Food Centre (MPCFC) was established in 2018 and is owned and operated by Interior Community Services.



As a partner site of Community Food Centres Canada, MPCFC follows a national model that emphasizes food advocacy. Its mission is to create a vibrant community space where members can access healthy, locally sourced food and come together to cook, grow and learn. Located in a neighbourhood with the highest concentration of poverty in Kamloops, MPCFC not only provides food access and food literacy opportunities, it plays a vital role in supporting community members to foster social connection.

MPCFC operates various food access programs, including community meals, produce boxes, delivery programs for seniors, Meals on Wheels, gardening workshops, and coordinating community garden programs throughout the city.

Notably popular is their affordable produce market, which runs twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays, requiring no registration or sign-up to access. The community can freely shop for produce as they would in a grocery store, with prices well below market value. Members can select the quantities they need and purchase items that suit their household and individual requirements. The produce is sourced through partnerships with local farmers and grocery stores, emphasizing the procurement of local produce whenever possible. Members can pay with cash or card and receive a loyalty card for ongoing purchases at the market.

How Mount Paul Community Food Centre creates DFA:

Welcoming Places
Ensures an inclusive environment with no barriers to accessing the affordable market. A welcoming board at the entrance displays flyers for community events and program access without restrictions.

Quality Food Choice
Through partnerships with local grocers and farmers, members have access to fresh, local produce at subsidized prices. A garden also allows individuals to engage in growing their own food.

Respectful Ways
Volunteers are members of the community and have formed personal relationships and friendships with members accessing the food programming. Helping to pack produce bags and serving community meals to neighbours and friends.

Advocacy
Empowers community members by enhancing food skills, promoting food access and literacy, and fostering opportunities for engagement and education

Collaboration
Through stronger partnerships with local farmers and grocers enhances food access.




Kamloops
Potatoes
75¢/lb


FREE
SEEDS!
Take one
seed per seed
type please!
ORGANIC


Community Fridge
Please help yourself
and take what you need


NEW
WOLFGANG'S
Locally-grown and
milled flours, oats, and
legumes!
#6
1 KG
BAG
Wolfgang's Grain and Flour
All Purpose
White
WHEAT FLOUR
Wolfgang's Grain and Flour
All Purpose
White
WHEAT FLOUR

Sunshine Coast Community Services Society, Sunshine Coast

Sunshine Coast Community Services Society (SCCSS) is a non-profit organization that was founded 50 years ago. Today, they operate 30 different programs with over 100 staff members, serving up to 4,000 people. Their programming supports all residents of the Sunshine Coast through four key areas: Community Action & Engagement, Violence Prevention, Counselling, and Youth Services. Additionally, they provide crisis response, housing, and advocacy services for seniors, adults, new families, and pregnant women.

Beyond the food bank, the society runs several food access programs, including an affordable produce market that operates on a sliding scale and a "pay-what-you-can" model. They also offer a coupon/voucher program for purchasing Okanagan produce at a local fruit stand, food literacy classes, grocery store gift cards, a gardening program, a senior meal program, and advocacy-related initiatives. The food bank operates once a week from 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM. Members must provide identification for each household member and proof of residency. They can select items from various food categories, including produce, dairy, and grains. Staff and volunteers repackage and distribute essential staples such as rice, coffee, and sugar into smaller portions for families.



How Sunshine Coast Community Services Society creates DFA:

Welcoming Place
In response to community feedback and recognizing the stigma and the challenges associated with accessing the food bank, SCCS adjusted its hours of operation to better accommodate the community's needs. Additionally, events such as barbeques, and art projects provide for community members to connect and build relationships beyond accessing the food bank.

Quality Food Choices
Members receive staple food items such as rice, sugar, and oil, along with a selection of fresh produce and dairy products for the week. The available items are rotated weekly to ensure consistent access to nutritious and balanced meals. The food provided matches the household needs so that families supporting children and elderly parents are able to properly support the household with food for the week.

Respectful Ways
By encouraging staff and volunteers to build personal relationships with members, understand their circumstances and provide a welcoming environment. The leadership team actively engages with community members and seeks to meet people where they are.

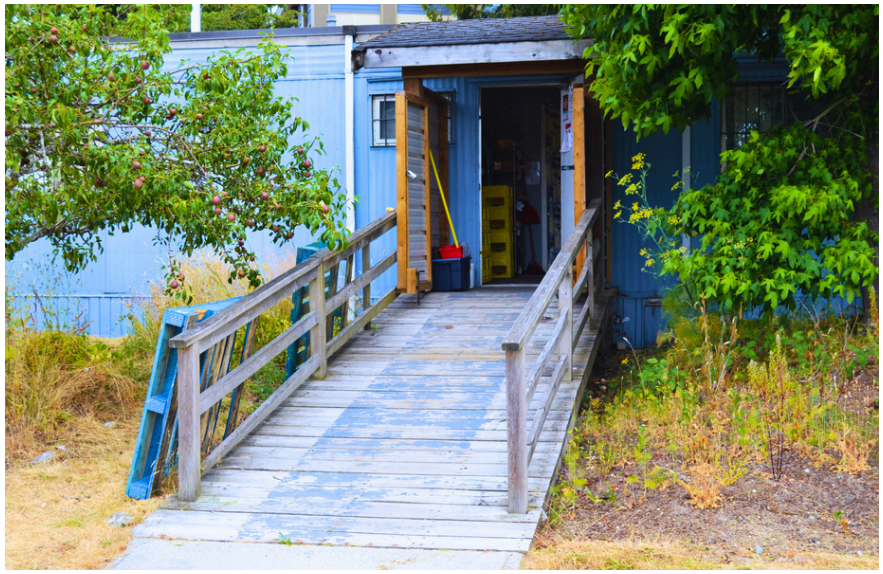
Adopting alternative food access models—such as meal programs and "pay-what-you-can" initiatives—SCCS support individuals who may not typically seek assistance but still need it.

