



# **Assessing the State of Food Security in Belleville, Ontario**

**A Report to the Community Development Council of Quinte**

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## **Executive Summary**

According to the 1996 World Food Summit, “food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” While the World produces more than enough food to feed everyone, many people are unable to meet their food needs. Consequently, these people are considered to be food insecure.

The purpose of this project was to gain insight into the magnitude of food insecurity in Belleville, Ontario. This was achieved by estimating the number of food insecure people that participate in Belleville-based food assistance programs.

Participation data was collected from each of the food assistance organizations in the city. Through an analysis of this data, it was determined that approximately 3,690 people used the services of a food program during the month of March 2001.

Through an analysis of both existing literature regarding food security and local data regarding poverty, the cost of food and the cost of housing, it is evident that many more people who are food insecure are not accessing assistance from these food organizations, and for various reasons.

Greater coordination among food assistance organizations is recommended in order to increase the public’s understanding of food security, and to improve efforts to achieve food security for all in the City of Belleville.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

This report is an attempt to measure the food security of the residents of Belleville, Ontario. This section begins with a description of the purpose of this report. The rest of the chapter is intended to give some background information on the issue of food security and its prevalence in today's society. Following this is a discussion of the planner's role in food security.

### ***1.1 Purpose of this Project***

The primary purpose of this project is to determine the number of people who are not food secure, according to the definition described in Section 1.2, that participate in Belleville-based food security initiatives. It must be stressed that this project is not intended to provide a precise measurement of the number of food insecure people in Belleville – this would be a difficult and costly task, and one that is beyond the scope of this project. Rather, the project seeks to better inform policymakers, food assistance providers, and the general public of the magnitude of food insecurity in the area. Hopefully, the results of the project will serve to promote further discussion among these groups, with the ultimate goal of creating food security for everyone in Belleville.

### ***1.2 Defining Food Security***

Before getting into a discussion of food security, it is important to define precisely what is meant by the term “food security.” Presently, the world produces more than enough food to feed everyone on the planet. However, millions of people are unable to meet their food needs. According the 1996 World Food Summit, “food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada: AAFC 1998). There are many parts to this definition, each of which is necessary to achieving a state of food security.

Further to this definition, Campbell et al. (1988) have identified six components of food security. First of all, food must be available at a reasonable cost. Cost here refers to both the amount of money that the consumer pays for the food, as well as to the social, economic and environmental costs of the method of production, processing and distribution of the food.

Next, food security requires ready access to quality grocery stores, food service operations, or alternative food sources. This component addresses issues relating to the siting of food retail outlets, mobility of customers and access to transportation systems, and the existence of food sources that are not part of the main food distribution system, such as community food development projects.

Thirdly, sufficient personal income to purchase adequate foods for each household member and for each day is needed. Therefore, enough wealth and income to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet are necessary for food security.

Food security also includes the freedom to choose personally acceptable foods. The World Food Summit definition mentions the issue of food preference as necessary to food security. It must be acknowledged that individuals and communities will make different food choices, based often on behavioural and cultural realities.

Fifth, legitimate confidence in the quality of the foods available is important to food security. This component addresses both food safety and the nutritional value of foods.

Finally, food security requires easy access to understandable and accurate information about food and nutrition. This component relates to food labelling,

advertising, grading, and formal and informal education about food and nutrition (Campbell et al. 1988).

In addition to the six components of food security listed above, the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC 1994) adds one additional component: the existence of a sustainable food production system. This final component of food security addresses the need for a long-term and secure food supply (TFPC 1994).

Evidently, there are many factors involved in food security. In order for food security to be achieved, each of the components discussed must be satisfied. For many people, however, it is impossible to meet each of these conditions all of the time. This can lead to food insecurity.

### ***1.3 Food Insecurity Today***

As described above, one of the key requirements of food security is sufficient income in order to purchase enough food for each day, and for every member of a person's household. However, many people in Canada today live in poverty, and as such, do not always have enough food to eat. There are many factors that have contributed to rising poverty, and subsequently, food insecurity.

