



YWCA
PETERBOROUGH
HALIBURTON

2020-2021 STORYBOOK



NOURISH



THEORY OF CHANGE

Our Theory of Change is anchored in three core areas of programming: Access to Healthy Food, Food Literacy, and Civic Literacy.

Food and belonging are at the heart of our work. The bulk of participants connect with us through our *Eating* programs. There they are able to better feed themselves and their families. Others get initially hooked on our *Growing* activities and *Cooking* work. It gives them a chance to learn new skills or refresh old ones. As their level of confidence rises, they join in on our *Advocating* activities. Under our Civic Literacy banner, we support participants in learning to work with others to push for meaningful change. This approach doesn't yield immediate policy change but with time, participants gain a strong sense of agency and develop important connections with others.

If we were to translate our work into a simple equation it would follow a basic pattern:

food + skills + belonging = empowered civic leaders





INTRODUCTION

2020/2021 has been a challenging year to say the least. Unwillingly, we found ourselves thrown into a brand-new world in March 2020. – A world where fostering belonging became much more difficult. Nourish tries to boost people's Vitamin F. Indeed, through our work we seek to cultivate Friendships and a sense of belonging through Food.

Social connections are essential to our health and well-being. As Wilkinson and Pickett highlight in *The Inner Level*, "[o]ver the last thirty to forty years, a large number of studies have shown that having a network of close friends, good relationships and involvement with others is extraordinarily beneficial to health." When evaluating the impact of our series, we look to see if participants have made new connections with others. Attending community dinners, participating in cooking workshops, joining a community garden, or being a food box contact, all offer many opportunities to make friends. When most of our connections become virtual, and when strangers are perceived as potential vectors of infection, it's a lot harder to create meaningful relationships. So, we were not surprised to see, as the year unfolded, participants experiencing growing rates of social isolation. We explored avenues to counter this change through new initiatives (see the Amplifying Voices in Our Community page) and we know that this is a challenge that we are going to face even more forcefully this coming year. Due to the circumstances of the pandemic, our social muscles have not been exercised enough, and we will need practice to strengthen them again.

The pandemic increased the level of loneliness, particularly among marginalized community members, and it also shed a crude light on the inequities already present in our community. As a result, we modified our overall approach and gave more prominence to our access-to-healthy-food programming. Yet we know that while these programs can support participants struggling to put good food on their tables, they do not alter rates of food insecurity. This is why we explored more ways to engage community members who care about this issue, to educate them about the root cause of food insecurity, and to get them involved in fostering equity.

This past year, phone conversations dominated our work. This led us to the decision to place greater emphasis on participants' and partners' stories in this Impact Report. That's why we created a storybook which illustrates how the pandemic impacted participants, and how our work with them made a difference in their lives. The speech bubbles you will see in this report all represent feedback we received from participants. Each core component of our work – eating, gardening, cooking, and advocating – thread together all the stories we collected.

We also heard from many food groups this past year. They wanted to find out how we were navigating the pandemic. Many asked us to help them engage participants more actively and boost their sense of possibility. We decided to conclude this report by offering a metaphor and suggestions which, hopefully, will be useful in fostering more connections, and continuously pushing for a future where everyone in our community is able to feed themselves and their families well, with dignity.

Sincerely,

Joëlle Favreau
Nourish Manager



EATING: FOOD BOX



In the past year, Nourish supported **700 adults** and **400 children** in our region by providing access to **fresh, healthy food** with about **600 food boxes monthly**.

Since the pandemic started, we have changed our model to include delivery. **We delivered boxes to almost 300 doors twice a month, totalling 7440 boxes** over the course of the year.

We would not have been able to do any of this work without the ongoing support of our home agency, **YWCA Peterborough Haliburton**.

We also received the support of **36 volunteers**, and funding from **Peterborough Public Health, the City of Peterborough, the Good Food Access Fund, Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough, and Greater Peterborough Health Services Foundation**.