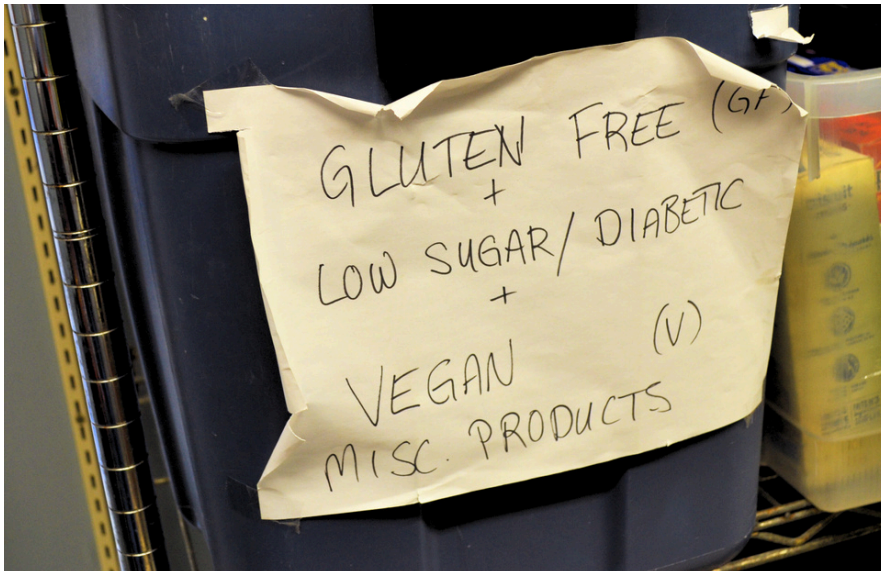
Advocacy
A central pillar of SCC's work is acknowledging that systemic issues—including housing costs, the rising cost of living, and insufficient social assistance—are key drivers of food insecurity. SCCS emphasizes that implementing a guaranteed basic income is essential to addressing food insecurity, as it is ultimately a symptom of poverty. Recognizing that the goal should not be for people to continue using these food access programs but to empower community members to be sustainable.

Collaboration
Is an emerging part of SCCS food programs as relationships with local food producers have been at the forefront of the staff's goal and mission. As a small community that is only accessible by ferry and air travel and not directly contained to the mainland, local partnerships and connections are key to establishing strong food programs and services that serve the entire community of the Sunshine Coast.




WELCOME
To Our Gardens




GLUTEN FREE (GF)
+
LOW SUGAR/ DIABETIC
+
VEGAN (V)
MISC. PRODUCTS

Recipes from Community Members

Another significant insight from this study is that food has meaning and value beyond its nutritional content. Conversations with community members about their experiences with food revealed that food holds memory and is central to culture and tradition. We listened to community member share fond memories of dishes made and enjoyed with family and friends. Some reminisced about their childhood, recalling the care their parents or grandparents took in preparing a dish. Others expressed excitement about exploring new foods and cuisines from different parts of the world.

To honour these stories and the deeper meaning of food, we developed a scrapbook of recipes collected during the focus group discussions. We hope that these recipes serve as a reminder and an invitation to recognize the central role food plays in our lives.

Food is not just sustenance; it is a profound expression of our identity, culture, and the care we extend to our loved ones and communities. Through these recipes, we celebrate the rich tapestry of memories, traditions, and connections that food brings into our homes. May these recipes remind us all that food is a powerful vehicle for expressing love, nurturing relationships, and fostering a sense of belonging. **Please download the recipe booklet to explore.**







Community Feedback

The feedback from our focus group participants across demographic groups highlights the importance of community engagement in addressing food security and sustainability. Most participants expressed satisfaction with both the survey and the focus group, appreciating the opportunity to voice their experiences and contribute to the discussion.

The 2SLGBTQIA+ group appreciated the welcoming environment but noted some challenges with technology. A participant shared: "Zoom's whiteboard function seemed confusing for some of our less techy participants... maybe a quick tutorial on how to use it before we dive in would be helpful." Another participant mentioned: "It felt really welcoming and useful," though they also noted the limitations of off-camera participation in creating a fully safe space.

Families and couples appreciated the friendly environment and tailored questions. One participant noted: "Friendly environment - tailored questions to individual's experiences - but this may not be appreciated in a group discussion." This suggests that while personalized questions were valued, there may be challenges in applying this approach in group settings.

Another participant expressed satisfaction, saying, "I'm very satisfied! I would love to participate in the focus group next time."

Immigrant and Refugee participants found the survey to be enlightening regarding community challenges. Older adults and seniors expressed satisfaction with the focus group, noting its professionalism and thoroughness. Post secondary students valued the community-minded approach, which actively engaged those who use or have used food banks in the past. One participant noted: “Usually, society makes it feel like it's such a shameful thing. Having the survey humanizes the people and actually tries to think of what they need."