Several changes to the economy over the last decade and a half have contributed to poverty in Canada (TFPC 1994, McIntyre et al. 1998). The recession of the early 1990s resulted in massive job losses. Further, since the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement, it is estimated that over 500,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in Ontario (Ontario Public Health Association: OPHA 1995). While the unemployment rate has decreased since the recession, it is still much higher than pre-recession levels, indicating that some of the effects are still being felt. (Community Social Planning Council of Toronto: CSPCT 1999).

The composition of the employment sector itself is changing, too. First of all, there has been a steady increase in both part-time and contract employment. These positions are usually non-unionized, and do not provide any benefits for employees. The employees rarely contribute toward a pension plan, and are often not eligible for Employment Insurance (CSPCT 1999, TFPC 1994, OPHA 1995).

There has also been a polarization of the job market. The Canadian middle class continues to erode, in favour of a divergent income structure. The recent economic “boom” has helped a few at the top get rich, but greater numbers of Canadians are earning poverty wages, and although they are working full-time, cannot afford to pay for basic living expenses (OPHA 1995, TFPC 1994, NCW 1997). In 1973, the richest 10% of families in Ontario made nine times the income of the poorest 10% of families. By 1996, however, they had 229 times the income of the poorest families (CSPCT 1999). Low-wage earners are clearly much worse off today than they were 25 years ago. This segment of the population has been dubbed the “working poor” - individuals who work full-time, but still live in poverty (TFPC 1994, NCW 1997).

Another trend over the last decade or so has been an increase in the cost of living. The cost of housing has increased significantly, as has the cost of everyday living expenses. Between 1995 and 1998 in Toronto, for example, the cost of a one bedroom apartment increased by 10.3% (CSPCT 1999). Despite these increases, however, the minimum wage rate in Ontario has remained steady for several years. Many low-income earners must therefore allocate a larger portion of their income to meeting everyday living costs. This leaves less room for other costs, such as food. Often, people are forced to sacrifice food for other, more inflexible living costs (Travers 1996). This contributes to food insecurity.

One particularly good example of the impact of rising costs on food security is with social assistance in Ontario. In 1995, the newly elected government slashed welfare rates by 21.6% (CSPCT 1999). As a result, social assistance recipients now had less money to pay for all of their living costs each month. And while housing and living costs have continued to rise, shelter allowances administered by social service departments have remained constant. Therefore, individuals must pay for increased living costs with less money than before. It is no coincidence that food bank use rose by 35% following the rate cuts (CSPCT 1999). Social assistance beneficiaries are therefore another group at risk of food insecurity.

Another factor that has influenced the prevalence of food insecurity today is the food distribution system itself. The current system of food distribution is not affordable to low-income people. Because of the way in which food is collected, processed, packaged and delivered, people are paying more for food than necessary (TFPC 1994). With food costs so high, many people cannot afford to eat nutritiously. For example, in many Canadian communities, low-income populations are concentrated in downtown areas. Very often, there are no grocery stores located within walking distance of downtowns, since these businesses prefer to locate themselves away from the city centre, where the land is cheaper and where there are fewer zoning restrictions. As a result, many individuals must invest time and money to get to and from grocery stores. Often, it is simply easier to shop at a local convenience store, even though costs are inflated and nutritional content is low. Therefore, many people are paying more for food, but not getting the foods they need. Finally, the current food distribution system also promotes poor eating habits, and foods that are low in nutritional content (Field & Mendiratta 1999, OPHA 1995).

Poor nutrition leads to a whole host of health problems, including anemia, weight loss, colds, infections and diseases, to name a few (McIntyre et al. 1998). Although nutrition plays a major role in health, current health policies virtually ignore food and nutrition as a component of overall health (TFPC, Field & Mendiratta 1999). And although access to medical care is universal in Canada, access to resources that nurture health, such as affordable, nutritious food, is not (McIntyre et al. 1998).

These trends, along with the persistent dismantling of the social safety net, and reductions in investments in social programs, have led to a high dependency on food banks and other food assistance organizations in order to meet basic food needs (McIntyre et al. 1998, TFPC 1994). But food banks are only meant to provide short-term, emergency assistance to those in need of food. The reality, however, is that many people depend on food banks and other food assistance organizations as a source of food for themselves and for their families (OPHA 1995, TFPC 1994). In March of 2000, for example, 726,902 people in Canada received emergency groceries from a food bank (Wilson 2000). Clearly, long-term, sustainable solutions are needed in order to eradicate food insecurity in Ontario.

#### ***1.4 Planner's Role in Food Security***

Now that food security has been defined, and a brief context of the situation in Ontario has been described, it is worthwhile to look at what the planner's role should be in dealing with food insecurity. Ultimately, the planner should seek to act in the best interest of the public. This is a very broad statement, however, and ignores the heterogeneous nature of "the public." Obviously, some individuals in society are more disadvantaged than others. With respect to food security, it is clear that some people are more at risk of being food insecure than other people.

From a Rawlsian ethical perspective, the planner's role should be to seek equity among all individuals in society, and to minimize any social and economic inequalities (Howe 1990). In terms of food security, the planner should therefore assist those individuals at risk of food insecurity in becoming food secure. But how should planners seek to assist those who are not food secure?

The planner's role could be to provide direct aid to those who are not food secure. This could be achieved, for example, through the establishment and proliferation of food banks and soup kitchens.

Alternatively, the planner's role could be to act as an advocate for those who are food insecure. The planner would represent the interests of the food insecure, and pressure governments and other organizations to assist them.

Finally, the planner's role could be to foster empowerment among individuals, so that they can achieve food security on their own. The Healthy Communities movement, for example, is based on the idea that health is not only determined by one's physical state, but also by social, economic and environmental factors. One of the goals of Healthy Communities is to improve the health and well-being of individuals, both by ensuring that municipalities recognize that health encompasses many different facets, and by encouraging municipalities to undertake a broad range of actions to strengthen the health of a community (McIntosh Larsh 1994). One of the basic strategic elements of the Healthy Communities philosophy is the notion of community empowerment. Empowerment refers to:

The ability to choose or to increase one's capacity to define, analyze and act upon one's problems. We cannot empower anyone; to presume so strips people of their capacity for choice. Empower is a reflexive verb; groups and individuals can only empower themselves. (Labonte 1989: 87)

Getting individuals to become empowered is a great way to get people to come up with solutions to their own problems, and ones that are sustainable over the long term.

But empowerment alone is not always enough to initiate change. With respect to food security, for example, people often do not have the resources they need to become food secure on their own. Therefore, the planner's role should also include a dimension of facilitation, whereby the planner seeks to remove the barriers preventing individuals from becoming food secure. For example, the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition (OHCC) assists communities in increasing their capacity to undertake community economic development initiatives. The OHCC helps communities with economic development initiatives through activities such as outreach and promotion, networking, promoting partnerships with businesses and municipalities, and acting as a resource for communities. The actual development of an initiative, however, is left to the communities. The OHCC merely facilitates the process (OHCC 2001).

Given these options, the planner's role with respect to food security ought to involve facilitating individuals and communities to empower themselves to become food secure. In this manner, planners can best work toward food security for all, while ensuring long-term success through individual self-empowerment.

## **2.0 Research Methodology**

This section provides a description of the planning process used to develop and implement a tool to measure food security in this project. The project began in October 2001, with a review of the current literature on food security. The collection of data took place from mid-November to January, and the report was finalized in early February 2002.

### ***2.1 Deciding on a Method***

Estimating the level of food security of a community is a daunting task. It is difficult to get an accurate assessment of the number of people that are food insecure in an area. There are many reasons why this is difficult.

First of all, it is virtually impossible to poll every resident of an area, through a census, for example. There is no question on the census that asks a person whether they are food secure or not, and such a poll would be too costly to undertake.

