

York Region

**Food
Network**



Hunger in York Region: *A Survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA*

November 2005

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.

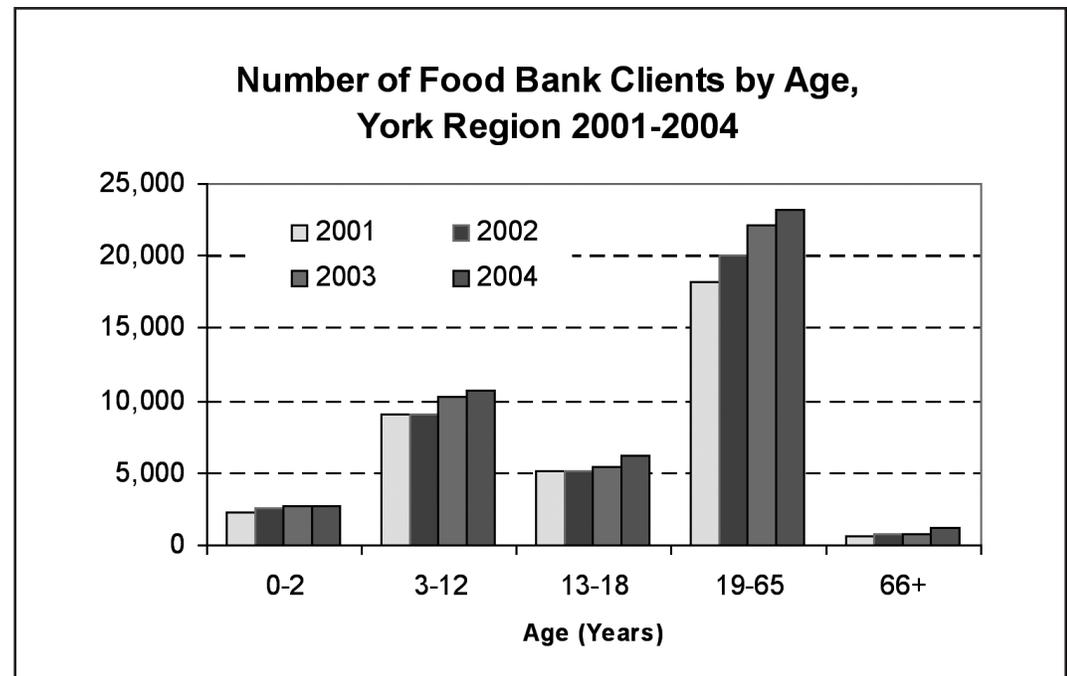
Highlights

In 2004, York Region food banks fed more than 44,000 people; 19,000 were children.

Through out the year York Region food banks feed the equivalent of population of the Town of Aurora.

How can you help?

York Region food banks are playing an increasingly important role feeding the community. From 2001 to 2004, food bank use increased 25%. In 2004 the food banks in Aurora, Georgina, Markham, Newmarket, and Richmond Hill fed approximately 44,000 people. Almost half of those people were children, many of whom were from single parent families.



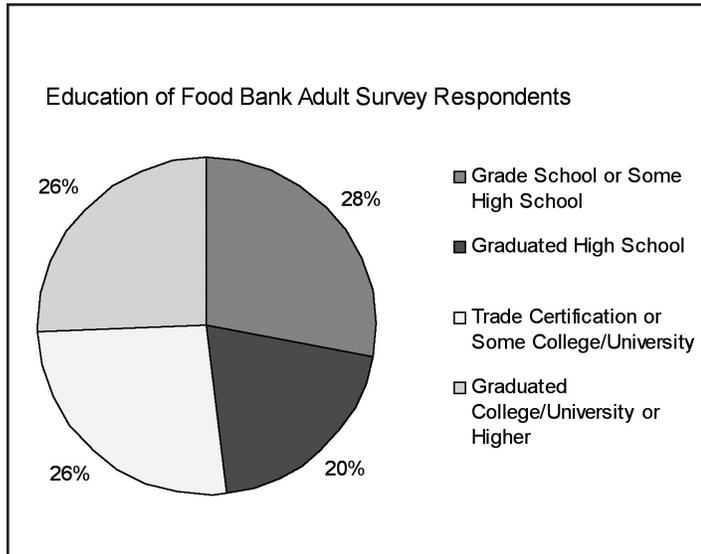
Food security is the assurance that all people, at all times, must be able to acquire nutritional food in a way that upholds basic human dignity. York Region Food Network's (YRFN) mission is to increase access to affordable, nutritious food for all people in York Region. The Food Network raises awareness and promotes change on food security issues and supports community-based food security programs and services.

To learn more about York Region food bank clients, YRFN helped administer the *Survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA*. This survey is coordinated annually by the Daily Bread Food Bank¹. Results of this survey provided here shed greater light into who uses York Region's food banks and the challenges they face. Many clients are an average York Region resident with a greater than average number of unfortunate circumstances.

...the voice of hunger in York Region

Education and Income

Survey results suggest that food bank clients are quite well educated. About 3 out of every 4 adult food bank clients have a high school diploma and 1 of 4 have a university degree or college diploma. Approximately 30% of Region residents have similar post-secondary education². As well, about 9 of every 10 adult food bank clients were born in Canada or have been here 10 years or more.



Sometimes a good education and a job aren't enough to keep food on the table.

Over 60% of adult food bank clients are employed or live with an employed household member (39% full-time). The income from this employment however, is too little to meet their needs. The average monthly income ranges from about \$725 per month for a single person to \$2100 per month for an extended family with children. This annual income of \$8,700 to \$25,200 is far below the average annual York Region household income in 2001 of \$91,878³. For over 60% of clients, the majority of this income (50% or more) pays for shelter. It is not surprising that income is a key determinant of food insecurity and hunger⁴.

¹ Daily Bread Food Bank. 2005. Who's Hungry: 2005 Profile of Hunger in the GTA.

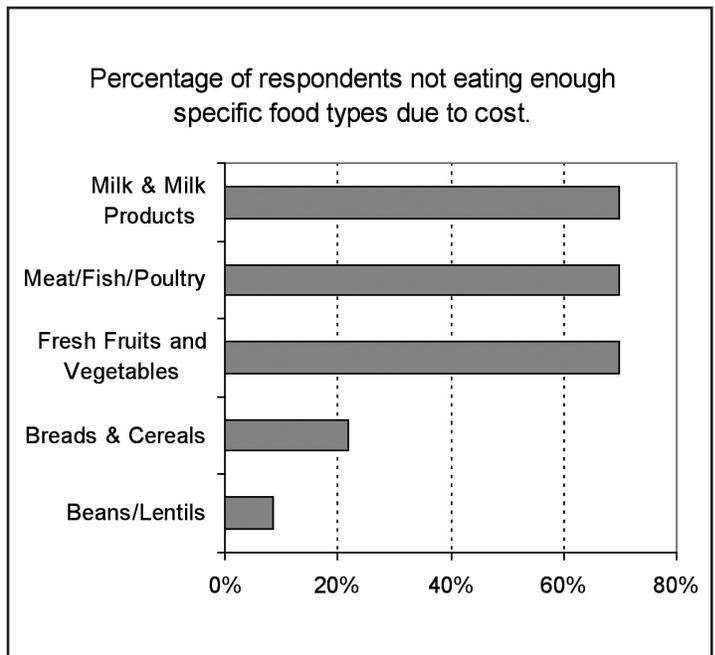
² Statistics Canada 2001 Census

³ Statistics Canada. 2002. Population counts, land area, population density and population rank, for Canada, Provinces and Territories, and Census Divisions, 2001 Census as cited in York Region Health Status

Shelter and Food

Shelter for food bank clients primarily consists of rental accommodation or shared housing. Nine out of 10 respondents reported renting a room, apartment or house, or sharing a house or apartment with others. Over 90% of these people reported their landlord's conduct to be average to very good and none reported ever being evicted.

Research suggests that persons living in food insecure households have poorer diets than those individuals who are food secure and that this may result in a higher incidence of certain types of chronic disease and poorer functional health^{4,5}. Many adults (41%) reported being hungry at least one day a week because they did not have enough food and most (83%) reported that there were foods they should, but didn't, eat because of the cost - fruits and vegetables, meat/fish/poultry and milk and milk products being at the top of the list.



Mothers, in particular, have been shown to sacrifice their own food in order that their children won't go hungry⁶. Survey results supported this claim, with parents going hungry more often than their children. However, about one quarter of these kids still went

Report: A Measure of Health, 2002.

⁴ Dietitians of Canada. 2005. Individual and Household Food Insecurity in Canada: Position of Dietitians of Canada.

⁵ Beaudry, M., Hamelin, A-M., and H. Delisle. 2004. Public Nutrition: An Emerging Paradigm. Canadian Journal of Public Health, 95(5).

hungry at least once a week and over half were missing required school items such as books, supplies and clothing.

After paying the rent, there is little money left for food and other necessities.

Health

Survey findings echo research that indicates a linkage between food security and health status. Only about one quarter of adult food bank clients reported their health to be excellent or very good. In comparison, almost 60% adult York Region residents give their health the same rating⁷. Many food bank clients (62%) also reported a disability that prevented them from securing employment. Fortunately, more than half of the respondents reported having dental insurance (53%) and prescription drug insurance (60%). Much of the drug coverage was through the Ontario government's drug benefit program.

Hunger and poorer health go hand in hand.

Acknowledgments

Thank-you to the six food banks in the Region that participated in the *2005 Survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA*, as well as to the many volunteer interviewers who administered the surveys. Most especially, thank-you to the food bank clients who participated in the survey process.

⁶ Tarasuk, V. March 2003. Low income welfare and nutritional vulnerability. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 168(6).

⁷ Statistics Canada 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey

The Survey of People Accessing Emergency Food Programs in the GTA

Between February and April, 2005, the *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. A total of 122 adult food bank clients (18 years of age and over) from the Aurora 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. 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 using the Statistical package for Social Sciences V 12.0 (SPSS).

The *2005 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 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 – People like you and me

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 was learned about York Region food bank clients.

- **Education:** the majority of food bank clients have graduated high school and a quarter has a college/university degree – just like you and me.
- **Employment:** 2 of every 3 clients are from employed households – just like you and me.

What is different?

- **Housing:** Only 8% own their own home while 9 out of 10 live in rental housing. About two thirds of food bank clients are paying 50% or more of their income towards shelter.
- **Hunger:** 41% of respondents reported being hungry as they didn't have enough food, at least one day a week.
- **Income:** The average annual income of respondents ranged from \$8700 per year for a single person to \$17,000 per year for a family. In comparison, the average annual York Region household income in 2001 was \$91,800.

The York Region food bank client could be you.

Hunger in York Region is a reality.

How can you help?

Support your local food bank – donate, volunteer, or advocate!



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