Another participant reflected on the meaningfulness of the experience and how it broadened their understanding: "I felt that it was really meaningful and really shows that people are there for those that are less fortunate. The [focus group] activities were great and provided a different perspective on the situation." They also appreciated the use of the whiteboard, which allowed them to share ideas effectively.

> The [results of the] survey is an eye-opener to the situation within the community **especially in the area of food security.** It is impactful and I wish more of this survey will take place.
> *(Focus Group Participant)*

> The experience was great and gave the community members an opportunity to voice out the expectations that are expected within the community and **better ways to improve on the challenges facing the community.**
> *(Focup Group Participant)*

> **Food sustainability is a critical issue for our times** - I have been completely impressed with how professional and thorough this survey has been put together. *(Focus Group Participant)*



Unhoused community members felt included, heard, and valued for their contributions, with one participant highlighting the importance of community feedback: " A lot of feedback for the overall in our community is important to all the people living downtown Eastside.

This will help for our future." Another emphasized the importance of follow-up: "It was good, what would be best is if suggestions/recommendations are followed." Additionally, participants suggested that providing worksheets could help individuals share feedback they might feel uncomfortable expressing in a group setting.

Overall, the feedback from our focus groups underscores the importance of creating inclusive, respectful, and well-structured engagement opportunities. Participants across all groups valued the chance to contribute their experiences and ideas, highlighting the need for continued efforts to engage diverse communities in meaningful dialogue about food security and sustainability.

For the feedback form used to collect participant experiences, please see Appendix 5.



CityReach Care Society



Cranbrook Food Recovery



Fire Pit Cultural Drop In Centre



Food Stash Foundation



Galiano Community Food Program



Golden Food Bank



Flourish School Food Society



Hope Community Services



Kanaka Bar Food
Self Sufficiency Program



Kilala Lelum Health Centre



Kingdom Acts Foundation



Kiwassa Neighbourhood House



Mount Paul Community Food Centre



Nelson Community Food Centre



Nourish Cowichan



CMHA Northern BC, Nourish Food Bank



People for Healthy Community



Prince George Native Friendship Centre



Simon Fraser University Food Pantry



Shuswap Food Action Society



Sole Food Street Farms



Squamish Climate Action Network



Sunshine Coast Community Services

Conclusion

Our comprehensive investigation into dignified food access in British Columbia has illuminated the diverse and multifaceted ways in which food access organizations are striving to create welcoming, respectful, and inclusive environments.

By prioritizing quality food choices, fostering community connections, and advocating for systemic change, many food access organizations are not only addressing immediate food insecurity but also activating the power of individuals and communities to shape their local food systems.

The collaborative efforts and innovative approaches highlighted in this study underscore the importance of community-driven solutions in building a more equitable and sustainable local food system for all residents of BC.





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Appendix

Appendix 1: Site Visit Guide

Region:
Participant Organization:
Service Area Type:
Food Access Typology:
Food Bank BC Member:

Date:
Start Time:
End Time:
# of completed surveys:
# of gift cards distributed:

Full summary of Site Visit:

- Can you tell us how and where you source your food? (Check all that apply)

☐ Rescued/ donated food
☐ Purchased from local farmers
☐ Purchased from local grocers and/or local food businesses
☐ Purchased from large chain grocery stores and restaurant chains
☐ Grew and harvested food for community purposes
☐ Obtained through traditional food ways – e.g. hunting, fishing, or gathering
☐ Other: _____

- Can you describe how this food is shared with community members? (Check all that apply)

☐ Food Hampers
☐ Food Pantry
☐ Affordable Market
☐ Community Meal Program
☐ Institutional Food Procurement – e.g. School Meals, Hospital Meals
☐ Community Food Hub – e.g. CSA Boxes, Good Food Boxes
☐ Community Food Asset – e.g. community garden, kitchen, food literacy
☐ Traditional Food Ways – e.g. gifting, ceremonies, communal gatherings
☐ Other: _____

- Can you tell us how many food programs/services does your organization offers?

☐ Total number of programs: _____

- Can you tell me the number of staff and/or volunteers that you rely on to run your food program(s)/service(s)?

☐ Paid Staff (insert number): _____
☐ Volunteers (insert number): _____

- Can you tell me the number of staff and/or volunteers that you rely on to run your food program(s)/service(s)?

- Is there an eligibility or registration criteria for people to access your food programs/services? (Yes/No)



- Can you show and describe the infrastructure that is used by your food program(s)/service(s)? Check all that are present at site:

- ☐ Food Storage – i.e. spaces where food is stored, freezers, refrigerators
- ☐ Food Preparation – i.e. spaces where food is prepared/cooked, kitchens
- ☐ Food Service Space – i.e. spaces where food is distributed to community members, such as where meals are served or food hampers are delivered
- ☐ Staff/Volunteer Area(s) – i.e. spaces utilized by staff/volunteers only
- ☐ Community Area – e.g. spaces where children can play, ceremonies occur, community members can gather
- ☐ Community Resources – e.g. bulletin boards, areas containing resources
- ☐ Accessibility – e.g. wheelchair ramp
- ☐ Washrooms – i.e. available for community member use
- ☐ Multi-gendered option(s) available
- ☐ Drinking fountains – i.e. available for community member use
- ☐ Food production – e.g. community garden, orchard, greenhouse, hydroponics

- Note any other reflections you have including impressions of the site.

Appendix 2: Survey Questions

Surveys were administered both in-person, on site at food access organizations and online through SurveyMonkey from June to September 2024. As a thank you, community members who completed the survey received a $25 gift card. In some locations, participants were given a $25 voucher redeemable at the corresponding food access site. To be eligible, survey participants had to be over the age of 18 and able to provide informed consent. Surveys completed without consent and participants that were incoherent (i.e. visibly under the influence of substances) or under the age of 18 were deemed ineligible and removed from the dataset.

General Information

1. How old are you?

   a. Under 18
   b. 18-30
   c. 31-50
   d. 51-64
   e. 65 and older
   f. Prefer not to answer

2. How do you identify?

   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Non-Binary
   d. Prefer to self describe
   e. Prefer not to answer

3. Do you identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ (two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or other gender identities/sexual orientations)?

   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

4. What best describes your ethnic/cultural background? (Select one)

   a. Indigenous (i.e. First Nations, Métis, Inuit)
   b. White
   c. Black
   d. Filipino
   e. Arab
   f. Latin American
   g. South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
   h. East Asian (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Japanese)
   i. Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai)
   j. West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan)
   k. Prefer not to answer

5. Are you someone living with a disability? (Select all)

   a. No
   b. Living with a physical disability
   c. Living with a mental disability
   d. Living with severe and chronic health issues (diabetes, asthma, COPD etc.)
   e. Prefer not to answer

6. How many people in your household do you feed using this food program or service (Select One)

   a. 1 person
   b. \2 people (i.e. partner, roommate, family)
   c. 3-4 people
   d. 5+ people

Main Survey Questions

7. How did you get here today? (Select One)

   a. Walked
   b. Biked, E-Biked or Scootered
   c. Drove
   d. Carpooled or was dropped off
   e. Took public transportation (i.e. bus, skytrain, seabus)
   f. Used rideshare services (i.e. Uber, Taxi)
   g. Other (please describe)

8. Did you have any trouble getting here? (Yes/No)

   a. If yes, please describe the troubles you faced. (Open-ended)

9. Is this the only food access program/service you use? (Yes/No)

   a. If no, how many other places do you visit for food programs or services? (Open-ended)

10. How often do you use food access programs/services? (Select One)

    a. Every day
    b. Every few days
    c. Once a week
    d. Once a month
    e. As needed basis
    f. Other (please describe)

11. Do you feel safe coming here? (Yes/No)

    a. What would make you feel safer? (Open-ended)

12. Do you feel welcome here? (Yes/No)

    a. What would make you feel more welcome? (Open-ended)

13. Do you feel like you're part of a community when you come here? (Yes/No

    a. What makes you feel that way? (Open-ended)

14. Do you have to wait in line? (Yes/No)

15. If yes, do you wait inside, outside, or both? (Select one)

    a. Inside
    b. Outside
    c. Both

16. If yes, how long do you usually have to wait? (Open-ended)

    a. Less than 15 min
    b. 15 to 30 min
    c. 30 to 1 hour
    d. More than 1 hour

17. Do you get to choose the foods you want? (Yes/No)
18. Do the foods given meet your dietary restrictions/preferences? (Yes/No)
    a. If no, what foods would you like to have? (Open-ended)
19. Does the food program/service meet you or your family's needs? (Yes/No)
    a. If no, what needs are not being met? (Open-ended)
20. What do you like about the food program/service here? (Open-ended)
21. What do you not like about the food program/service here? (Open-ended)
22. How would you improve the food program/service ? (Open-ended)
23. Are you comfortable talking about what you need and like with the people who work here? (Yes/No)
24. Is there anything else you want to tell me about you, your community, or the food program here? (Open-ended)

Group Discussion

We'll be asking people to join a group discussion to learn more about their experiences and insights. You will be paid for your time.

1. Do you want to join the group discussion
   a. Yes
   b. No

If you said yes, please share your name and contact details with us.

Name:

Email:

Phone:

2. How should we contact you?

   a. Email
   b. By Phone

3. Would you rather meet in person or online?

   a. In-person
   b. Online

Appendix 3: Focus Group Questions

The focus groups were conducted between September and October, each lasting 1.5 hours. A total of six sessions were held, three in person and three virtually via Zoom. The in-person sessions took place at their respective food access sites after service hours to minimize barriers for community members. There was a maximum of 10 participants per focus group to ensure everyone was able to meaningfully contribute. Each participant was given a $100 gift card as a thank you to acknowledge their time and contributions. All focus groups were recorded for transcription purposes.

During the in-person sessions, five large sheets of paper, each labeled with one of these features, were placed around the room. Participants could write their thoughts directly on the paper or share their responses verbally for facilitators to transcribe. In virtual sessions, this activity was conducted using Zoom Whiteboard, allowing participants to type their responses, share them verbally, or use the Zoom chat, with facilitators transcribing their responses.

Ice Breaker/Introduction

1. What's your favourite dish and why? Tell us about the last time you ate this dish?

Main Questions & Survey Findings

2. We've learned that there has been a growing number of community members needing help to get food for themselves and their loved ones.

   a. Can you tell us when and why you started using [Organization Name]'s food programs?
   i. Could you share some of the challenges that you've experienced obtaining food?
   ii. How are you navigating/overcoming those challenges?
   iii. How has this food program affected your daily life or sense of well being?

