

Hunger in the Midst of Prosperity

The Need for Food Banks in York Region: 2009

In 2009, York Region food banks provided food for over 54,000 clients

Why do people in such a prosperous region need to use a food bank? In March of 2009, the York Region Food Network interviewed 176 food bank clients to help answer this question.

The most frequently cited reason for needing to use a food bank was "recently lost job" (33%). Other reasons included family break up, reduced hours at work, and "new to area and just getting settled". These are reasons why any one of us might someday need to use a food bank.

When asked about hunger, 39% said that in the last 3 months, there were times when they were hungry because they could not afford to buy enough food. Moreover, when people at the food banks were asked about going without food, 44% said that they had not eaten for a whole day because there wasn't enough money.

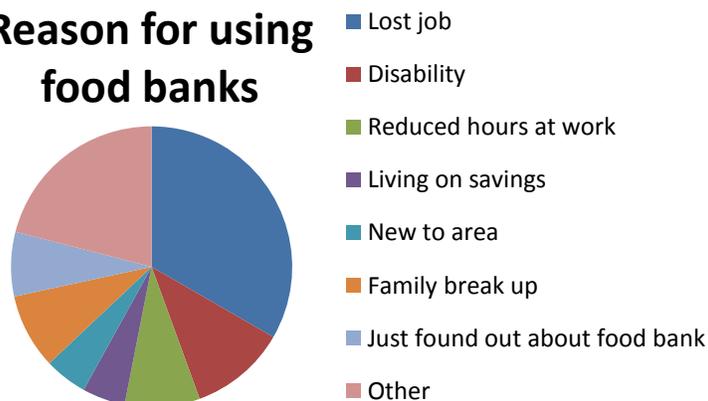
Research into the issues of food security and hunger indicates that parents will go without food in order to make sure that there is enough food in the house for their children. Therefore, it is frequently found that children are buffered from the effects of poverty and hunger.



Even with this protection, when York Region food bank clients were asked about their children's experience with hunger, 7.4% shared that in the last 3 months, their children had gone hungry.

Discussing the issue of hunger and children is the most difficult part of this survey. Many parents cannot go through this section without feeling pain.

Reason for using food banks



Disability

When asked, 42% of respondents indicated that they either had a disability or a serious illness expected to last one year or more. However, only 21% of respondents received Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) funds, 5.7% received CPP-Disability, and 2.3% received Workers Safety and Insurance Board benefits. These numbers indicate that many people who are disabled or ill do not receive ODSP. Even then, people who are successful in obtaining support through ODSP need to go to a food bank due to food insecurity.

Living with debt

Living with debt has become a necessity for many people. 33% of food bank clients who were interviewed said that they had mortgage or back rent debt, and 33.5% owe money on their utilities. Over 24% have a bank loan and 20.5% a student loan. Almost 44% of people interviewed owe money on their credit card and over 36% owe money to a friend or family member.

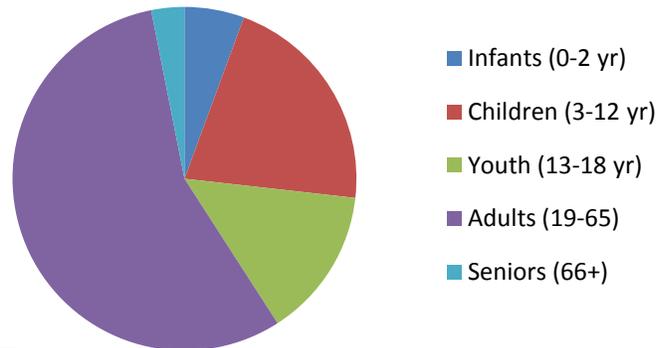
What poverty means

When food bank clients were asked which statements best describe what poverty means to them, the following descriptions were provided:

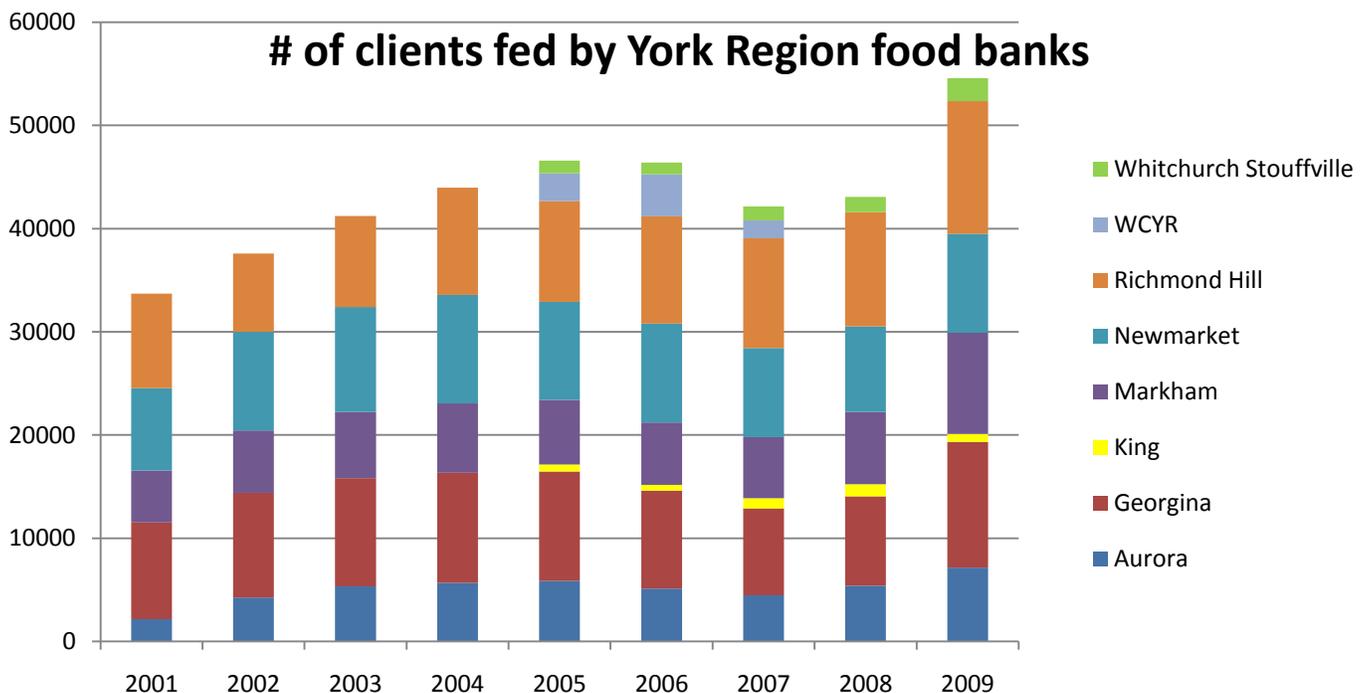
- Not having money to make ends meet – over 78%
- Not having enough to buy basics like food and clothing – 67%
- Having to struggle to survive each and every day – 61%
- Never having enough to be able to live decently – almost 51%
- Having a lot less than everyone else – almost 39%

“Poverty is ... pretending that you forgot your lunch.”*

People accessing food banks in 2009 by age group



There were also several comments about embarrassment, humiliation, depression, sadness and shame. Food bank clients spoke about being homeless, feeling like a failure as a parent, and “bullying [when my] kids don’t have the same food and same clothes as other kids”.



York Region food bank use increased 27% between 2008 and 2009.

Acknowledgments

Thank-you to the eight food banks in the Region for sharing their statistics and participating in Daily Bread Food Bank’s annual Survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA, as well as to the many volunteer interviewers who administered the surveys. Most especially, we thank the food bank clients who participated in the survey process.

People in York Region cannot afford a nutritious diet

Low-income households often live in rental housing. Using the costs of renting in the central and northern parts of York Region (which are **lower** than in the southern part of the Region), here are five scenarios outlining monthly expenses and income.

Households on fixed incomes					
	Ontario Works Single man age 31	Ontario Works Single mother age 35 With a boy age 14 and a girl age 8	Ontario Works Family of 4: a man and woman age 35, a boy age 14 and a girl age 8	Ontario Disability Support Program Single Man age 34	Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement Single woman aged 75
Income ^{1,2}	\$572	\$984	\$1,106	\$1,020	\$1,169
Additional benefits and credits ³	\$20	\$698	\$698	\$27	\$30
Total monthly income	\$592	\$1,682	\$1,804	\$1,047	\$1,199
Rent ⁴	\$625 (bachelor)	\$974 (2 bedroom)	\$1,126 (3 bedroom)	\$625 (bachelor)	\$852 (1 bedroom)
Cost of a nutritious diet ⁵	\$239	\$540	\$713	\$239	\$175
Amount remaining to cover other basic monthly expenses	-\$272	\$168	-\$35	\$183	\$172

