

Transforming PHC's Food Programs



Food Programs Review Committee

Report to the PHC Board & Executive Director

Land Acknowledgement



Photo by Murray Bush

People for a Healthy Community's (PHC) work, along with the work of this report, takes place on the Coast Salish territories of the Snuneymuxw Nation. We are grateful to work and reside on this island as uninvited settlers. To provide some insight into the first peoples of Gabriola, the Snuneymuxw Nation describes its culture as follows:¹

Snuneymuxw culture is founded upon a deep connection to our land, waters, and all living things. The Creator has provided a sacred trust to Snuneymuxw in relation to Snuneymuxw Territory. We are in a sacred relationship with all things in the natural world - the land, waters and air, and all of the plants and animals we live with. Respect for the spirit and life in each of these, and the intricate relationships and interconnectedness we are all in together is a key value and principle of our culture.

In the context of this report, it is important to acknowledge that Indigenous people (First Nation, Inuit, and Métis) in Canada experience higher levels of household food insecurity than non-Indigenous — as a direct result of colonization which dispossessed Indigenous people of their land and ways of life.² Coast Salish culture for many generations had a vibrant food system deeply connected to the land, and settler colonialism has harmed Indigenous food systems, like that of the Coast Salish peoples.³

We hope that as settlers, and as a settler organization (PHC), we can continue to learn and move in a good way to address the ongoing systemic health and social inequities experienced by Indigenous people.



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Executive Summary

People for a Healthy Community's (PHC) Food Programs grew out of grassroots efforts by Gabriolans to take care of their neighbours. It has been said that the first grocery program operated out of the trunk of a car, and the hot lunch program at Gabriola elementary was created by mothers tired of witnessing children going to school hungry. This spirit of compassion, "boots on the ground" work and innovation remain strong and provide the foundation for exciting opportunities for the food program's future.

First we would like to acknowledge our long-standing and ongoing relationship with Food Banks Canada and Food Banks BC and the powerful community they provide through infrastructure, training, and networking, which has given us a strong foundation moving forward.

This report outlines the work of the Food Programs Review Committee, which was mandated to provide recommendations to the Executive Director and Board of Directors, identify three key priorities, and give advice for implementation and strategic direction of the PHC food programs for the next five years. The Committee was made up of one PHC board member, two staff members, and three community members who have volunteered with PHC's food programs in various capacities.

We note that the operational implications of our recommendations at the program level (i.e., day-to-day aspects of how the programs are run) are not provided in detail in this report since we focused on higher level strategic alignment of the food programs, and program operations were beyond the scope of our work. We feel that implementation of the transformation at the operational level should be undertaken by senior management (i.e., the Executive Director) working closely with staff, and that the Board should allocate specific resources (both human and financial) to creating plans to guide implementation.

The committee's recommendations are based on: internal and external scans that reviewed PHC's model as well as the ways in which food programs are being delivered elsewhere;

Key Recommendation

Our key recommendation is that PHC's food programs transition to a full Community Food Centre (CFC) model, that is "...a welcoming space where people come together to grow, cook, share and advocate for Good Food for All. CFCs provide people with emergency access to high-quality food in a dignified setting that doesn't compromise their self-worth. People build their cooking and gardening skills while sharing their knowledge, and kids expand their tastes and get their hands dirty in kitchens and gardens in ways that help them make healthier food choices. Community members find their voices on the issues that matter to them, and people find friends and support. CFCs offer multifaceted, integrated and responsive programming in a shared space where food builds health, hope, skills and community." ④

surveys of food program participants, volunteers, and staff to evaluate our current programs and gauge their interest in program changes; and close examination of the Community Food Centre model. This is a well-recognized organizational model that incorporates leading best practices and is used by community-based organizations across Canada to provide food programs to thousands of Canadians.

Many elements of this model are already in use in PHC's food programs; however, a full transformation will enhance the quality and impact of current programs, address immediate and longer-term needs of community members, and improve the health and wellbeing of Gabriolans. It means addressing immediate food needs and the systemic forces that cause food insecurity. To support the full transition this report identifies:

4 Key Strategic Actions

- 1) **Review and Develop Policy: Create new vision, mission, and values statements for PHC's food programs through a community-based process, as well as a widely-accessible food programs policy toolkit and a policy communications strategy, all of which would provide the required guidance for transforming PHC's food programs operations and communicate PHC's new model to staff, participants, and the community;**
- 2) **Establish Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Processes: Prioritize and build the organizational capacity to ensure ongoing planning, monitoring, and evaluation of PHC's food programs, with appropriate resourcing as well as inclusion of program participants;**
- 3) **Allocate Appropriate Resources: Ensure appropriate financial, human and facilities resources are allocated to facilitate the transformation itself and better support ongoing food programs operations, including planning, monitoring, and evaluation and;**
- 4) **Take Action on the Roots of Food Insecurity: Incorporate a strategic longer-term social justice vision into PHC's food programs that acknowledges that systemic inequities in society result in food insecurity, and incorporate the best practices that would both encourage PHC's engagement in systemic advocacy as an organization as well as empower the people who participate in PHC's food programs.**

The First Step

While this report addresses many important aspects of the paradigm shift that we are recommending, we see adoption of this report and its recommendations as a first step. We encourage the Board to engage with this report and discuss its recommendations with program

participants and the broader community, and to prioritize implementation as an important aspect of PHC's mandate to foster an inclusive, caring, responsive and resilient community, build and strengthen social networks and connections, support the health and wellbeing of community members and collaborate and partner with community members and groups.❶

Introduction

For the past 26 years, People for a Healthy Community on Gabriola Society (PHC), a registered charity, has been Gabriola Island's only social service agency. PHC's programs focus on the three social determinants of health: Improving food security, reducing social isolation, and contributing to early academic success at school. PHC's programs have touched the lives of 1-in-7 Gabriola Island residents. See Appendix A on Page 16.

Review Committee

The Food Program Review Committee (FPRC) was formed by the Board and Executive Director to examine the existing food programs and best practices in the field, and to suggest changes in strategic direction, policies, programming and facilities.

The purpose of the committee was to keep PHC's food programs relevant in the face of changing demographics and trends, and find creative solutions to challenges. The committee was mandated to provide recommendations to the Executive Director and Board of Directors, identify three key food programs priorities, and give advice for implementation and strategic direction of the PHC food programs for the next five years. Committee members included representation from staff, the Board, and volunteers, each of whom contributed their various skills, perspectives, and expertise. This work took place from January to September 2021. *See Appendix B, Page 16.*

We note that no food program participants were asked to serve on this committee. In addition to recommendations around involving participants in reviewing and finalizing various aspects of the transformation, we also urge the Board to include participants in all future committees about PHC's programs.