A Letter from a Healthcare Professional

To: info@nourishproject.ca
Subject: The Impact of Nourish Food Boxes

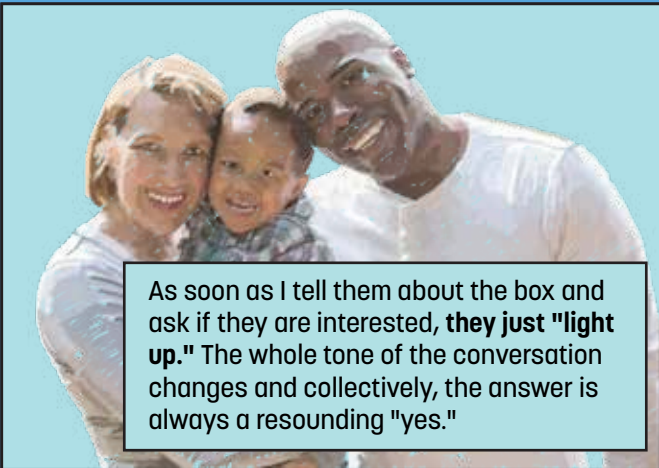
I just wanted you to know how important the Nourish Food Boxes have been in our patients' lives here at Peterborough Family Health Team. As a Nurse Navigator with the Clinical Support Services Team, we help our patients struggling with health equity concerns navigate health and social systems; to connect with resources to help stabilize their lives...



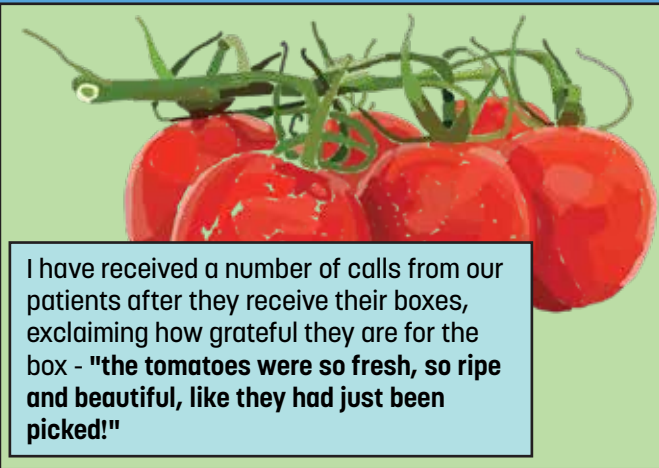
Food insecurity is one of the biggest issues our patients face.

Of all of the programs and services we connect our patients to, **the Nourish Box is one of the most cherished.**

Through our Compassion Fund, we cover the cost of Nourish Boxes for our patients, with the goal that when they are able, they can start paying for the boxes on their own - as they are extremely affordable at \$5 and \$10 a box. (Most of our patients relay that this is very affordable for them and are willing to pay for it themselves).



As soon as I tell them about the box and ask if they are interested, **they just "light up."** The whole tone of the conversation changes and collectively, the answer is always a resounding "yes."



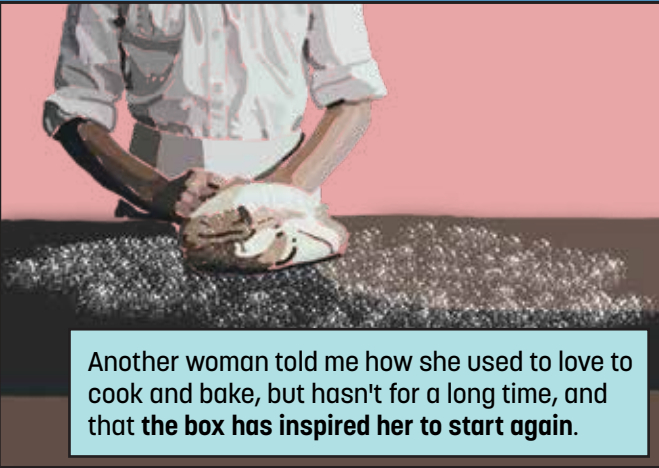
I have received a number of calls from our patients after they receive their boxes, exclaiming how grateful they are for the box - **"the tomatoes were so fresh, so ripe and beautiful, like they had just been picked!"**



Some comment on how much **they appreciate the little touches** - like a lemon and/or fresh herbs, to get creative with cooking.