3. Given all of these transit/travelling related challenges that community members are experiencing.

   a. Do you have any ideas for how to better connect community members with food?

4. We've learned from community members about the different ways programs create spaces that feel safe and welcoming and foster a sense of belonging and community. We also learned some of the reasons why community members feel unsafe, not welcome, or not part of a community.

   a. What are some examples of welcoming places and what are some examples of unwelcoming places? Feel free to share stories or descriptions.
   i. What would an ideal experience at a food program look like for you? For example, are you interested in participating in cooking or nutrition classes, community gardening, canning and preserving workshops, and more? Why or why not?

5. We've learned from community members about the different ways programs provide quality food choices that meet community member needs, including dietary preferences. We also learned about the way programs are NOT meeting these needs and food preferences.

   a. What are some examples of quality food choices and non quality food choices? Feel free to share stories or descriptions.
   i. How do you feel about the process of choosing food items at [insert food program}
   ii. Do you feel like it allows you to make choices that align with foods you like, your dietary needs and/or your cultural preferences?
   iii. What foods would you like to have more access to?

6. We've learned from community members about the different ways programs provide food in a respectful way, as well as areas of improvement.

   a. What are some examples of being connected with food in a respectful way and a non respectful way? Feel free to share stories or descriptions.
   i. What could be done to make these programs more inclusive?
   ii. Respect can mean different things to different people. Can you share any specific examples where you felt good about getting help with food here?
   iii. What made those experiences stand out for you?
   iv. What does it mean to you to be treated respectfully?
   v. In what ways, if any, do you feel respected when you come here?

7. We've learned from organizations that run food programs about the different ways they engage in advocacy. Some organizations partner with other organizations or services to provide mental health, housing, and/or employment support. Some organizations work together to ensure meal programs are offered multiple days a week for community members, and to communicate with the public on how to both donate and access food. Others work with local farmers, school districts, or municipalities to create more affordable public transportation. Some organizations are working to shift policies to improve food access and food security, including advocating for Indigenous food sovereignty, income supports, school meal programs, affordable housing, and more.

   a. What kinds of advocacy would you like to engage in and what kinds of advocacy would you like to see the organization engage in?
   i. Are there any additional services or supports you would like to see food programs offer?
   ii. Do you feel comfortable discussing your needs and preferences with staff or volunteers at the food bank?
   iii. What could be done to improve communication and make sure your voice is heard?
   iv. What kind of advocacy do you engage in or would like to engage in?
   v. What support do you need to amplify your voice and efforts?
   vi. How can organizations empower you to advocate for yourself and your community?

8. What are we missing? Anything else we should consider?

   a. What does dignity mean and look like to you?
   b. What are some other ways food programs could better understand and meet the needs of people, while maintaining dignity?

Appendix 4: Recipe Form

At the end of each focus group, participants had the opportunity to share a favorite recipe and explain its significance. Those interested could also grant permission for their recipe to be included in the final report.

1. Would it be okay to publish this recipe in our report and other media?

   a. Yes and please include my name
   b. yes , please do NOT include my name
   c. No, please do not publish my recipe

2. Name of dish
3. Origin (what region/territory/country) is this dish made
4. When/where do you eat it (is this prepared for a special occasion)
5. Why is this dish important to you
6. Recipe Instructions

Appendix 5: Environmental Scan of Dignified Food Access

*Denotes food access organizations that are Food Banks BC Members.

Food Access Programs	Welcoming Places	Quality Food Choices	Respectful Ways	Advocacy	Collaborative
Fraser					
Central Okanagan Food Bank* Food Bank, Food Rescue, Food Hamper, Coupon Program	Food hampers distributed at accessible and convenient distribution points; food rescue program offered in multiple locations to accommodate participants, wrap-around supports offered for convenience	Provides access to low/no-cost produce, dairy, and proteins	Health and development support is tailored to the specific needs of each participant; school food program offers nutritious food as part of curriculum	Advocates for sustainable food practices and resilient local food systems	Collaborates with 18 local grocery stores and farmers to expand food access; partners with government agencies and aid organizations to distribute food during emergencies; and the Breakfast Club of Canada to expand access to schools

Archway Food Bank Food Pantry, Home Delivery, Food Hamper, Dental Clinic, School Meals	Volunteers from similar backgrounds create safe and inclusive spaces, home delivery increases accessibility	Provides fresh produce, proteins, and culturally appropriate foods for various ages	Home delivery volunteers help participants unpack food and engage with clients, dental clinic offers free dental care to increase dignity, hampers are tailored to be culturally appropriate and inclusive	The Food Pantry raises awareness by educating donors and the community on the importance of culturally appropriate food, regularly participates in food justice dialogues and local food security events, promoting the importance of equitable and sustainable food access	Collaborates with community organizations to increase access to culturally specific hampers to South Asian and multi-ethnic communities, partners with dentists and dental hygienists who volunteer their services, collaborates with schools and local organizations to increase access to food in schools