Instead, it may be possible to poll a random sample of residents in the area. Again, there are costs associated with this method, but they are more feasible than a census approach. One of the problems with asking people whether they have enough food to eat, however, is the risk of self-serving selection. Because of the personal nature of the question being asked, many people would either be reluctant to respond accurately, or unwilling to respond at all. In addition, the method used to select random participants would be crucial to the accuracy of the results. A phone interview, for example, may elicit a higher response rate from participants than a face-to-face interview. However, this type of survey might not be representative of the population, since it is possible that people who are not food secure as a result of economic circumstances may not be able to

afford telephone service. With these constraints, it is likely that surveying a random sample of residents would not reflect the actual level of food security.

Given these limitations, as well as other constraints in this project, such as time and money, the following approach was determined to be the most feasible in terms of estimating the number of people who are food insecure in Belleville.

## ***2.2 The Method Used***

The methodology used in this study begins with the assumption that people in the Belleville area who are food insecure access programs geared toward providing food assistance and support. Therefore, it logically follows that the number of people in Belleville that are not food secure can be estimated by measuring the number of people who use food assistance organizations.

Based on this assumption, all of the major food assistance organizations in Belleville were contacted. A representative from each agency was asked a set of standardized questions regarding the food program(s) they offer (see Appendix A). Each of the food assistance organizations was asked how a person goes about accessing the program and how participation data is collected.

Once all of the data was collected for each agency, it was found that common data existed. A data table was then constructed for the month of March 2001, showing the number of people who accessed each of the food assistance programs in Belleville.

## ***2.3 Data Integrity: Double Counting***

Another important aspect of collecting the data was determining how the existing data from each source was obtained. With open-door programs, where anyone is eligible to participate, there was double counting in the recording of participation levels. That is, the figures reported by these organizations for the

month of March were based on the total number of times the program was used, and not on the total number of individual people who accessed the service.

In instances where double counting occurred, the data was modified by dividing the number of people reported for the month by the number of times the service was offered per month. For example, if 50 people were reported to have used an open-door program in March, and the program is offered twice a month, then for the purpose of this study, the actual number of individuals that used the program in that timeframe would be recorded as 25.

This, of course, makes the implicit assumption that the same people sought out the service each time it was offered during the month. In speaking with members of the food assistance organizations for which double counting was an issue, it was found that, on average, many of the same people did indeed attend the program each day. Therefore, for the purpose of this project, it can be assumed that the same people accessed a particular program each time it was offered during the month of March 2001. A detailed explanation of how the figures were adjusted for each organization follows in Chapter 3.

Double counting was only an issue with open-door programs that are offered more than once a month. Since participants must register in order to use food banks, the numbers provided from food bank organizations represent the actual number of individuals served. In other cases, the food assistance program is only offered once a month, so no double counting was reflected in the figures reported for the month of March.

## ***2.4 Caveats***

Despite efforts to get as accurate a count as possible, there are still a few issues that could not be fully resolved. Each of these issues serves to increase the margin of error in this study. Therefore, it must be emphasized that the results

of this project are estimates only, and are not intended to represent an exact count on food insecurity in Belleville.

As discussed above, double counting was a problem that was mitigated as much as possible, but may still contribute to error. There is also another aspect of double counting in this analysis, which comes from the fact that people who have used more than one food assistance program in the same timeframe are being counted more than once. Because each program operates independently, there is no way to track how many programs each participant has accessed over the course of the month. Consequently, there is no way to avoid double counting these individuals. This is one problem that could not be dealt with within the context of this analysis.

Another potential caveat in this project is the assumption that food insecure people in Belleville seek help from food assistance organizations. It is likely that some people who are not food secure do not use any food assistance programs, but instead, rely on friends and family members (Community Development Council of Quinte: CDCQ 1992). Alternatively, some people may simply eat very little, providing only for their children, for example, until they can afford to eat again (McIntyre et al. 1998). Still, others may be too proud to approach a food assistance organization, and may be unwilling to ask for help (CDCQ 1992, McIntyre et al. 1998). As discussed, however, this assumption was necessary in order to get the most realistic count possible, given the limitations already described.