PHC Food Programs Overview

PHC's food programs aim to strengthen food security by providing food for those who need it while fostering social connections, sustainability, and good health. These food programs offer various resources and opportunities to participants and operate with the support of a variety of partners and a team of dedicated volunteers:



Photo by Sharon Kravitz

- **Grocery Program (Food Bank)** - Weekly groceries to food insecure households
- **Soup Socials** - Opportunities for community members to have a hot meal while engaging and building social connections with one another and program staff and volunteers
- **Food Recovery** - Unsold food from Nesters Market is diverted from the waste cycle and used by people (through PHC's groceries and meals programs), animals (through free provision to farmers), or compost (for use in PHC's gardens)
- **Farmers Market Nutrition Coupons** - Coupons for lower income families and seniors to purchase healthy items from local farmers
- **Gardens** - Growing food for PHC food programs in PHC garden beds
- **Hot Lunches, Emergency Snacks/Sandwiches (at Gabriola Elementary)** - Weekly provision of a hot lunch to all students and snacks/sandwiches stocked
- **Garden Program (at Gabriola Elementary)** - Spring/Fall gardening with classes in PHC gardens
- **Educational Programs (e.g. workshops)** - Funding-dependent workshops focusing on cooking skills, healthy eating, and nutrition.

4 Research & Methodology

In order to gain a better understanding of PHC's food programs, we conducted the following research:

- **Internal Scan** - We reviewed PHC's organizational policies and bylaws that relate to its food programs as well as current food program operations
- **External Market Scan** - We examined the food-related programs and vision/mission statements of seven similarly-sized social service organizations across Canada, two committee members attended a Food Transformation course hosted by Community Food Centres of Canada (CCFC), and we conducted research on communication methods (e.g. language and images) that capture how different food programs are conceived of and publicly portrayed
- **Surveys** - We conducted six separate surveys of food program participants and volunteers/staff in various program areas, to assess aspects of current operations as well as future opportunities.

As a result of our examinations, we identified that:

- 1) Internal policies need review and revision in order to remain relevant to current operations and to meeting future strategic goals of the Food Programs
- 2) Gaps in policy exist relating to certain areas - for example, Healthy Food Policy, specific Food Programs Vision, Mission, Mandate etc. - which highlights the need for policy development
- 3) Policies are not effectively communicated to staff, volunteers, participants, or the wider community, and thus there is a lack of understanding about PHC's policies and the ways in which they can and should operate as living documents that direct the work of the food programs.

B. External Scan

The purpose of the external scan was to look outside ourselves and see what other organizations and groups are doing and how they are doing it. The external scan provided us the opportunity to see how other communities in similar contexts are dealing with similar challenges. It also showed us different approaches to food program provision that inspired us and moved us to think in new directions.

We focused our external scan on seven community food programs/food centres in communities in BC and Ontario that are similar to PHC and/or to Gabriola. We started by identifying the various food programs of each of these centres and created the Programs chart below.

Brief information on each aspect of our research follows.

A. Internal Scan

The internal scan examined PHC documents including its organizational Mission, Vision, Mandate, and Purpose. We also reviewed PHC's current strategic plan for the key areas related to Food Programs (e.g. "alleviate hunger and social isolation", "fewer hungry kids", and "grow food locally to support food bank") and their current goals, indicators of success, and outcomes. And we looked at relevant bylaw

considerations such as those for the Grocery Program (Food Bank). This review of PHC material prepared us to compare them to other organizations in the external scan (see results on chart).

Programs		Food Bank	Food Recovery	Farm / Garden	Enterprise	Market Coupons	Food Skills Workshops	Community Meals	School Programs	Clubs	Food Preservation	Cleaning	Soc Justice /Advocacy	Community Kitchen	Food Fit	Fresh Food Box (perishables)
PHC		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			
Salt Spring		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										
Nelson		✓	✓	✓			✓					✓				
Galliano		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Tolno		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓					
Uckeleit		✓									✓	✓				
Perth		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Peterborough		✓		✓		✓	✓					✓	✓			✓

We identified that while PHC offers a high number of programs as compared to the organizations examined, PHC's programs have the following key gaps:

- 1) **Communication:** PHC does not clearly articulate how the programs link together or their connections to the driving forces of food insecurity, and how these programs aim to address those connections. In addition, the images and language used to describe PHC's food programs could use improvement to reflect a social justice approach to food insecurity (see Action on the Roots of Food Insecurity). As an example of this, Nelson Community Food Centre's website clearly articulates its rights based approach and policies, supported by images that promote feelings of dignity and good health.⁶
- 2) **Policy and Strategic Planning:** We identified that the quality of and outcomes provided by PHC's programs would benefit from an improved policy regime and strategic planning and evaluation processes. In comparison, similar organizations like Nelson Community Food Centre have well-developed policies and guiding strategic direction that direct program operations and overall program orientation.⁷

C. Surveys

Surveys of participants, staff, and volunteers were conducted in early 2021. Separate surveys were created for each of the different respondent groups: grocery program participants, soup social participants, farmers market coupon participants, educational program participants, GES program participants, and staff/volunteers in all of the program areas. All responses were anonymous.

The methods used to collect data were primarily quantitative in nature, with opportunities for respondents to add qualitative comments if they chose. More information about and a high-level analysis of the data from all surveys are available in Appendix C. Full survey findings are available in a separate document upon request.

Survey Conclusions

Our surveys revealed that PHC's food programs provide a number of important benefits to program participants, as identified by both the participants themselves and by the staff and volunteers who support the programs. These include not only the physical provision of food and meals that participants and their families would not otherwise be able to access - which is a primary role of PHC's programs - but also more intangible but just as important benefits, like being treated with respect and dignity and feeling part of a community that cares about them. The surveys also revealed that program participants would benefit from certain changes in the programs, such as providing more choice in the foods offered, more



Photo by Sharon Kravitz

opportunities to socialize and make connections with others, and more healthy food offerings. Most critically, the surveys also revealed that improvements in the programs should be made in the following areas:

- Increasing the choice that program participants have in the foods available to them
- Providing participants with education about and opportunities to have their voices heard on issues that impact their ability to meet their food and basic living needs - i.e., building an advocacy component into the programs
- Increasing access to healthy fresh produce and healthy locally-grown food.

