

York Region

**Food  
Network**



Our vision is to ensure that all residents of York Region are food secure. Food security is the assurance that all people at all times are able to acquire nutritional food in a way that upholds basic human dignity.

Our mission is to increase access to affordable, nutritious food for York Region residents. York Region Food Network will:

- Raise awareness and promote food security issues and policy change in our communities.
- Support community-based food security programs and services.

1 in 10 York Region households is considered at risk for needing a food bank as these residents are spending 50% or more of their income on housing.

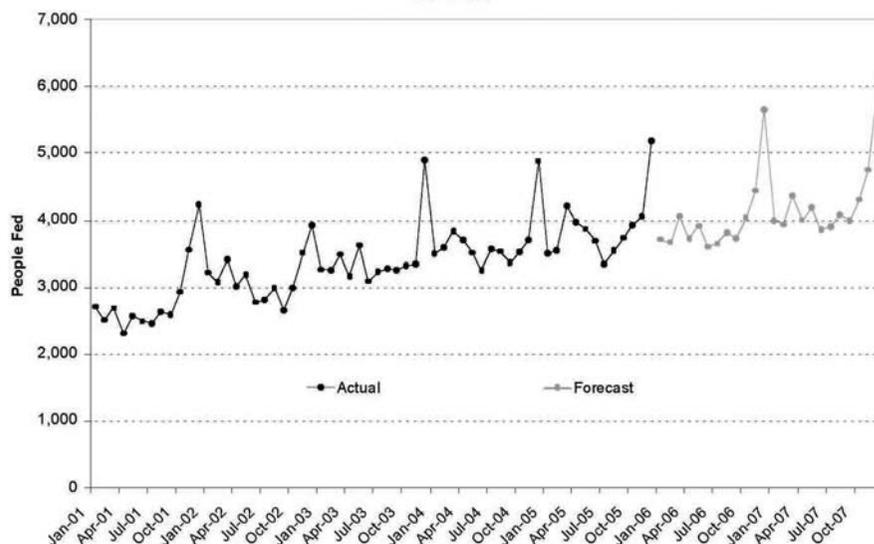
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# Hunger in the Midst of Prosperity: The Need for Food Banks in York Region

York Region's economic growth has been anything but modest. From 1991 to 2001 York Region's population increased by 44% and between 1996 and 2001 York Region was the fastest growing "region" in Canada. Employment in York Region has grown even faster than its population. Between 1996 and 2001, the number of jobs increased by 53.4%<sup>1</sup>. The average annual household income increased from \$74,277 in 1996 to over \$90,000 in 2001<sup>2</sup>.

Unfortunately, food bank use in York Region continues to grow at an alarming rate – 38% between 2001 and 2005. In 2001, less than 3,000 Region residents used a food bank each month but in 2005 this increased to almost 4,000 residents per month. Almost half of those served are children; about 60% of whom are from single parent families<sup>3</sup>. *In 2007, York Region Food Network (YRFN) estimates that an average 4,284 residents will be visiting local food banks each month. This is an increase of 53% since 2001.*

Actual and Forecast Number of People Fed by York Region Food Banks, 2001-2007



York Region appears to be a prosperous area of Ontario, so why is hunger an increasing problem? Food bank clients were surveyed to help answer this question (see insert for survey details).

Food bank clients who come to food banks today are more educated than clients were ten years ago – **yet food bank use has increased**. Presently, almost 70% of those surveyed have graduated high school and about 1 in 4 have completed university or college or higher. This does not differ substantially from the average Region resident – 80% have graduated high school and 25% have a university degree or higher<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> York Region. 2004. Housing and Our Economy. Remaining Competitive.

<http://www.region.york.on.ca/Publications/Default+Economic+Publications.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. 1996 & 2001 Census

<sup>3</sup> York Region Food Network. 2006. York Region Food Bank Utilization 2005 Summary.