Finally, the fact that the data for each program was not collected uniformly can contribute to error in measurement. The lack of a common system for counting and reporting participation levels among each of the food assistance

organizations can lead to inconsistencies with the data, and a misrepresentation of actual results.

Despite the limitations described above, the project still has a great deal of merit. Not only does it estimate participation levels for all food assistance programs in Belleville, the project also sheds some light on the extent of food insecurity in the area, and provides a basis for further analysis.

## **3.0 Results**

A total of 13 different food assistance programs were identified in Belleville. The number of individuals that accessed each of these programs for the month of March 2001 was determined, and the results can be summarized in Table 1, Appendix B. As shown in the table, the total estimated number of people in Belleville, Ontario, who were food insecure during the month of March 2001, is 3,690. Below is a brief description of each of the food assistance programs, along with the count for each, and an explanation of how each count was arrived at.

### ***3.1 Meals on Wheels***

The Meals on Wheels program is a service provided by Community Care for South Hastings. The service provides home-delivered hot meals to adults, mostly seniors. The majority of the meals are paid for by the participants at a cost of \$3.50 per meal, while Community Care subsidizes the rest. During March 2001, 1054 meals were delivered to 68 individuals.

### ***3.2 Good Baby Box***

The Community Development Council of Quinte operates several self-help food programs designed to help families meet the food needs of their family members. One such program is the Good Baby Box program. For a nominal fee, new families can purchase a box of items designed to help meet the dietary and nutritional needs of their infants. The number of times a family purchases a food box over the course of a month is recorded, thus avoiding the double counting problem. In March 2001, a total of 151 children were assisted through the Good Baby Box program.

### ***3.3 Good Food Box***

Another program offered by the Community Development Council of Quinte is the Good Food Box. Once each month, participants can purchase a box of fruits, vegetables and other foods at a cost well below that of buying each of the items

at individual retail prices. The boxes can be offered at a cheaper rate because of the collective buying power that the participants create by pooling their resources together through the program. For the month of March 2001, 917 individuals accessed the Good Food Box program.

### ***3.4 Good Lunch Box***

The Community Development Council of Quinte also offers a Good Lunch Box program. This program operates in much the same way as the Good Food Box program. However, the contents of the box are geared more towards providing breakfast, lunch and snack items at costs well below their retail value. For the most part, Good Food Box customers also participate in the Good Lunch Box program. Therefore, in order to avoid a double count, these figures are not included in this analysis.

### ***3.5 Gleaners Food Bank***

The Gleaners Food Bank provides emergency food assistance to Belleville area residents, and is the largest food bank in the region. All participants undergo an intake and screening process. As a result, Gleaners is able to count the number of individuals that accessed the food bank over the course of a month, and not the number of times the food bank itself was accessed. For the month of March 2001, 1194 people used the services of the food bank.

### ***3.6 Gleaners Distribution Centre***

In addition to the general food bank, Gleaners also operates a distribution centre, whereby surplus food bank items are given to those in real need. Once again, participants must register, so there is no double counting involved. In March 2001, 98 individuals received aid from distribution centre.

### ***3.7 Salvation Army Food Bank***

The Salvation Army also operates a food bank in Belleville. This food bank also provides emergency food assistance to those in need. Because the Salvation

Army, along with Gleaners, is a member of the Canadian Association of Food Banks, participants must register in order to use the service, and participation rates must be reported in terms of the actual number of people that accessed the food bank. Double counting is therefore not an issue here. In March 2001, a total of 631 individuals accessed the food bank.