Delta Food Coalition – Earthwise Society Harvest Box, CSA	Fosters community participation to promote a shared sense of belonging and responsibility	Provides access to low/no-cost locally grown produce	Harvest boxes provided at no cost, in a non-judgemental environment, grown by local farmers; hands-on education in sustainable agriculture increases sense of ownership and agency over food	Raises awareness about food waste, promotes local and sustainable agriculture	Partners with agencies and farmers to expand access to fresh produce; collaborates with community gardens to build community gardening skills
Hope Community Services Food Programs* Community Meals, Food Bank	Spaces that support both food access and relationship-building among participants; offers accessible spaces for seniors/km	Provides access to low/no-cost locally grown produce; perishable and non-perishable foods	Choice-based, "grocery store-style"; facilitates interaction and community building for seniors	Raises awareness about food insecurity through community events and partnerships	Partners with local businesses to collect surplus food for redistribution; and community NGOs to ensure students receive access to food during the summer

Refood | Food Rescue Charity Food Distribution, Food Bank, Food Literacy,	Accessible and convenient distribution points; collaborates with local food banks and community organizations to integrate programs into the community; provides culturally appropriate food options and accommodates dietary restrictions	Provides low/no-cost produce; aim to ensure rescued foods are of highest possible quality; food literacy programs help individuals and families aim to empower participants	Provides resources and information in in a way that empowers individuals to make informed food choices; volunteer voices are considered in program development and decision-making	Raises awareness about the environmental implications of food waste; advocates for policies that support food waste reduction efforts; hosts community discussions about food insecurity, nutrition, and sustainable food practices	Partners with food banks and local community organizations across Canada to distribute rescued food; collaborates with grocery stores, restaurants, and food producers to rescue surplus food; with various levels of government to advocate for policies that support food recovery, food security, and sustainable food practices

Mission Community Services Society Food Hampers, Resource Hub, Hot Meals	Offers a central space to access resources; spaces that support both food access and relationship-building among participants	Provides low/no-cost produce and proteins; provides access to hot meals	Services take a client-centered approach; staff and volunteers are trained to understand and meet individual needs; offers confidential services	Advocates for address poverty, housing, and food insecurity and the importance of tackling the root causes of food insecurity; raises awareness on issues like homelessness and food insecurity	Partners with local organizations, government agencies, and community groups to pool resources and coordinate services to provide comprehensive support

Interior					
The Lumby Food Bank* Food Hamper, Food Recovery, Food Bank	Volunteers distribute hampers in an engaging way to help clients feel comfortable	Provides no-cost produce, dairy, and proteins	Fosters a supportive environment where clients feel valued and respected; enables discreet and personalized experiences	Through public outreach the program engages community to raise awareness about food security issues	Partnerships with local grocery stores to ensure a steady flow of fresh food while supporting waste reduction; local residents and businesses contribute to the food bank's operations through volunteer hours and donations

Mount Paul Community Food Centre Community Meals, Community Kitchen, Meals on Wheals	Offers an accessible, inclusive space with comfortable dining areas; spaces that support both food access and relationship-building among participants; kitchen space encourages social interaction	Provides access to balanced meals with proteins, whole grains, and vegetables; provides low/no-cost local produc	Meal delivery includes friendly check-ins so clients can receive food support and social connection; community meals foster open, stigma-free settings for food access and socialization	Advocates for food security through educational workshops on topics like food justice and sustainability; raises awareness about the importance of elder care	Partners with local farms and suppliers to provide high-quality foods; Collaborates with local government agencies and health services to expand access
The Cranbrook Foodbank Society* Food Bank	Location is accessible, and personalized transportation services create a sense of belonging	Provides access to produce, fresh proteins, dairy, and gluten-free options	Choice-based model; personalized hamper deliveries foster inclusion; confidentiality is built in and no proof of income/ID required	Advocates for systemic changes to regional food security, and better policies and programs that support food security	Partners with local non-profit organization to provide a range of services that support vulnerable populations

Island					
Sunshine Coast Community ServicesSociety* Food Bank, Produce Market, Community Engagement, Food Rescue, Food Literacy	Extended operating hours, food hubs located in convenient locations, inviting spaces that support both food access and relationship-building among participants	Provides low-cost and locally sourced produce and dairy products.	Choice-based model, nutrition consultations are tailored to the specific needs of each participant	Advocates for sustainable and fair food systems, income-based solutions, systemic change in food security policies through media engagement, public presentations, and campaigns intended to address the root causes of food insecurity	Partners with the Good Food Organizations part of the Regional Food Systems Action Network; collaborates with other food banks; engages with local food system leaders to exchange knowledge and support initiatives that address food insecurity regionally; prioritizes social interaction and community engagement

Victoria Community Food Hub Society Food Hub, Produce Market, Community Supported Market, Coupon Program	Food hubs located in convenient locations, supports access to local, fresh food in community-friendly spaces	Provides low/no-cost, locally sourced produce and high-quality proteins	Choice-based model, culturally sensitive	Advocates for sustainable and equitable food systems, socially responsible food system	Partners with local farmer and charity advisory groups to align program models with agricultural and community needs, builds direct relationships with farmers and food producers to strengthen the local food economy



Non-profit Organization | People For A Healthy Community | Gabriola Food Bank, Food Distribution, Meal Delivery, Food Recovery, Community Meals, Good Food Box, Coupon Program, Community Garden, Food Literacy	Inviting spaces that support food access and relationship building, delivery services that provide more equitable food access, community meals that support access to nutritious meals and community connection	Provides low/no-cost locally sourced produce and high-quality proteins, offers nutritious community meals with varied menus, offers food skills to prepare more diverse meals	Choice-based model, coupon programs to facilitate increased autonomy over food, equity-centered model, community-centered approach	Advocates for sustainable and equitable food systems, community involvement in food systems, awareness building around food security, equitable access to food skills training	Partners with Farmers' Markets, provincial food access programs (Nutrition Coupon Program), Good Food Box, local food suppliers, local grocery stores; prioritizes community engagement and social interaction; engages with community organizations; collaborates with local schools to support education initiatives that address food skills