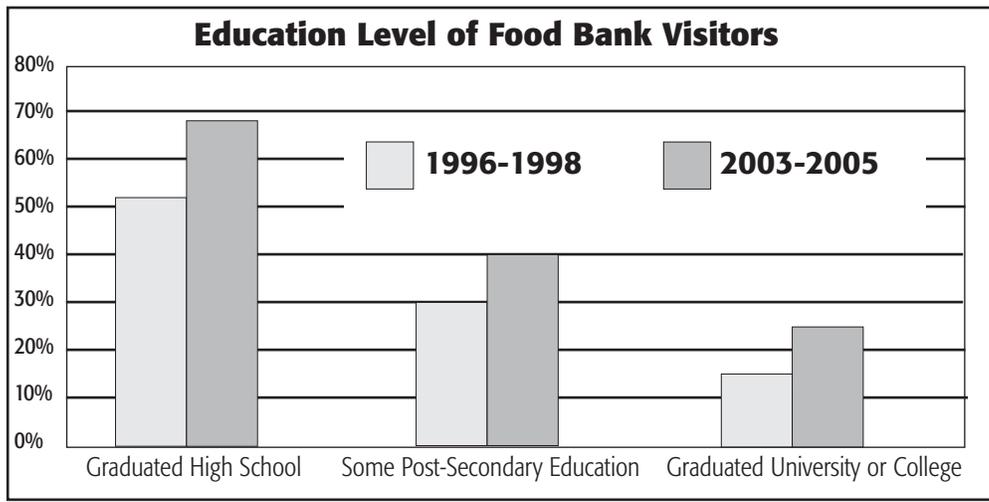
[http://www.yrfn.ca/pdf/2005\\_fbstats.pdf](http://www.yrfn.ca/pdf/2005_fbstats.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> York Region Community Services and Housing Statistics.

[http://www.region.york.on.ca/NR/rdonlyres/fsoet7mhlabrszfyj4rkaoczs2ab3rgcf3hi26756j7oobrebdtw7dynveccxu34t614stbgwgjqzc56kczlzn3ib/TP\\_20\\_years\\_by\\_highest\\_level\\_of\\_schooling.xls](http://www.region.york.on.ca/NR/rdonlyres/fsoet7mhlabrszfyj4rkaoczs2ab3rgcf3hi26756j7oobrebdtw7dynveccxu34t614stbgwgjqzc56kczlzn3ib/TP_20_years_by_highest_level_of_schooling.xls)

...the voice of hunger in York Region

Employment status of adults visiting the food banks appears to have improved as well - yet **food bank use has increased**. Many households of food bank clients have one or more employed individuals (30%), but 49% are not working due to disability, retirement, or full-time care-giving responsibilities.

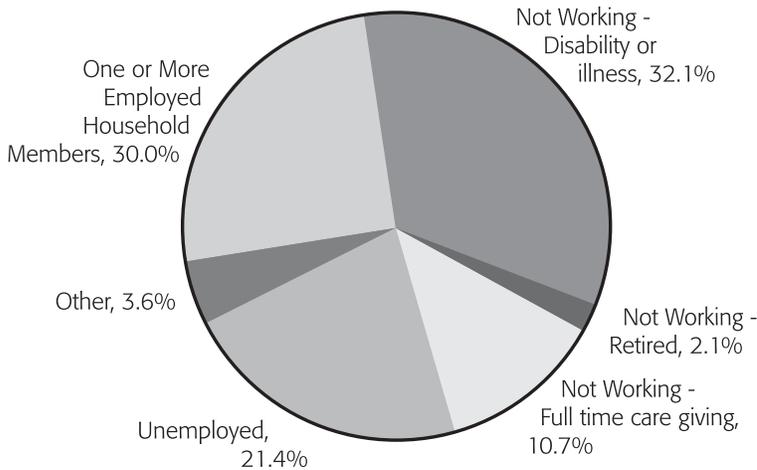


still paying a huge proportion of their income towards mortgage/rent and utilities.

Half of all food bank households continue to spend more than 60% of their income on shelter, leaving little available for other basic needs such as food and clothing. Four out of 10 adults report

that they go hungry at least once a week and 13% of their children go hungry at least once a week. Similar to previous years<sup>7</sup>, even when they do eat, the majority of food bank clients (75%) go without certain foods; more than 6 out of 10 cannot afford enough fruits, vegetables, or meat products for an appropriate diet. Missing school supplies and clothing are also an issue for 10-20% of children from families using food bank services.