### ***3.8 Lunch Room***

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the Salvation Army also operates a Lunch Room, where anyone can drop in and have a sandwich. The cost of the lunches is fully subsidized by the Salvation Army. Because the lunchroom is open to everyone, double counting can occur. However, this program works in tandem with the Sandwich Shop, so an explanation of how the double counting was dealt with is provided in the next section. In March of 2001, 867 meals were prepared for about 99 people.

### ***3.9 Sandwich Shop***

The Lunch Room program is complemented by the Sandwich Shop, which runs on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The Sandwich Shop is offered by Living Hope Community Meals – an association of churches and other organizations in the area who seek to provide aid for those in need. Since both the Lunch Room and the Sandwich Shop are delivering a service to primarily the same clientele, for the purpose of this project, they were treated as the same program.

In March 2001, the Lunch Room served 867 meals, and the Sandwich Shop served 1320 meals, giving a total of 2187 meals served by the two programs. There were 22 weekdays in that month, so the total was divided by the number of days the program was offered, yielding 99 individual participants. One could therefore say that the Lunch Room and the Sandwich shop each served 99 individuals during the month of March. However, since it is generally the same people that come to the program each day, regardless of how it is being

subsidized, this would create unnecessary double counting of participants. Therefore, it is best to say that the Lunch Room and the Sandwich Shop each served 99 people, but they were the same people.

### ***3.10 Open Door Café***

Living Hope Community Meals also sponsors an “Open Door Café” program, which is run at Eastminster United Church. Once a week, a meal is prepared for which anyone can attend. Participation in the program is monitored by counting the number of plates served each week. Since double counting is therefore prevalent, the number of plates served for the month was divided by the number of weeks in the month. In March 2001, 408 meals were served to approximately 102 individuals.

### ***3.11 TGIF Community Meals***

Bridge Street United Church offers “TGIF Community Meals,” an open-door program that serves hot meals on Fridays. Anyone is welcome to participate in the program, and there is no registration. Participation is tracked by counting the total number of meals served each month. Double counting was therefore an issue that had to be dealt with in this case. A total of 145 meals were served each of 5 Fridays during the month of March 2001, yielding participation by 29 individuals.

### ***3.12 Sunday Brunch***

The Royal Canadian Legion offers a biweekly Sunday Brunch program. Anyone is welcome to attend Sunday brunch. In March 2001, the program ran twice, and a total of 306 meals were served. Adjusting for double counting, the Sunday Brunch program provided meals for approximately 153 people during that month.

### ***3.13 School-Based Student Nutrition Programs***

The Hastings & Prince Edward District School Board offers breakfast, lunch and snack programs in many of its schools. These programs are designed to ensure that all children have access to food so as to fuel their minds and bodies. It must be stressed that these programs are open-access, and students can attend for a variety of reasons. Students must sign in when they access the programs, so the figures do not need to be adjusted for double counting. Unfortunately, data is not available for March 2001, but figures are available for May 2001. During that month, approximately 248 children participated in student nutrition programs in eight Belleville schools.

## **4.0 Community Context**

With the exception of food banks, many of the food assistance programs described here are open-access, meaning that anyone can attend them. While food tends to bring people together for many of these programs, it does so for different reasons. For some participants, a food program provides an opportunity to socialize with other members of the community, or simply get out of the house. For others, the food program helps subsidize their food budget. School nutrition programs, for example, are accessible to all students. Some students may access the program because they have not had time to eat breakfast before getting to school. Some students participate in the food program out of convenience, while others simply do not eat before a particular time of day. Still, other children participate because food is not available in the home. It is important to keep this in mind when doing such an analysis.

Through this exercise, 3,690 people were estimated to be food insecure in Belleville during the month of March 2001. Before amalgamation, the 1996 census reveals that the population of the City of Belleville was 37,083 (Statistics Canada 1996). Each of the food assistance programs studied also exists within the boundaries of the “old city”. It can therefore be inferred that about 10% of the population in the “old city” accessed a food assistance program in March 2001. Does this mean that 10% of the population of Belleville is food insecure? In order to gain a better understanding of the extent of food security in the area, it is useful to explore other trends.