These scenarios illustrate that households on fixed incomes and minimum wage earners have little if any money left over to cover basic monthly expenses such as:

- Heat and hydro
- Telephone
- Laundry
- Toiletries and household cleaning products
- Insurance
- Transportation (bus pass, taxi or expenses associated with running and maintaining a car)
- Clothing for family members
- Debt payment
- Gifts
- Non-prescription drugs and dispensing fees for prescription drugs
- Banking service charges
- Costs associated with having children in school
- Child care expenses
- Money to cover unexpected expenses

“Poverty is ... hiding your feet so the teacher won’t get mad when you don’t have boots.”*

In reality, people usually choose to pay their rent and other fixed expenses e.g., heat, hydro, and transportation. Food becomes a “discretionary” expense, resulting in a diet of poor nutritional value.

**Quotes from Grade 4 & 5 children in Ontario*

¹ Ontario Works and Maximum Shelter Allowance.

² Ontario Disability Support Program Basic Needs and Shelter Allowance.

³ Additional Benefits include the Canada Child Tax Benefit, National Child Benefit Supplement, and Ontario Child Benefit. Additional credits include the GST Credit and Working Income Tax Benefit, where applicable. This number is 1/12th of the annual amount.

⁴ Average Rents for central and northern York Region. Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Report, October 2008

⁵ Food Basket Cost for York Region calculated using weekly data for May 2009, using calculations outlined in the Ontario Public Health Standards – Nutritious Food Basket Protocol & Guidance Document (April 2009)

Did you know?

While food banks provide emergency food supplies to people in need, they are not the answer to the problem of people not having enough to eat:

- Food banks rely on donations and have to limit visits to once a month to ensure that they have food for everyone.
- They give 2 to 4 days worth of food but this is not always enough.
- Fresh food storage facilities are limited or non-existent and therefore the supply of nutrient rich fresh foods is lacking.

Poverty exists in York Region:

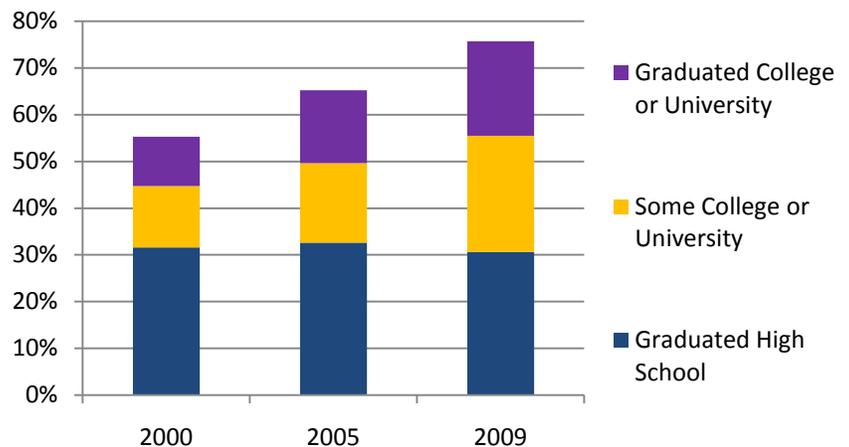
- According to the 2006 census, 13% of people in York Region (over 112,000) live on low incomes.
- The median income in York Region in 2006 was \$89,099 per year, while an individual on Ontario Works receives \$6,864 per year.

DO THE MATH

Go to www.putfoodinthebudget.ca

This interactive budgeting exercise illustrates the difficult choices to be made when you live in poverty.

Education level of food bank visitors



Over the past 10 years, food bank clients have become increasingly educated – yet food bank use has increased. Over 70% of those surveyed have graduated high school. This does not differ substantially from the average Region resident – 80% have graduated high school and 25% have a University degree or higher.



United Way
of York Region
Member Agency

The survey of people accessing emergency food programs in the GTA

Between February and March, the 2009 Survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA was administered by trained volunteers at six food banks in York Region. York Region Food Network and Daily Bread Food Bank recruited volunteers to conduct the survey. 176 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, and the Markham Food Bank were interviewed. 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.

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