Some love the recipes in the newsletter they receive with the box. One woman expressed how excited she was to make zucchini loaf with the zucchini she received in her box. **"I had never thought of that before!"**



Another woman told me how she used to love to cook and bake, but hasn't for a long time, and that **the box has inspired her to start again.**

When people are accustomed to getting limited and/or less than fresh vegetables from food banks and sometimes even the discount grocery stores, **receiving a box like this is a very special gift.**

Until I received the unanimous response I did from my patients about the opportunity to receive the Nourish Food Box, **I didn't realize how much I took having the privilege of being able to afford healthy and whole foods for granted.**



For single mothers who struggle to feed themselves and their children healthy food, getting **the box is an absolute necessity.**

Most of our patients are low income and struggle to afford enough food for the month, let alone fruits and vegetables, which tend to be more expensive than buying boxed foods.

I had one woman call me in tears after the first time she received the box, telling me: **"I can't tell you how grateful I am for this box. I'm just blown away. I can't believe it. It is so beautiful. Thank-you so much."**

The number of calls I receive solely to thank me for the box is astounding. So as a healthcare professional, I just wanted to let you know how meaningful and helpful the service you provide is. I just want everyone who needs a Nourish Box to be able to get one!

Thank-you from our team for everything you do!



EATING:

Curve Lake Community Market



In 2016, during a community dinner in Curve Lake First Nation, community members identified the need for a local market. There is no grocery store in Curve Lake, which limits access to fresh, healthy food. In 2017, Nourish started a seasonal market, which was later expanded to a weekly, year-round market with the support of Community Food Centres Canada, as well as the Curve Lake Health Centre and Economic Development Department.

Improving Food Access in Curve Lake First Nation

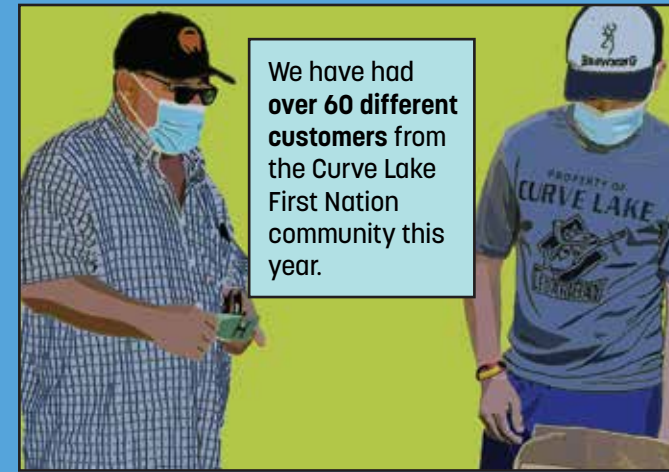


About **20-30 people** shop at the Curve Lake Community Market each week, purchasing a total average of **\$350 worth of produce** at affordable prices.



This is so great. It saves me from going into town, feels safer, and the food is fresh.

I love this market so much I look forward to it every week!



We have had **over 60 different customers** from the Curve Lake First Nation community this year.



My grandson keeps reminding me to come here and get the fruit that he loves.

I don't buy vegetables or fruit anywhere else anymore.



In 2020, the Curve Lake First Nation Economic Development Department installed a shed, to allow us to run the market **year-round**.

Lots of selection! Inspires me to try new recipes and eat healthier.



This is Nourish staff member, Jill, all **dressed up to stay warm** while running the market through the winter months.

I shop for my whole extended family here! It really helps us get lots of fresh fruits and veggies in our budget.



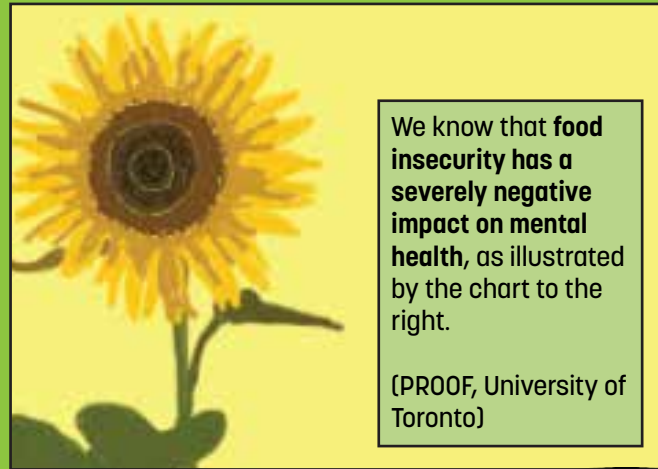
GROWING

In March 2020, Nourish staff worked with the Ontario Community Garden Network to quickly mobilize a response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that community gardens were declared an essential service. Nourish also worked with Peterborough Public Health to develop a series of protocols that allowed local gardens to operate safely. We have always known that community gardens have a positive impact on mental health, but this was especially true in 2020.