### ***4.1 Poverty in Quinte***

During the month of March 2001, just over 1,200 people of every 10,000 in the region were either in receipt of or a beneficiary of social assistance (CDCQ 2001). Concurrently, in the first quarter of 2001, there were 1,977 Employment Insurance claimants in the City of Belleville (Ker 2001).

Wehler et al. (1992) suggest that poverty and the use of charitable food assistance programs are interdependent. As discussed previously, the relationship between income security and food security has been resoundingly proven in study after study (CDCQ 2001, CDCQ 2000, CDCQ 1992, TFPC 1994, Campbell 1991). It can therefore be assumed that many of the people who accessed food support programs during the month of March 2001 are the same people in receipt of social assistance and Employment Insurance discussed above.

However, the Task Force on Hunger (1992) reports that only half of the people at risk of being hungry are in receipt of income support (CDCQ 1992). The rest are actually employed, and consist of the working poor – people who are employed, but have insufficient income to meet their basic needs (TFPC 1994, NCW 1997).

In 1996, for example, 26.6% of all households in the City of Belleville and 10.3% of all households in the Township of Thurlow earned less than \$20,000 annually (Statistics Canada 1996). As illustrated below, many of these people are also at risk of being food insecure.

#### ***4.2 The Cost of Food***

In the Community Well Being Index (2001), a local study of more than 125 indicators contributing to community quality of life, it was determined that having access to healthy, nutritious foods at reasonable prices sufficient to nurture one's body and mind is fundamental to good physical and emotional well being (CDCQ 2001).

Each year, the Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit (HPECHU) uses a price index to measure the cost of healthy eating based on current nutritional guidelines. According to June 1999 figures, it was determined that a family of four consisting of one man and one woman; both aged 25-49, and two children;

one aged 13-15 and one aged 7-9, must spend \$108.94 per week on food in order to consume sufficient nutritious foods from all four food groups in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating (HPECHU 2000). This does not include the cost of non-food items such as personal hygiene products or household cleaners.

Based on these figures, neither a family of four with an annual income of \$18,000, a female-led lone-parent family with two children and a monthly income of \$1043, nor a single man in receipt of social assistance are likely to be able to afford to purchase sufficient nutritious foods from each of the food groups in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating (HPECHU 2000). In each of these scenarios, insufficient income is the primary cause of food insecurity.

### ***4.3 The Cost of Housing***

The cost of housing is another factor proven to affect one's ability to attain food security. The following table illustrates the average housing costs for a family of four in Belleville, Ontario.

Sample Base Shelter Costs – Tenant Family of Four in Belleville	Monthly	Annually
Average market rent - 2 bedroom apartment	\$ 643.00	\$ 7,716.00
Electricity (average 12,000 kWh/annum)	\$ 77.21	\$ 926.52
Water Consumption (average 75,000 per annum)	\$ 17.91	\$ 214.92
GST on home heating/lights/water services	\$ 7.61	\$ 91.32
Total base housing costs (less maintenance/insurance)	\$745.73	\$8,948.76
Income necessary to meet 30 % of shelter costs	\$2,485.76	\$29,829.16

Source: Community Development Council of Quinte. *Community Well-Being Index*. Belleville: CDCQ; 2001.

According to this table, which draws on data from Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation (CMHC), Belleville Utilities Commission and Statistics Canada, a family of four renting a two bedroom apartment requires an annual income of almost \$30,000 in order to spend 30% of their income on housing costs (CDCQ 2001). Housing affordability is recognized as spending a maximum of 30% of household income on shelter (CMHC 2002).

Yet, as stated in Section 4.1, 26.6% of households in Belleville have a gross yearly income of less than \$20,000. This clearly indicates that many Belleville residents do not earn enough income to meet their basic housing costs. Consequently, families must spend in excess of 30% of their income on housing in order to cover these costs. As discussed in Section 1.3, this money often comes from funds budgeted for food. The result is that many individuals cannot afford to eat sufficient, nutritious foods from Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating, and are food insecure.