Homepage - Cowichan Green Community Food Market, Food Hub, Community Garden, Food Recovery, Food Share, Farm Skills	Barrier free, accessible programming, facilitates community ownership and connection, fosters inclusive spaces	Provides low/no cost locally grown, high quality produce	Equitable access to fresh food, offers accessible services and programs, community-centered approach	Advocates for a food justice approach to promote skill building, agency, andsustainability	Collaborates with local stores and farms to coordinate food recovery, partners with local organizations to strengthen local and just food networks
Food Security - Greenways Land Trust Community Garden, Environment-Centered, Good Food Box, Food Waste Reduction, Food Skill Building	Collaborative, inclusive, and community-centered programming; accessible programming, fosters social connection and community relationship-building	Provides low/no-cost and locally sourced and high quality produce and proteins; offers seasonal foods; builds skills for food production and preparation	Inclusive and culturally appropriate programming, prioritizes community-centered approaches, promotes participant autonomy and relationship-building	Advocates for systems change (food justice, sustainable and local food systems); facilitates individual food resilience through education and skill-building	Collaborates with local government, non-profits, and food suppliers to establish a regional food security alliance to exchange knowledge and promote local food systems resilience; partners with community organizations and local farmers to increase access to local food.

Neighbours Helping Neighbours - Nanoose Community Services* Food Bank, Community Meals, Food Literacy, Community Outreach, Emergency Support Services	Program staff take an inclusive, community-centered approach programming; foster social connection and relationship-building; promotes and open-door policy to drop-in programs; provides emergency assistance	Source a variety of fresh foods, prioritize diverse menus, food skills programming uses fresh, locally sourced ingredients; promotes community food assets	Trauma-informed, inclusive and non-judgemental, responsive to diverse community needs; strives for culturally safe programming	Raises awareness about regional/ community food insecurity; advocates for improved social safety nets and stronger support for vulnerable community members; influence social policies and programs	Collaborates with local organizations and provincial networks to improve access to food for all; partners with local farmers and food producers to source fresh and high-quality food; partners with health and social service organizations to provide wrap-around support to community members; collaborates

Nanaimo Foodshare Society Good Food Box, Food Skills, Community Gardens, Gleaning, Coupon Program, Seniors Social Networking, Employment	Programs held in accessible locations, access to transportation for seniors, community-centered programs that foster relationship building; diverse range of programs for all community needs	Food skills programming uses fresh, locally sourced ingredients; community meals with diverse menus; provides access to low-cost, high-quality produce	Culturally sensitive programming, diverse programming for all ages and needs	Advocates for sustainable food practices and waste reduction	Partners with local government to promote programming, engages with First Nations to enhance Indigenous perspectives; collaborates with schools to offer tailored food programs; partners with local organizations to share tools, knowledge, and resources

The Galiano Club Food Program* Food Literacy, Environmental Conservation, Community Meals, Food Bank, Community Engagement	Centrally located in community, modern kitchen facility, volunteers to welcome participants	Provides low/no-cost and locally sourced produce; engages with wild, locally sourced ingredients; food skills programming uses fresh, locally sourced ingredients	Choice-based model, no-cost access, non-judgmental environments; option for confidential access; promote autonomy through food skill-building	Advocates for sustainable food systems and community resilience	Community-driven, collaborate with local volunteer network to enhance program delivery, partners with local farmers, gardeners, and suppliers to increase community engagement and access to local food
Loaves & Fishes Community Food Bank Free Food Market, Food Bank	Multiple, convenient locations, accessibility, fosters community engagement and relationship-building	Provides free local produce and high-quality proteins	Choice-based model; barrier-free, non-judgmental environment	Advocates for local and sustainable food systems; promotes food waste reduction; influences local policies	Collaborates with >100 local organizations, including schools, charities, Indigenous communities, and regional food banks; partners with local retailers, wholesalers, and producers, to secures surplus food; partners with community volunteers

Northern					
The Link Food Centre - Nourishing Family and Community Mobile Food Centre, Hot Meals, Community Garden, Emergency Food Distribution	Mobility service offers convenient access in various locations across the community; spaces that support both food access and relationship-building among participants; garden volunteers work closely with clients to foster a supportive learning environment	Provides access to low/no-cost locally grown produce and proteins; hot meals offer high quality, nutrient-dense foods	Offers a judgment-free and inclusive environment; community garden involves community members and fosters a sense of ownership and inclusion; sit-down meals in a community setting build an environment of social inclusion	Raises awareness about food security and poverty reduction; advocates for sustainable agriculture and resilient food systems	Collaborates with local organizations and businesses to sustain the mobile food service; partners with Local businesses and Food Banks Canada to fund hot meals program; and partners with local schools to engage students in the community garden

Vancouver Coastal					
Quest Non-Profit Grocery Market Grocery Market, Food Redistribution	Extended program hours, functional and accessible spaces, culturally safe spaces	Provide low/no-cost produce and proteins	Access to wrap-around services, sliding scale pricing model	Raise awareness of food affordability issues (e.g., Cost of Groceries Report)and challenges faced by individuals experiencing food insecurity	Collaborates with over 350 referring partners (e.g., social service agencies, community-serving organizations, non-profits) to expand the reach and impact of Quest
Greater Vancouver Food Bank* Community Market, Food Distribution	Accessible space, volunteer support, food distribution in convenient locations, hosts community events to foster social inclusion and relationship-building	Provides no-cost nutrient dense foods, tailored nutrition programs for children and seniors, provides some locally sources produce donated by farmers, encourages local farmers to donate through the BC Farmer Tax Credit	Choice-based model, grocery model, partner agencies provide culturally diverse foods, offer interactive food stations at community events	Promotes awareness of food insecurity and supports community advocacy efforts that seek long-term solutions to food insecurity	Collaborates with 150+ local non-profits and provincial agencies to expand community reach; partners with farmers, food retailers, and distributors ensure a reliable supply of fresh food

Food Stash Foundation Food Market, Community Fridge, Food Redistribution	Accessible, multi-lingual space with staff available to enhance the shopping experience, 24-hour access (food fridge), food distributed to conveniently located organizations	Provides a range of foods: produce, dairy, proteins, and shelf-stable foods	Pay-what-you-feel" model, no proof of income required, low-cost food boxes, anonymous, open-access	Advocates for responsible food sourcing and environmental stewardship, raise awareness to support systemic change to address food securit	Partners with over 30 local retailers, farms, and wholesalers to rescue surplus food, distributes 80% of rescued food to over 30 nonprofit organizations, collaborate with the Vancouver Community Fridge Project to low-barrier food access is consistently available to all community members

Kílala Lelum Health Centre Meal Program	Cooked meals provided in inclusive spaces that foster community, communal meal spaces to encourage social gathering	Provides culturally appropriate meals	Elders are engaged in programming to help build safe spaces, provides case management and outreach services to provide wrap-around support	Advocates for food as a fundamental right, advocates for Indigenous-led approaches to health and food security, emphasizing self-determination and community-led care in the Downtown East side.	Partners with DUDES Club and Inner City Women's Initiative Society to expand food access and community support, collaborates with Indigenous Elders to incorporate traditional knowledge and cultural practices in food and health programs

Cityreach Care Society* Food Distribution	Volunteers engage with clients personally; meals are served a communal setting where clients can socialize	Provides fresh produce, proteins, and dairy	Staff and volunteers are trained to interact with empathy, hosts convenient locations across the lower mainland	Advocates addressing food security in schools, organizes events (e.g., Back to School Blast and holiday gift distributions) to engage community and raise awareness about food insecurity	Participates in the Adopt-A- School program to reach a wider range of students and families, partners with community organizations who act as community sponsors for Food for Families, which helps to increase access to food in the Greater Vancouver Region
The Sharing Farm Community Farm, Market, Food Bank, CSA Food Baskets	Offers programs for all ages and backgrounds, promotes community connection, host community-centered events	Provides low/no-cost locally sourced, fresh produce	Community members are encouraged to volunteer and participate in programming, inclusive gatherings promote respect and belonging among participants.	Advocates for food and environmental sustainability and local food systems resilience	Partners with Richmond Food Bank, Musqueam Nation, and community meal programs to distribute food, community involved in CSA program

The Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group Society Community Kitchen, Good Food Box, Community Orchard, Childcare	Inclusive, barrier-free community hub, convenient locations, inviting spaces that welcome all community members	Provides low/no-cost seasonal produce, offers low-cost nutritious meals prepared with local ingredients where possible	Licensed childcare programs reduce barriers to accessing programs; community spaces where all can gather, regardless of their socioeconomic status	Advocates for affordable housing through the Affordable Housing Initiative, raise awareness about local food systems resilience and sustainability	Collaborates with local artists, businesses, and community organizations to host events, partners with government agencies, housing organizations, and community stakeholders to advocate for and develop affordable housing options

Richmond Food Bank Society Food Distribution, Food Delivery, School Meals, Community Garden	Community outreach services enhance wrap- around supports; accessible garden plots enable all community members to participate in gardening	Provides low/no-cost produce, proteins, dairy, school meals focus on variety and nutrient-dense foods with a range of options	Choice-based model, confidential services, food programs are integrated into school programming for all children, community outreach prioritizes clients' autonomy and unique needs, participants involved in programs.	Advocates for addressing childhood hunger, raises awareness of food insecurity; advocates for community-wide involvement in alleviating poverty; advocates to strengthen community resilience	Collaborates with school district and local organizations to support meal programs in schools; partners with community agencies to provide food and support services to vulnerable community members who may not access program services

Appendix 6: Community Member Participant Feedback Form

1. Did you participate in the community member survey over the summer?

   a. Yes
   b. No

2. If yes, please indicate your overall experience with the survey

   a. Dissatisfied
   b. Neutral
   c. Satisfied

3. Please share any feedback you have about the survey. What did you like/dislike, what can we do better the next time?

4. Please indicate your overall experience with the focus group

   a. Dissatisfied
   b. Neutral
   c. Satisfied

5. Please share any feedback you have about the focus group discussion and activities. What did you like/dislike, what can we do better the next time?

Division of Community Engagement and Food Systems

(Re)Defining Dignified Food Access in BC:

What we learned from community members

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