Community Gardening & Mental Health

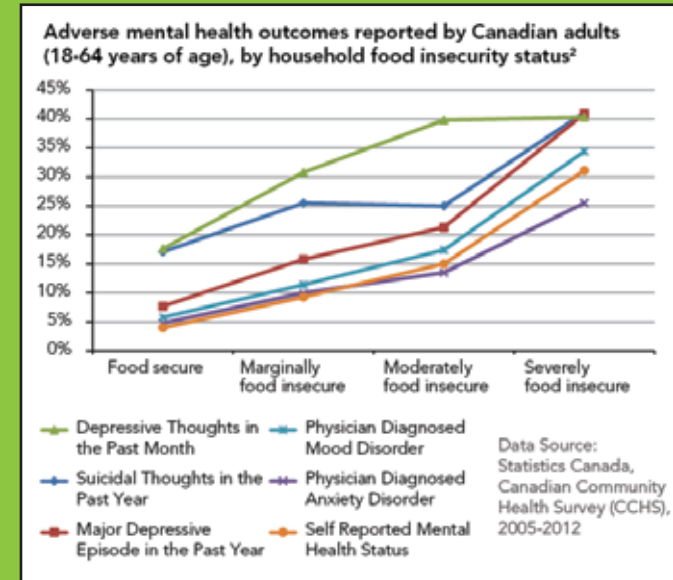


Among surveyed participants, the **top 3 motivations** for participating in a community garden were: **Providing food** for the gardener and their family, **improving mental health**, and **improving physical health**.



We know that **food insecurity has a severely negative impact on mental health**, as illustrated by the chart to the right.

(PROOF, University of Toronto)

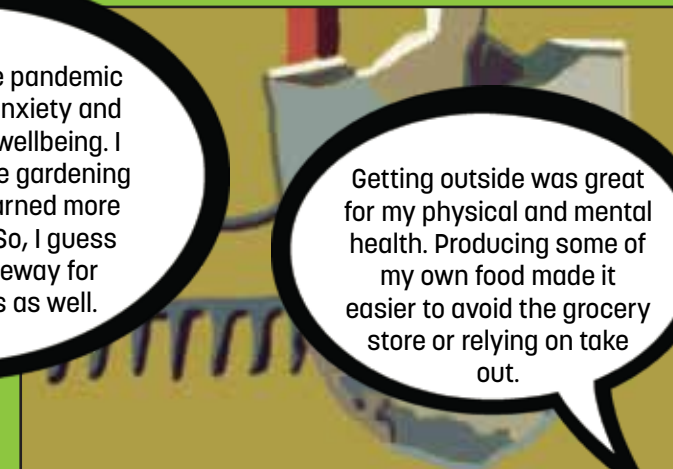


Community gardening decreases my anxiety and staves off loneliness and is best for my mental health.



Nourish supports **595 community gardeners** in **32 community gardens**.

Gardening during the pandemic helped me with my anxiety and gave me a sense of wellbeing. I connected with online gardening communities and learned more than I did last year. So, I guess my garden is a gateway for social connections as well.



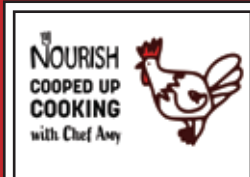
Getting outside was great for my physical and mental health. Producing some of my own food made it easier to avoid the grocery store or relying on take out.



COOKING

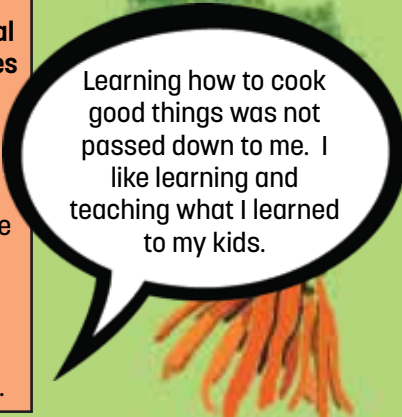
Of all of our work, our cooking programs were the most deeply impacted by the pandemic. As you can imagine, food skills are best taught in person, working in a kitchen together. We did our best to move these programs online, and to keep participants connected through food.