#### ***4.4 Summary***

As discussed, the main purpose of this project was to estimate the number of food insecure people in Belleville, Ontario that participate in food assistance programs. Based on an analysis of participation rates for various food assistance programs in the City of Belleville, it was found that a total of 3,690 individuals accessed the services of such organizations during the month of March 2001. This figure represents approximately 10% of the population of the city before amalgamation.

From preceding discussions regarding poverty in the area, the cost of food and the cost of housing, it is clear that the number of food insecure people in Belleville is much greater than the figure arrived at in this study. However, it is important to remember that many people who are either food secure or at risk of becoming so do not seek assistance from food programs. This is the case for

various reasons, including being too proud to ask for help, or seeking assistance from family and friends instead (CDCQ 1992, McIntyre et al. 1998).

As stated in Section 1.2, food insecurity is caused by several different factors. Consequently, it can also be manifested in different ways. For example, individuals may not have access to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious foods; relying instead on unhealthy foods from day to day. Alternatively, some people might be able to afford foods at the beginning of a pay cycle, but by the end, have run out of money, and cannot afford to eat adequate amounts of safe, nutritious foods. Many of these people would likely not turn to a food assistance program for help.

Nonetheless, it must be stressed that the overarching goal of this project was to get a glimpse of the extent of food insecurity in the area. Based on this study, approximately 3,690 people are relying on food assistance programs in order to meet their food needs. While the various food assistance organizations should be applauded for their efforts, it is also clear that there are many more food insecure people in the area. Hopefully, the findings of this study will serve to promote both an increased awareness of the issue of food security, as well as more coordination and communication among the various food assistance organizations in the area.

## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Questions Asked of Each Food Assistance Organization*

1. Hi, my name is Jonathan Wallace, and I am calling on behalf of the Community Development Council of Quinte. I'm doing a placement at the centre that involves a hunger count for the Belleville area, and was wondering if I could ask you a couple of questions about your program(s)? First of all, I was wondering if you could tell me specifically what programs you offer to those in need of food. My understanding is that you \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, but I just want to clarify that.
2. How does someone go about accessing the program?
  - a. Do you advertise publicly?
  - b. Is everyone eligible to participate, or do the participants need a referral?
3. Do you keep any record of the number of people or families that use your service?
4. **IF SO** How do you go about counting how many people use your program?
  - a. Do you count people as they come in the door, or do you keep track of who uses the service?
  - b. Do you count individuals or families?
  - c. How do you avoid counting someone twice?
  - d. Do you report your numbers for a particular month, day, or year (fiscal or calendar)?
  - e. Do you keep track of whether the people or families that use your program also use any other food security services in area?
5. **IF NOT** Do you have any idea of the number of people that use your program?
6. Do you have any published information on the number of people/families that use your program that I might be able to get from you?

7. Thank you so much for your time. What was your name, again?
8. Would I be able to call you back in the future, in case I needed to ask a couple more questions? Should I ask for you?

**Appendix B: Participation Levels for Each Food Assistance Program**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Total Served</b>	<b>Double Counting?</b>	<b>How to Remedy?</b>	<b>Total Individuals</b>
Community Care for South Hastings	Meals on Wheels	68			68
Community Development Council	Good Baby Box	151			151
Community Development Council	Good Lunch & Good Food Boxes	917			917
Gleaners	General Food Bank	1194			1194
Gleaners	Distribution Centre	98			98
Salvation Army	Food Bank	631			631
Salvation Army & Living Hope Community Meals	Lunch Room & Sandwich Shop	2187	✓	Divide by 22	99
Living Hope Community Meals	Open Door Café	408	✓	Divide by 4	102
Bridge Street United Church	TGIF Meals	145	✓	Divide by 5	29
Canadian Legion	Sunday Brunch	306	✓	Divide by 2	153
HPED School Board	Nutrition Programs	248			248
				<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>3690</b>

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