Program participants ranked these as their top three most supported program shifts.

Support for new or recently introduced programs was highest among participants for a 'sliding scale' fresh produce box, the Farmers Market Nutrition Coupon Program, and provision of gift cards for Nester's instead of physical food. Staff / volunteers ranked cooking / nutrition workshops (e.g., for kids, seniors, families, adults), gardening workshops / opportunities to get involved with the garden, and the Farmers Market Nutrition Coupon Program as highest.

The surveys also identified the need among program participants for additional services, which may or may not be provided through PHC in the future such as mental health supports, exercise and healthy living supports, individual advocacy, housing-related and parenting supports.

These survey results provide important information that support our recommendations to the Board.

6 Recommendations to the Board

The key recommendation is that PHC food programs undergo a paradigm shift and transform to a Community Food Centre (CFC) model. A paradigm shift is defined as "an important change that happens when the usual way of thinking about or doing something is replaced by a new and different way".⁸

Our paradigm shift would be to transform to a CFC that brings "people together to grow, cook, share, and advocate for good food for all" — Community Food Centres Canada. This model would emphasize supporting the longer-term health and well-being of participants and our whole community, as well as addressing the root causes of poverty, which is at the heart of food insecurity.

What is a Community Food Centre?

Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC) was launched in 2012 to support the development of Community Food Centres across Canada to support the broader community food sector to create impact and change.

A Community Food Centre is described as "...a welcoming space ... where people come together to grow, cook, share, and advocate for good food. Community Food Centres provide people with access to high-quality food in a dignified space. People learn cooking and gardening skills there, and kids get their hands dirty in the garden and kitchen in ways that expand their taste buds and help them make healthier food choices. Community members can take action on the issues that affect them, and people find friends and support."⁹

The objectives of Community Food Centres are to:

- Improve people's ability to access healthy food in a dignified way
- Increase healthy food knowledge, skills, and behaviours
- Decrease social isolation and increase people's connection to supports
- Create opportunities for people to take action on the issues that affect their lives
- Empower people to be volunteers and leaders.

Community Food Centres typically provide:

- **Healthy food access:** Community meals, affordable produce markets, and healthy food distribution programs increase access to fresh and nutritious food in a welcoming space where people can get connected to other supports and resources.



Photo by Sharon Kravitz

- **Food skills:** Community kitchens, gardens, and after-school programs help people build the skills, knowledge, and confidence to grow and prepare healthy food for themselves and their families. They also empower people to take control of their health and nutrition within the context of their circumstances, and make lasting and sustainable changes in their diets.
- **Education and engagement:** Peer advocacy and support, community action training, social justice clubs and volunteer programs support people to get involved in the issues that matter to them, equip them with the tools they need to take action, and create opportunities for participants to be community leaders and push for change.

Case Study: Nelson Food Cupboard

This case study was chosen because Nelson is a small community and the Food Cupboard has transformed from a food bank to a vibrant Community Food Centre.¹⁰ Key aspects of this process included policy review and development, evaluation and strategic planning, staff and volunteer training, education, and advocacy and communications efforts on systemic forces creating food insecurity.

Aiming high has led to an exciting evolution for this flourishing food bank in the West Kootenays. To revitalize its funding strategy, the Nelson Food Cupboard board and management worked with a fundraising consultant to create a plan and received training to become more confident asking the community for financial support. Implementing a dynamic fundraising plan hasn't always been easy, as it requires more staff time and enhanced skills. But the Food Cupboard's investment in training and support recently paid off with a significant grant from a local foundation to help plan its next stage of growth.

Nelson Food Cupboard's goals also included evaluating its core food bank program. Staff created a survey for members who use the food bank and members who use other social services but not the food bank.

The results of both internal and external surveys showed what people liked the best about the existing food bank and what changes they'd like to see happen. Surveys also confirmed a stigma to using food banks that deterred many low-income community members from using their services. Members' responses were overwhelmingly positive about the Food Cupboard's vision for a new location and a low-cost market as an alternative to a food bank.

Showing, not just telling, also took on greater meaning for the organization's communications efforts. It hired a professional photographer to spend mornings on site and at their nearby garden throughout the year, capturing programs in action. The lovely pictures are far beyond what staff could take on their own. The photos will continue to be used in the organization's communication with donors, online, in the newsletter, and on public



Photo by Bobbi Barbarich courtesy Nelson Food Cupboard

signage. Nelson Food Cupboard looks forward to hiring a fundraising and communications coordinator who can raise its profile even further.

Evaluation fed into its communications and outreach strategies since Nelson Food Cupboard was able to report on the positive changes that people made due to participating in its programs.

In 2016 they evaluated each program, gleaning critical data: 74% of respondents were eating more fruits and vegetables as a result of participating in food skills programming, 96% learned new cooking skills they will use in the future, and 96% felt more confident preparing healthy meals at home. Overall, program evaluation has allowed Food Cupboard staff to feel confident that they are meeting member needs.

The organization is charting a course for an even bigger organizational evolution. Committed to a formal audit of their food bank, staff hope to diversify food accessibility and grow more of their own produce. Aiming even higher, they will be collaborating with other local organizations to find a new location with a welcoming space and greater capacity for additional programs and staff.

“The end result is so much more than just food,” says Marya Skrypiczajko, Nelson Food Cupboard's coordinator. “We want to engage people so they don't feel any stigma and offer vulnerable community members educational and social activities that really count!”

The transformation aligns with leading best practices and changes in the food security sector.

PHC is already demonstrating Community Food Centre principles and practices in many of its programs, but some of these practices have not been formalized within the broader organization through formal adoption and policy development. This creates a risk because without formal adoption, these principles and practices could change depending on who is involved in program delivery.

A purposive transition to this new paradigm, supported by the four key strategic actions outlined below, will create a *cultural shift* as an organization. This shift would support PHC's food programs to address the systemic issues that Gabriola residents experience while also meeting their short-term and emergency needs. The shift will also build upon aspects of the work already carried out within the food programs.

Operating from within this new paradigm, the organization at all levels would have a deep understanding of food insecurity and its root causes, such as recognizing the driving forces of poverty on Gabriola and that residents need increased support that goes beyond the physical provision of food. Some examples of the ways in which programs could change as a result of this transformation are: enhancement of the ability of food programs to provide referrals to income support services, and providing increased social connection opportunities.

PHC currently follows some of these practices in many ways. However, making a commitment to this change at an organizational level will transform PHC's food programs to better support the holistic health of participants. In other words, the transformation will allow PHC to demonstrate the understanding that food is only one piece of a broader puzzle of supporting community members and can act as a point of connection to refer and support people to address other areas of their health and wellbeing.

Current Elements of the CFC model

PHC has been a member of CFCC's 'Good Food Organization' Network for over three years and has integrated elements of the CFC model in many ways:

- 1) **Healthy Food Access:** Access to healthy food is a key pillar of the Community Food Centres model. PHC currently provides low-barrier community and school healthy food access programs. In addition, PHC connects food program participants to community supports like a social worker, advocate, and tax help. We also place an emphasis on providing non-judgmental and supportive services and space, and prioritize growing our own food in our garden plots to promote access to healthy local food.
- 2) **Food Skills / Education:** Providing food skills and education to program participants is another important part of the CFC model. PHC currently provides food skills programs, but they are dependent on funding and not a regularly offered core program area.
- 3) **Culture:** PHC has a culture of being a warm and supportive space. While the environment is typically identified as respectful and welcoming for community members, especially participants, many of the aspects that create a warm and supportive environment are done informally rather than through direct training or policy.

A formal transformation will fortify and consolidate the informal changes that have been occurring over the last few years, and serve as the foundation for PHC and its funders, staff/volunteers, community partners, and participants to work together to reshape PHC into a Community Food Centre.

Transformative Actions

In order to produce the kind of culture shift that would move PHC's food programs into the Community Food Centre model, we recommend the Board take action in the following four areas: review and develop policy; establish planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes; allocate appropriate resources; and prioritize taking action on the roots of food insecurity. We will now discuss each of these actions.

The specific operations level changes resulting from this recommendation are not outlined in this report. The scope of the committee was to provide higher level strategic guidance, and directing the implementation of these recommendations will be the responsibility of the Executive Director and appropriate staff. While many of the CFC programs and elements are already beginning to be integrated into current PHC food programs, the following key actions will develop the structures needed to support the full transformation.

1. Review & Develop Policy

An important starting point to encourage and facilitate the paradigm shift described above is to review the current policy regime that supports the food programs and to make necessary changes, including revising existing policies and creating new ones where they don't exist.

Having a foundational policy regime in place is important because policies “provide guidance, consistency, accountability, efficiency, and clarity on how an organization operates”¹⁰ and offer the Board, staff, volunteers, participants, and other community members guidelines and principles to follow. It would also provide a signal to the community about how PHC does its work and what the goals and operating principles are for the programs. Strategic planning could also be coupled with policy review and development.

A. Mission, Vision and Values

We recommend that the policy review and development process include the creation of new food programs Vision, Mission, and Values statements. Creating these helps to provide not only a clear direction for the transition but also well-defined ideas for the goals of the food programs and the ways in which they can be achieved.

The committee spent considerable time thinking about what new Vision, Mission and Values statements might be and provide our drafts below. However, we feel strongly that these draft statements should not simply be adopted by the Board, but should be used as the basis for a broader, equitable and inclusive process that would bring participants, staff, volunteers, and other community-based stakeholders together to review and agree on their final form. Putting in place a process to build these new statements in this way - almost from the ground up - supports the kind of paradigm shift that we support.

DRAFT Food Programs Vision: A healthy, connected and thriving community where every Gabriolan is food secure.

DRAFT Food Programs Mission: PHC Food Programs help Gabriolans fulfill their right to good food through collaboration, connection, and action on the root causes of food insecurity.

DRAFT Food Programs Values: We believe in

- **The right to food security:** We view food security as a right for every person. This includes culturally

appropriate food, and food that makes people feel healthy. We recognize the root causes of food insecurity are systemic and typically linked to poverty.

- **Social connection:** We see food as a way to build relationships and forge stronger connections as individuals, a community, and beyond. Through sharing food and building social connections, we reduce isolation, improve community resilience, and connect community members to resources.
- **Equity and inclusion:** We believe in fair and just treatment and opportunities for all, that is inclusive of various ways of being a part of our community. Equity guides our work to identify and eliminate barriers for specific groups, and recognize that specific forms of support are needed to address systemic inequities. At the core of this, is deep rooted respect for one another.
- **Addressing systemic injustice:** We recognize that certain systems of oppression have created injustices for specific marginalized groups. In particular, recognizing that food insecurity disproportionately impacts certain groups such as Indigenous people, racialized people, and persons with disabilities to name a few in Canada. Our work must also address these root injustices.
- **Empowerment:** We believe in empowering community members to make choices about their food and lives. We believe in the importance of providing resources and skills to empower individuals to lead healthy lives and make their own decisions wherever possible.
- **Continuous improvement:** We believe that we must have strong capacity to deliver high-quality and effective services to our community. We are committed to continuous improvement through evaluation to keep our programs relevant and respond and adapt to emerging needs.
- **Integrated approaches:** We believe in partnerships and collaboration to provide holistic services that reflect the diverse spheres that make up individual and community health.
- **Sustainability:** We believe that environmental health is linked to the wellbeing of our community, and work to reduce our environmental and climate change impact and strive to support sustainable food systems.

An example of the how the direction provided by the creation of these statements could impact the operation of PHC's food programs is that if, for example, "choice" is adopted as a value or principle underlying the programs, the grocery program might shift toward operating with a "food store" model where participants are given the ability to freely wander the shelves and pick food themselves rather than having the food selected and bagged by volunteers and staff.

Once the Vision, Mission, and Values statements are finalized through a community-based process, we further recommend that the Board engage with all community stakeholders through a communication process, as described below.

A. Food Programs Policy Toolkit

We recommend that, as existing policies are revised and new policies created to help facilitate the transition to a CFC model, they be compiled into a *Food Programs Policy Toolkit*, which will provide guidelines and parameters and simplify the creation and revision of future PHC food policies.

New or revised policies should incorporate the following:

- **A policy philosophy** that is collaborative. Consultation with stakeholders is a key element in the process of policy development. This may include surveys, discussion, forums, meetings or outreach.
- **An equity lens and framework.** Policies should include consideration of issues of inclusion, power imbalances and differing levels of engagement in the community.
- **Each policy should use a checklist** to guide development, which should be examined against PHC Food Programs Vision, Mission, and Values. All policies and programs should support the broader Vision, Mission, and Values and be examined against those articulations. The toolkit could involve guiding questions to reflect on policy development (e.g., has equity been considered for the policy?).

The toolkit should be accessible to everyone involved in PHC's food programs - participants, volunteers, staff, the Board, and other community members alike - and should be a living, responsive document that is revised regularly as conditions and needs change.

B. Communications Strategy

The success of PHC's food programs depends on PHC's ability to reach and serve its intended community. Communication should be intentional and planned, and should be part of the planning process for policy. As such, we recommend that a *Food Programs Policy Communications Strategy* be created.

Communication should aim to educate the community about broad issues of poverty and food insecurity, and therefore needs to consider messages implied in language and image choices. In our communication with both the public and within the organization, language choice and image selection can reinforce negative stereotypes or build respect. For example, using terms like "food centre" rather than "food bank" and statements such as "ensuring food security" rather than "feeding the poor" implies respect rather than charity. Choosing images and captions that reflect positivity and empowerment rather than desperation reflects a belief in the core dignity of all.

Policy communication should engage both stakeholders and community members. New policies must be shared across the organization, with resources dedicated to their understanding and adoption. New policies should also form a core element of staff, volunteer, and Board member on-boarding and regular training, as well as of the ways in which participants are welcomed.

In a sense, we are recommending a *reframing* of our work in order to shift to a CFC model. This change in language is not meant to detract from our long and ongoing history as a member of Food Banks Canada and Food Banks BC, and the important work they do at a local and federal level.

What might this look like?

- Review and revise/develop PHC's Food Programs Policies, including Mission, Vision, and Values
- Develop a Healthy Food Policy¹² and other policies as required
- Develop additional respectful environment policies
- Create and implement communications plans for the new policies/policy revisions and the transition to new CFC model to ensure buy-in and understanding among staff, volunteers, participants, donors, and partners
- Create participant groups to ensure involvement in all aspects of the policy review process.



Photo by Sharon Kravitz

2. Establish Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation

Planning, monitoring, and evaluation are key to a food programs transformation. Transformative change will only occur in PHC's food programs if dedicated resources are given to planning, monitoring, and evaluating both the food programs transformation and ongoing operations.

Planning determines particular objectives and targets. For example, a biannual program/project plan with goals for food programs could ensure objectives and targets are met.¹³ *Monitoring* involves collecting information to ensure the programs and projects are not experiencing any major problems and whether adjustments are needed for objectives. *Evaluation* can help examine why specific objectives or targets were or were not met, typically after a specific time period or at the end of a project/program.

Embedding these three components within PHC's food programs will create a learning environment where continual improvement occurs, and makes it easier to identify where successes and lessons learned are.¹⁴

It is important that food programs engage participants in planning, monitoring, and evaluation activities. For example, PHC participants could join a working group committed to planning, attend engagement sessions, give feedback on programs, and much more. This helps ensure that participants have voices, and ideally, hold some power when it comes to decision making, which is identified as a best practice in this area.

What might this look like?

- Create and implement a planning, monitoring, and evaluation plan for the shift
- Create and implement a planning, monitoring, and evaluation plan for the next five years for PHC's Food Programs

3. Allocate Appropriate Resources

Community Food Centres Canada emphasizes the need for organizations to be well-resourced enough to be able to provide high quality food programs.¹⁵ For PHC, this means allocating resources for both ongoing operations and the specific activities required to transform to a CFC model.

Facilitating the shift to a CFC model will require human resources, on top of those available for current daily program operations. A key piece may be allocating dedicated employee time to establishing the budget for and implementing the CFC model transformation. The shift may also require additional financial resources to expand or create new programs.

We also recommend that the Board prioritize providing Living Wages to staff, which is a best practice that other similar food non-profits, such as Toronto's FoodShare, are adopting.¹⁶

Human Resource Areas

We recommend that human resource capacity should be directed towards these key areas:

- **Training opportunities for staff and volunteers** (including board of directors) on topics such as:
 - PHC overview as an organization, to

- promote internal understanding
- Shifting the food bank to a food centre model
- Mental health and crisis response
- Equity and inclusion training on areas including gender and race
- Facilitation and leadership skills
- Technology training
- Basic evaluation and measurement

A Welcoming Space

Another key resource is a physical facility that is accessible, meets the needs of food programs, and fosters social connection. Creating and providing a welcoming space is a cornerstone of the CFC model. Ideally, the shift would be coupled with a new facility. This is a non-exhaustive list FPRC brainstormed:

- Shopping choice: Increased space and purpose built design
- Reduce social isolation, large open areas where people can gather, community and teaching commercial kitchen, welcoming, bright, reduce stigma, social connectedness
- Environment of respect and community leadership
- Sense of support and community
- Community gathering place, all welcome, barrier free, everyone feels respected
- Space for food skills building, educational opportunities such as workshops etc.
- Include participants in building a wish list, facilitated process so all voices are heard
- Space for community forums and meals
- Connections to helpful programs, services and advocacy resources
- Participants involved in volunteering/working in construction
- Outdoor kitchen with lockable cupboards
- Garage doors that open upward, creating indoor/outdoor space, as needed, for Food Recovery
- Greenhouse to support garden programs and gardening education.

- **Evaluation of food programs:** Annual surveys and measures for continuous improvement and opportunities for participants and volunteers to provide input. This engagement is key for understanding whether programs are meeting key targets and needs of the community on an ongoing basis. More details on this follow.

What might this look like?

- Establish a budget and resource allocation plan for the shift to a CFC model
- Ensure the plan created has resources allocated for CFC model transformation as well as ongoing operations to be reviewed and shifted to reflect updated policy.