### Employment Status of Food Bank Households in 2005



Over the past 10 years, the annual household income of food bank clients has increased 10% while household size has remained the same (Table 1) - yet **food bank use has increased**. However, household income of food bank clients, \$12,420, is still far below the regional average of over \$90,000 per household<sup>5</sup>, and is well below what is considered to be the low income cut-off for a single person living in York Region (\$14,561 - \$18,371)<sup>6</sup>.

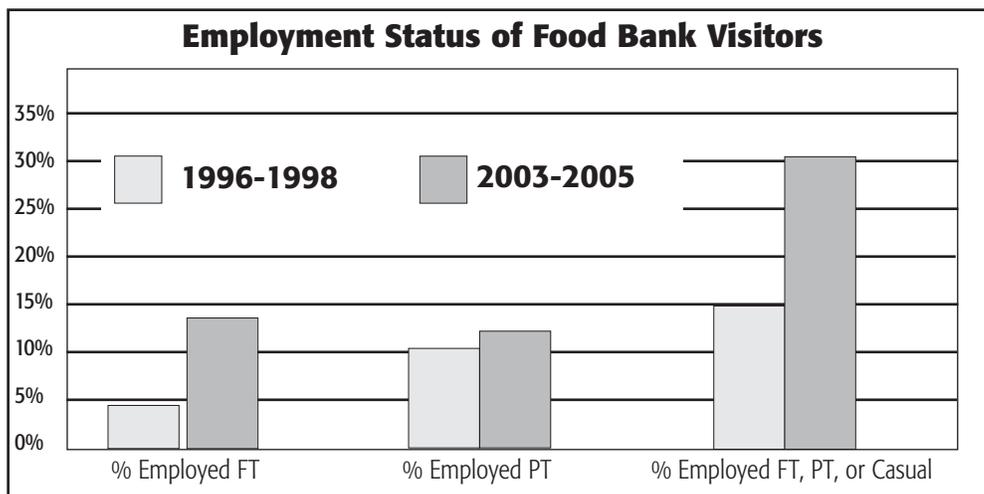
Overall, only 6% of York Region residents with a university education has a low income, but this is not the case for well educated food bank clients. Consequently, people who access food banks are

**Table 1. Average household size, income, and percentage of income spent on shelter for food bank clients over the years 1996-98 and 2003-05.**

	1996-98	2003-05
Average Household Size	3	3
Average Annual Household Income	\$11,280	\$12,420
Average Percentage of Income Spent on Rent and Utilities	65%	60%

Housing in York Region is relatively expensive and its affordability worsened between 1991 and 2001. The average cost of a detached home is \$405,000, resulting in a monthly mortgage, less down payment, of \$2250-2583. The average monthly rent for a 2 and 3 bedroom rental is \$950 and 1075, respectively<sup>8</sup>.

In 2001, 1 of every 4 Region households spent 30% or more of their income on housing and 1 of 10 spent 50% or more of their income on housing. These households represent potential future clients of York Region's Food Banks. A slight



reduction in household income, through events such as job loss, illness, or family care needs, and shelter will consume most of the funds leaving little for food!

Not surprisingly, given their income, over 90% of food bank users do not own a home, and based on the housing costs in the Region, it appears that the majority of food bank clients are living in below average housing. Many of these are well educated individuals whose income is insufficient to provide suitable accommodation as well as life's other necessities, including food. For many this is a relatively new situation, as more than half (54%) have been food bank clients for less than a year.

How do York Region residents arrive at this station in life? The York Region Food Network is committed to further exploring this question. As part of its effort to eliminate hunger, we plan to investigate the circumstances that result in the need for food bank services and to advocate for changes that will alleviate this need.

### **The Link Between Hunger and Homelessness**

The lack of food security, homelessness, and the wider issue of risk of homelessness are serious issues in York Region.

The 1.6% rental vacancy rate (2005) in York Region is one of the lowest in Ontario. 3% is considered to be the rate at which tenants have a reasonable choice of units.

As of June 2006, there are 5500 households on the waiting list for subsidized housing (rent geared to income) in York Region. Wait times are long – families can expect to wait 3-5 years in the north end of the region, and well over 6 years if they live in the south end (Vaughan, Richmond Hill or Markham). Single people can expect to wait well over 10 years.

