

NETWORK NEWS

What's happening at York Region Food Network



FOOD AND HEALTH

by Kate Greavette, Executive Director

Over the past two years, York Region Food Network has evolved with the changing world. We have been continuously adjusting our methods, priorities, and reach to support what the food security sector and our community members need from us.

York Region Food Network is a community food centre. We regularly walk the line of supporting people through immediate food access in the forms of grocery gift cards, fresh produce, and community meals, while also addressing the impact food insecurity has on all other areas of one's life.

Food is not just fuel for the body, it is fuel for the mind. It feeds our social health. Think of your most recent gatherings or holiday celebrated with family or friends. There is a good chance food was included in one way or another.

We often underestimate the importance of eating with others. Eating together helps build relationships. Sharing a meal is a chance to catch up and talk, and a moment where people can take time out of their day.

Right before the pandemic started, York Region Food Network conducted surveys and interviews with our participants across the Region which contributed to a larger country-wide study. The goal was to better understand the obvious and not so obvious impacts of food insecurity on one's day to day life. What stood out to us was the hidden social impacts of food insecurity.

When asked what this looks like, we heard:

- People skip gatherings with family and friends because they could not contribute.
- Food insecurity creates barriers to participating in cultural events and holidays which can make people feel excluded from their culture.
- People feel socially isolated because food insecurity limits their ability to participate fully in society.

As we've all experienced during COVID19, social connections are vital, and lack of social connection is harmful to people's health and wellbeing. This is why spaces like York Region Food Network are so important. We provide a multi-dimensional approach to food insecurity and food security, and create spaces that foster social inclusion and opportunities to connect around good food. This work is instrumental now more than ever. Be part of the movement for a food secure York Region with a financial donation or by spreading the word about our work throughout York Region.

BENEFITS OF FRESH FOOD ACCESS

by Christina Lu, Community Food Animator

Good physical health is vital for us to be able to live our daily lives, so we have enough energy to connect with friends and family, sleep better, and improve our general well-being. Our Good Food Box program provides fresh, local produce to households across York Region. Supplied by Top Tomato Foods, a family-owned and operated farm based in Markham, Ontario, the seasonal based produce brings joy to those who receive it. With the contents being a surprise each time, it has sparked many interesting conversations on how to prepare the produce, especially during cabbage season.

With the rising cost of living, demand for more affordable fresh produce has been greater now than ever. We see and hear so many people talk about the challenges of accessing food, particularly fresh food. High housing costs, gasoline prices and the continued impacts of the COVID19 pandemic are making meeting one's basic needs extremely challenging. York Region Food Network has been responding to what is happening in the community. We continuously fundraise to offer free Good Food Boxes to households throughout York Region and we have partnered with Routes Connecting Communities to make sure that people who do not have reliable means of transportation also have access to this program.

Despite the uncertainty right now, our Good Food Box program offers an opportunity for everyone in our communities to gain access to fresh produce which feeds the body with good food and supports our local food economy.

Through the Good Food Box, we've learned about the needs of our community, and it has even served as an entry point for some to access additional supports. We have received amazing feedback, with one recipient stating *"The good food box is a wonderful support and program for people in many ways. I myself know that if not for this program I would not be able to have fresh produce in my home. Many need help these days and the good food box is a huge help."*



WAYS TO SUPPORT YORK REGION FOOD NETWORK

Financial Donation

A one-time or monthly donation goes a long way in supporting York Region Food Network's cooking classes, community gardens, Good Food Box program, Youth Food Committee and advocacy work.

Support our Afternoon Tea Fundraiser

Purchase an afternoon tea box for \$35.00. Treat yourself or buy for another! This is a great way to enjoy a little treat while also supporting York Region Food Network's community food classes.

Spread the Word

Tackling food insecurity and ensuring everyone's right to food is met, takes education and effort from everybody. Please share this newsletter and follow us on social media.

SOCIAL HEALTH

by Marissa Wiltshire, Director of Operations

YRFN works tirelessly to strengthen social health in communities across the Region.

Our breakfast program serves two different, yet equally important, essential needs:

1. Access to food
2. Connection to others

Pre-pandemic, staff and volunteers prepared delicious meals where community members joined us around the kitchen table to enjoy a hearty breakfast and friendly conversation. We were delighted to watch new friendships develop and community connections forged.

Once COVID-19 hit, we transitioned from a sit-down meal to takeout. As gatherings were no longer permitted and the demand grew in the precarious climate, we worked diligently to provide quality meals in an open and caring outdoor community space. Our breakfast service has expanded since March 2020 because the pandemic heightened an already existing reality for so many – social isolation. Through our breakfast program, staff seek opportunities to engage with our community, and regularly hear from residents how our Tuesday breakfast is a highlight in their week. For some it is the only time they leave the house and connect with others.

One participant shares, *“This breakfast service has really gotten me through tough times. I feel so cared for knowing someone lovingly prepared this meal. It has even helped me build up my community, as I now pick up extra breakfasts to share with my neighbour who is unable to leave their house.”* J.S.

We’re finding that when one starts their day with a smile, fully nourished bodies and souls, it launches a positive ripple effect in their lives and throughout the community.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

June 9, 2022
7:30 PM
via Zoom

RSVP to
kima@yrfn.ca

YOU CANNOT PLAN THE FUTURE OF FOOD WITHOUT YOUTH

by Gurneet Dhami, Youth Food Committee Co-Lead

Since January 2021, Gurneet and Morgan have been bringing youth, 18 to 30 years of age, together around food.

These youth would not normally have had a reason (or opportunity) to come together, but through the York Region Youth Food Committee, they have had the chance to connect with one another in a virtual space. Through monthly interactions these youth have discussed, debated, learned, and shared about all-things food.

This group meets regularly and have organized virtual events such as a two-part UN Independent Dialogue on Food Systems and an upcoming event on environmental racism and food insecurity. Members have done deputations and have worked to make sure their voices are included in decisions that are happening around food.

The fact that many of our members have not even met in real life and have created strong bonds and overcome social isolation during a tough time speaks volumes to this group's potential.

Equipping the future leaders in food starts with giving them mentorship to thrive and an opportunity to lead at the table!



SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS