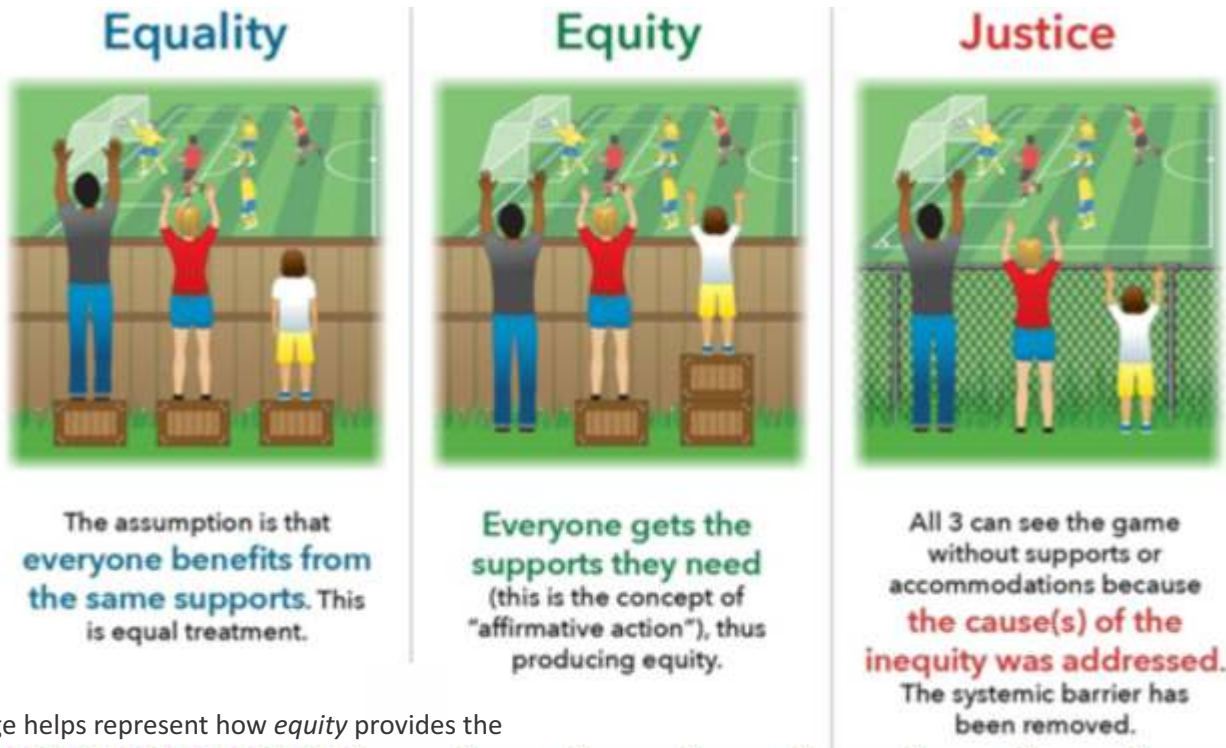
4. Take Action on the Roots of Food Insecurity

Addressing the roots of food insecurity means broadening our view of hunger and poverty throughout PHC to understand the underlying causes. For example, government assistance rates that do not provide enough for people to make ends meet and low wages that mean people can't afford rising costs.

As well, understanding how the intersections of race, gender, diverse abilities and other systemic inequities in our society further marginalize specific groups is important - for example, the higher rates of food insecurity amongst Indigenous and racialized groups in Canada as well as persons with disabilities.¹⁷

PHC's work should be striving towards *justice* - for example, a society where food banks are no longer needed because supports are in place where every family can afford the food they need.

We recommend that an equity framework be adopted to guide PHC's work. Such a framework would recognize that everyone deserves equal outcomes (e.g. food security) but that each person has different circumstances and may need different support for unique needs.



This image helps represent how *equity* provides the unique support needed, and *justice* is what the organization ultimately could be supporting through advocating to remove barriers entirely.

This perspective also means recognizing that PHC as an organization, and its food programs specifically, can be a site to challenge the structures that produce injustices and that result in people being unable to afford the food they need. It also means that community members who access the food programs are supported to talk about, engage with, and take action on these issues as well. This perspective sees that people with lived experience are best able to speak to the issues they themselves know.

Some of the best practices in this sector to engage with these issues as an organization and empower the people who access PHC services include:¹⁸

- Referrals to services that can help with longer term solutions: Mental health services, social workers, community advocates, tax help, advocacy with government services, etc.
- Participant involvement in governance, program decision-making, and implementation
- Peer advocacy and capacity building
- Education and training on systemic issues and how to take action on them, for staff, volunteers, and participants
- Organization-level communication and advocacy

on issues that impact community members who access PHC services.

Adopting these best practices will support the new model and have implications for how the organization and people involved conceive of and go about their work. Doing so will promote a shift from a charity focus to a social justice focus, with an emphasis that everyone, no matter who they are, deserves good food and health in the Gabriola community.

What might this look like?

- Create resources and provide training to increase capacity of volunteers, staff, and participants to provide referrals and connection to services that can help with longer-term solutions
- Establish a plan and implement ways to increase participant capacity and involvement in decision-making and operations of PHC's food programs
- Establish a plan and implement ways to increase awareness in our community about local social issues experienced by participants and work with partners to take action on these issues
- Include an advocacy component in each of the food programs to inform program participants about the upstream issues involved in food insecurity and empower them to address these issues through advocacy activities with the appropriate decision-making bodies.

Case Study: Eden Food For Change

Mississauga has a larger population than Gabriola, but this example illustrates how program changes (similar to PHC's over the last few years) can be followed by formal changes like revising Vision, Mission, and Values. This example also shows how communication and training on the changes is key for organizational transformation.¹⁹

Eden Food for Change, a member of CFCC's Good Food Organizations initiative, is at an exciting time. Based in Mississauga, Ontario, the eight-person operation runs a learning kitchen, cooking classes, and a fresh produce box in addition

to a long-standing food bank. Its mission is to increase access to good food in a dignified manner, develop food skills to encourage healthy eating, and empower the community through education, outreach, and advocacy.

Eden's programs, mission, and even its name are actually pretty new. Up until May 2015, the organization was called Eden Community Food Bank, reflecting that for the past 25 years, giving out food to hungry people was its primary activity.

According to Bill Crawford, Eden's executive director, the organization realized that the political change required to create better living conditions and wages for those who were using its food bank wasn't happening. Eden wanted to support the short-term needs of hungry people while creating opportunities around good food so folks could grow, learn, and take steps toward self-sufficiency.

The shift started happening at the board level about six years prior. According to Bill, "We sought out fresh produce in a big way for our food bank. To create a more inclusive and empowering

environment, we recently started calling those who use our food bank 'members' or 'participants' rather than 'clients.' We added new programming too — we created a community learning kitchen in 2013 which is now staffed by a chef who runs regular healthy cooking classes and groups."

In 2014, Eden embarked on more formal changes



Photo courtesy Eden Food For Change

including revising its mission and vision statements and adopting new guiding principles. Eden held three meetings over twelve months so staff and board members could work through the transition, trouble shoot, and re-strategize as needed.

Of course, the changes met with some pushback from long-standing volunteers who were resistant toward using funding in any way besides feeding people. To manage these responses, the staff and board worked slowly and communicated frequently with everyone about the process and provided opportunities for input along the way.

Bill has advice for organizations looking to make similar changes: "Give yourself a long transition period to give people time to process and fully own the change. Secure dedicated funding for the shift, especially if it's going to change how your organization operates. Hiring a consultant to support the process also helped us immensely. And finally, don't hold on to a vision too tightly. If you keep it to yourself it's only your vision, but if you are sharing your vision then more people can take ownership of that and make it their vision too."

Conclusion & Next Steps

This report identifies exciting opportunities for PHC's Food Programs. The key recommendation, to transform the Food Programs into a Community Food Centres Canada model, involves four key strategic actions:

- 1) Review and develop appropriate policy;
- 2) Establish planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes;
- 3) Allocate appropriate resources;
- 4) Take action on the roots of food insecurity

By undertaking this transformation, PHC can ensure that the structures are in place to ensure the long-term sustainability and relevance of its food programs. In turn, the quality and impact of its current programs will be enhanced, the immediate and longer-term needs of community members will be better addressed, and the health and wellbeing of Gabriolans as a whole will be improved.

The PHC Board could move this initiative forward by:

- Adopting the key recommendation and four strategic actions of the FPRC



Photo by Sharon Kravitz

- Directing the Executive Director to establish appropriate resources and work with appropriate staff to create a plan to implement the food programs transformation and four strategic actions recommended by the FPRC.

The Food Programs Review Committee thanks the Board for the opportunity to serve PHC and the wider Gabriola community in this capacity.

Footnotes

1. <https://www.snuneymuxw.ca/nation/culture>
2. <https://foodpolicyforcanada.info.yorku.ca/background/colonial-history/>
3. <https://thediscourse.ca/cowichan-valley/colonization-impacts-coast-salish-food>
4. <https://depotmtl.org/en/what-is-a-community-food-centre/>
5. PHC Director's Manual, 2017
6. <https://nelsoncfc.ca/>
7. <https://nelsoncfc.ca/our-strategic-plan/> and <https://nelsoncfc.ca/food-policies/>
8. <https://www.npr.org/sections/13.7/2016/07/18/486487713/what-is-a-paradigm-shift-anyway>
9. <https://cfccanada.ca/en/Our-Work/Community-Food-Centres>
10. <https://cfccanada.ca/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=8b59410d-87b9-4c6c-853c-f305e4326d58>
11. <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/professionals/industry-innovation-and-leadership/industry-expertise/affordable-housing/managing-affordable-housing/manage-affordable-housing-projects/policy-information/why-are-policies-important>
12. A Healthy Food Policy can direct what kinds of food are offered, as well as the donations and food received:
<https://cfccanada.ca/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=8b59410d-87b9-4c6c-853c-f305e4326d58>
13. <https://www.justgender.org/monitoring-and-evaluation-a-brief-overview/>
14. <https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/foodshare-data/Community%20Food%20Project%20Evaluation%20Handbook%20-%202nd%20Ed%202004.pdf>
15. <https://cfccanada.ca/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=8b59410d-87b9-4c6c-853c-f305e4326d58>
16. <https://foodshare.net/2021/04/30/all-workers-deserve-a-living-wage/>
17. <https://www.ccsa-nccah.ca/docs/determinants/RPT-HealthInequalities-Reading-Wien-EN.pdf>
18. <https://cfccanada.ca/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=8b59410d-87b9-4c6c-853c-f305e4326d58>
19. <https://cfccanada.ca/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=8b59410d-87b9-4c6c-853c-f305e4326d58>

Appendix A: Information on PHC

PHC's Vision, Mission, Mandate and Purpose

Vision

A Gabriola community that compassionately & effectively provides for more than just people's basic needs.

Mission

To use an integrated approach to help all people in the community of Gabriola find the support and services they need to contribute to their health and well-being.

Mandate

- We believe everyone can foster an inclusive, caring, responsive and resilient community;
- We build and strengthen social networks and connections;
- We support the health and wellbeing of community members and offer a range of essential and participant-centered services; and
- We collaborate and partner with community members and organizations to carry out our mandate.

Purposes of the Organization

- To deliver community services and programs that address poverty, isolation, early intervention and prevention of health and social problems, and support for those in crisis;
- To provide food to people in crisis due to physical or mental illness, depression, grief, unemployment or other hardships;
- To invite people who may be feeling isolated or hungry to participate in food share programs; to educate people about nutrition and food preparation;
- To provide regular opportunities for seniors to network and socialize;
- To ensure that families and youth have knowledge of the resources within our community that provide support, positive networks and opportunities for them;
- To provide programs and services to promote literacy in our community; and
- To provide affordable counseling services in our community.

Appendix B: Committee Information

Members

- **Kenda Chang-Swanson** – Kenda is PHC's Food Programs coordinator and currently a Masters of Public Health student, interested in promoting better health for all Gabriolans.
- **Linda Hellenius** – Linda is a long time volunteer and a business owner, whose education and work has been in Seed Sciences. She believes that community cooperation and mutual respect is key to well being.
- **Sharon Kravitz** – Sharon is a documentary photographer and filmmaker and long time social justice advocate and community organizer.
- **Jennefer Laidley** – Jennefer is a researcher, writer, editor, policy analyst, advocate, and volunteer who believes that food security is best achieved through action that supports individuals and addresses systemic inequities.
- **Nadine Mourao** – Nadine was the Bookkeeper with PHC and has recently completed her Non-Profit Management Certificate through Simon Fraser University. Nadine served as Project Manager for the FPRC, providing project guidance, project monitoring, distribution of information, and communications.
- **Wendy Phillips** – Wendy is a novelist and former teacher librarian who has maintained a lifetime interest in equity and social justice issues.

The committee Chair and Vice Chair roles were rotating with each member taking three sequential turns. This process enhanced the collaborative feeling of the committee and allowed for mentoring and leadership training in a safe and encouraging space. The work in this report is a result of biweekly meetings, as well as individual and group work.

As noted above, surveys of participants, staff, and volunteers were conducted in early 2021. Separate surveys were created for each of the different respondent groups: grocery program participants, soup social participants, farmers market coupon participants, educational program participants, GES program participants, and staff/volunteers in all of the program areas. The surveys were distributed and filled out online and in hard copy versions made available at PHC. Data was collected for three weeks in March 2021. All responses were anonymous.

Survey sections included: demographic data, rating statements about the programs, rating interest in possible program shifts, rating interest in possible future programs, and identifying additional services needed. The methods used to collect data were primarily quantitative in their nature, with opportunities for respondents to add qualitative comments if they chose.