“Due to the acute shortage in affordable housing supply, many people are living in overcrowded conditions, some in unsafe environments, some having to commute long distances to work, some paying rents they cannot afford, and some in shelters, etc. There is a wide range of people who need housing, including working families, seniors, persons with disabilities, single parents, and the homeless. The lack of sufficient affordable housing in York Region is a serious concern. There are increasing pressures on municipalities due to a growing population, high rents, long waiting lists and wait times for social housing.”<sup>9</sup>

While York Region appears to be a prosperous area, food bank use is increasing and hunger is an increasing problem.

### **What Can You Do to Make A Difference?**

<sup>5</sup> York Region. 2002. York Region Health Status Report: A Measure of Health.

<sup>6</sup> York Region. A Profile of York Region's Low Income Population. Research Highlights.

<sup>7</sup> York Region Food Network. 2005. Hunger in York Region: A Survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA.

<sup>8</sup> York Region. 2004. Housing and Our Economy. Remaining Competitive.

<sup>9</sup> Report No. 2 Community Services<sup>7</sup> and Housing Committee March 2005 Regional Council Meeting March 31 2005.

<sup>10</sup> <http://temagami.carlton.ca/jmc/cnews/01022002/n4.shtml>

## **The Survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA**

Between February and April, 2006, the *Survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA* was administered by trained volunteers at seven food banks in York Region. York Region Food Network and Daily Bread Food Bank recruited volunteers to conduct the survey. A total of 142 adult food bank clients (18 years of age and over) from the Aurora Food Pantry, Georgina Food Pantry, Newmarket Food Pantry, Richmond Hill Community Food Bank, King Township Food Bank, Markham Food Bank, and the Women's Centre of York Region were interviewed representing 377 household members. Survey participation was voluntary and anonymous, and interviews were carried out either while respondents were waiting to collect food or after food collection. Respondents were assured that they could stop the interview at any time, that all responses would be kept confidential, and that participation and/or responses would not affect their eligibility for food bank assistance.

All data entry, validation and cleaning, including York Region data, were performed by staff at the Daily Bread Food Bank. Analysis of York Region data was carried out by the York Region Food Network using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences V 12.0 (SPSS). Data from earlier surveys in York Region food banks were used for comparison purposes.

The 2006 *Survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA* represents a convenience sample of food bank clients in the Greater Toronto Area. Participants were not selected in any methodological manner but were simply a sample of those available and willing to participate. While a more robust survey methodology might have been preferred, survey administrators felt that any greater intrusion would significantly reduce participation. In the end, the age and family composition of those represented by the survey did not differ substantially from what monthly statistics compiled by York Region's Food Banks. As well, survey results were felt to have significant face validity amongst Food Bank volunteers and administrators.

# **Hungry in York Region – Why is Hunger an Increasing Problem in a Prosperous Area?**

Each year, York Region Food Network participates in the survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA. This survey is conducted annually by the Daily Bread Food Bank and associated agencies. York Region Food Network assists by collecting York Region specific data in order to provide a snapshot of the situations and circumstances faced by food bank clients in the region. What follows is a summary of what has been learned over the past 10 years about York Region food bank clients.

- % married and % single food bank clients has remained quite steady at 36% and 25%, respectively
- % employed Full Time has climbed from 4% to 14%
- % employed Full Time, Part Time or casual has climbed from 15% to 30%
- % with high school diploma or more has risen from 53% to 69%
- % with university/college degree/diploma has risen from 15% to 24%
- % owning house has remained around 8-9%, but % renting a house has climbed from 31% to 45%
- average monthly household income has risen from \$940 to \$1,035, still well below the average York Region monthly household income of \$7,500
- Half of the responders spend more than 60% of their household income on housing and utilities. According to CMHC, spending more than 50% of income on housing puts one at risk of homelessness<sup>10</sup>.
- Currently there are over a million Canadian households paying over 50% of their income just for shelter<sup>10</sup>

**The next York Region food bank client could be you.**

**Hunger in York Region is a reality.**

**How can you help?**

**Say NO! to Hunger and Homelessness**



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