Survey Limitations

The surveys were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and PHC food programs were operating in limited COVID-19-adapted capacity. This may have meant a lower response rate than usual, although the surveys did reach minimum sample size response rate targets. There were a few errors in the data collection, including some minor differences between question wording in the online and print surveys.

The surveys were limited in their ability to collect qualitative data. Informal discussions about survey topics occurred at PHC during the survey period as participants engaged with the survey, which indicates that, in the future, in-person roundtable discussions and qualitative focus groups would be valuable for participant engagement and data collection.

Analysis

Each of the individual program area respondent surveys was analyzed individually. Responses to quantitative questions were totaled and ranked accordingly and key themes were identified in each individual survey area. Higher level key themes that cut across all food programs were identified by survey respondent group, as outlined below. Qualitative responses were also reviewed and used to better understand the quantitative responses and to illustrate the key themes.

1. Participant Surveys

a. Key Themes Strengths:

- Staff/volunteers treat participants with respect and dignity (all surveys)
- The program is easy to access (all surveys)
- The program helps participants feel part of the community / like community cares about them (7 out of 8 surveys)
- The program makes them feel good (4 out of 5 surveys)

Key Qualitative Comments:

"I so appreciate the bag of groceries and a little chat with the volunteers. Just a big thank you"

"This program is indispensable to this community. The staff are amazing people and are just willing to help in any way they can. Amazing resource!"

"It was very socially significant to me before covid. It helped me deal with social anxiety. You could rely on Any [Amy] to always smile with the soup and I would talk to certain people I might not, otherwise."

Middle Ground:

- The program gives participants food/meals they couldn't afford otherwise/gives my children food that is free/affordable (3 categorized as middle ground, 2 as strength)
- The program provides enough choice in foods received (2 out of 3 categorized as middle ground, 1 as weakness)
- The program provides opportunities to socialize/make connections with others (3 out of 4 categorized as middle ground, 1 as strength)
- The program helps me access healthy food I wouldn't get otherwise/helps my child(ren) access healthy food (3 out of 5)

Key Qualitative Comments:

"I wish the staples were more varied (cream sauce vs tomato, other grains than oatmeal and rice etc) I appreciate it all but we get overwhelmed over time with these items there's only so many things i can do with oatmeal and I shouldn't be eating tomatoes due to health issues and my kid hates tomatoes"

Weaknesses:

- Education about healthy food choices (4 out of 4)
- Providing skills to help participants prepare food (4 out of 4) (*GES parents felt that this was a strength for their children related to food. This may be influenced by school-wide participation in the garden program).
- The program helps me know how to make my voice heard on issues that impact my ability to meet my food and basic living needs (e.g. with government or decision-makers) (2 out of 4 categorized as weakness, 2 out of 4 categorized as middle ground)

b. Support for Shifts (Top 3):

1. Increased choice about the foods (4 out of 4)
2. Building an advocacy component into the program (4 out of 4)
3. Increase access to healthy fresh produce/expanding access to healthy locally grown food (3 out of 4)

Key Qualitative Comments:

"More fresh vegetables would be great"

"Some fresh produce has had mould on it and could not be used"

c. Future Program Interest (Top 3):

1. 'Sliding Scale' fresh produce box (e.g., pay what you can afford for a nutritious fruit and vegetable box) (5 out of 5)
2. FMNCP (4 out of 4)
3. Gift cards for Nester's instead of physical food (3 out of 4)

Key Qualitative Comments:

"My family felt so lucky to access this program. It allowed us to engage with and benefit from the vibrant local food economy in a way we couldn't access before. My kids got to see (and taste) the value of making healthy, sustainable, ethical food choices and we gained a greater sense of community. Thank you so much!" [Farmer's Market Coupon Program]

"Perhaps local meat donations from farmers could be approached? It's the highest grocery expense and would be amazingly helpful? Maybe even just a card to take to boultons farm with an amount of specific item ie; Like I k of hamburger, or such? They would carry a list of registered participants and you'd have to show ID to redeem?"

d. Additional Services Needed:

- Mental health supports (5 out of 5)
- Exercise and healthy living (5 out of 5)
- Individual Advocacy (4 out of 5)
- Housing related supports (3 out of 5)

2. Staff / Volunteer Surveys**a. Key Themes****Strengths:**

- The program helps participants feel like they are part of a community / their community cares about them (5 out of 5)
- The program's staff / volunteers treat participants with respect and dignity (3 out of 4 strength, 1 out of 4 as middle ground)
- The program helps participants access healthy food they wouldn't get otherwise (3 out of 4)
- The program gives participants food that they couldn't afford otherwise (3 out of 5)

Key Qualitative Comments:

"I love the perpetuation of love and respect that is shared during our Tuesday gatherings. Many people come to our kitchen for that love and respect and social time. Food (for some) is the bonus."

Middle Ground:

- The program gives participants opportunities to socialize / make connections with others (2 out of 4 middle ground, 2 out of 4 strength)
- The program is easy for participants to access for participants (e.g., timing, location, physical space etc.) (2 out of 3 as middle ground)
- The program makes participants feel good (3 out of 4 as middle ground)
- The program helps participants know how to make their voice heard on issues that impact their ability to meet their food and basic living needs (e.g. with government or decision-makers) (3 out of 4 as middle ground)

Weaknesses:

- The program gives participants education about healthy food choices (4 out of 4)
- The program gives participants skills to help them prepare food (4 out of 4)

Key Qualitative Comments:

"I can't answer for participants, but I think there needs to be greater expectation, opportunity and accommodation to incorporate the users of the service into all levels of the program."

"I think there needs to be greater involvement of the recipients to transform the program from 'charity' to 'social justice'."

b. Support for Future Programs (Top 3):

1. Cooking / nutrition workshops (e.g., for kids, seniors, families, adults)
2. Gardening workshops / opportunities to get involved with the garden
3. Farmers Market Nutrition Coupon Program

c. Additional Services Needed (Top 3):

1. Mental health support
2. Housing-related supports
3. Individual advocacy / Parenting support (tied)

Key Qualitative Comments:

"Participants need all of these services to some extent. I think the main ones PHC is equipped to offer are exercise (especially for seniors) and healthy living. PHC should be advocating and helping participants advocate for other organizations and levels of government to be more active in all of the above areas."



Photo by Sharon Kravitz



Oct
2021