Cooking Online During the Pandemic




At the beginning of the pandemic, Nourish created **6 episodes of our Cooped Up Cooking** web series, and later **held 13 virtual cooking events.**


In the summer, Chef Amanda ran a **virtual family cooking series in partnership with Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre.** Ingredients and Nourish Dollars were delivered ahead of time, along with recipes, and everyone cooked together over Zoom.



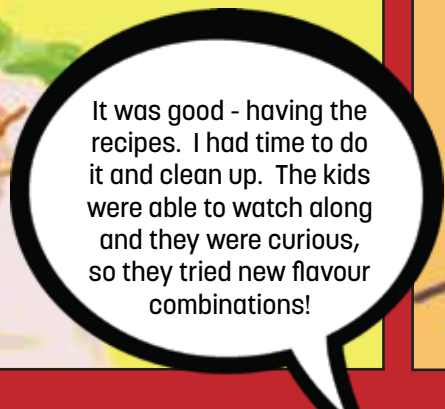
Learning how to cook good things was not passed down to me. I like learning and teaching what I learned to my kids.




I enjoyed spending time with my son. My boys are into cooking and helping. They got excited. My son has such a sweet tooth, and he tried foods he never would have normally tried! We are having more in depth conversations about food now, like why are we cooking from scratch and not getting takeout. He even checks on me if I'm in the kitchen stirring something.



I enjoyed getting my son more engaged, with new skills and healthy recipes. I was surprised at the ingredients and what you can whip together.



It was good - having the recipes. I had time to do it and clean up. The kids were able to watch along and they were curious, so they tried new flavour combinations!



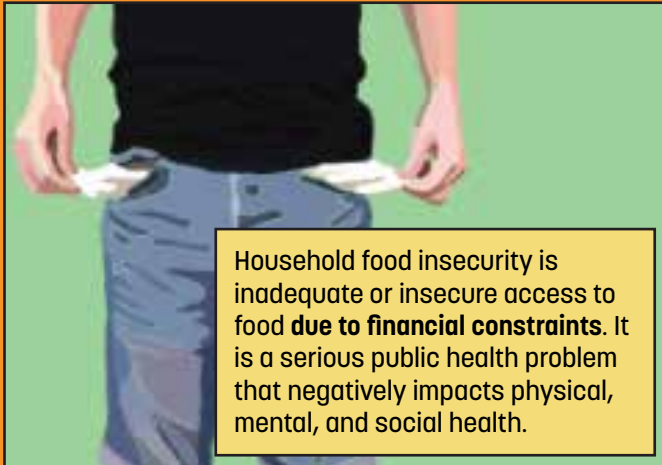
We also held two canning series, a soup-making series, and started our Veg Pledge series. For the Veg Pledge, we asked what vegetables folks didn't like, and provided monthly recipes and tips over Zoom to turn them into vegetables they'd love.



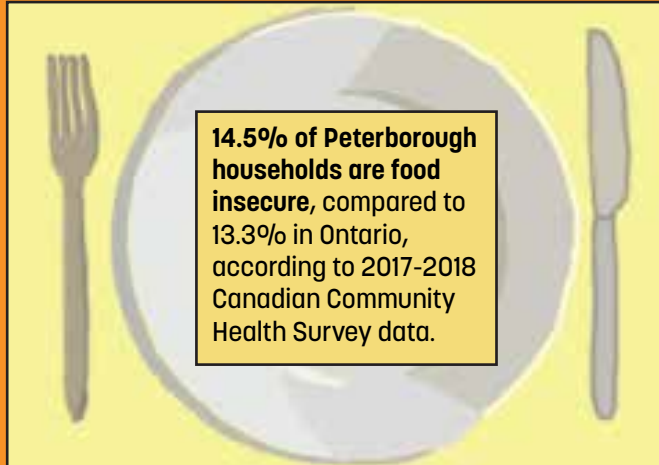
ADVOCATING

Food charity dominates the narrative around hunger in Canada, and yet we know it will never be able to address the root causes of food insecurity. Improving incomes is an essential ingredient that allows people to put good food on their tables, with dignity.

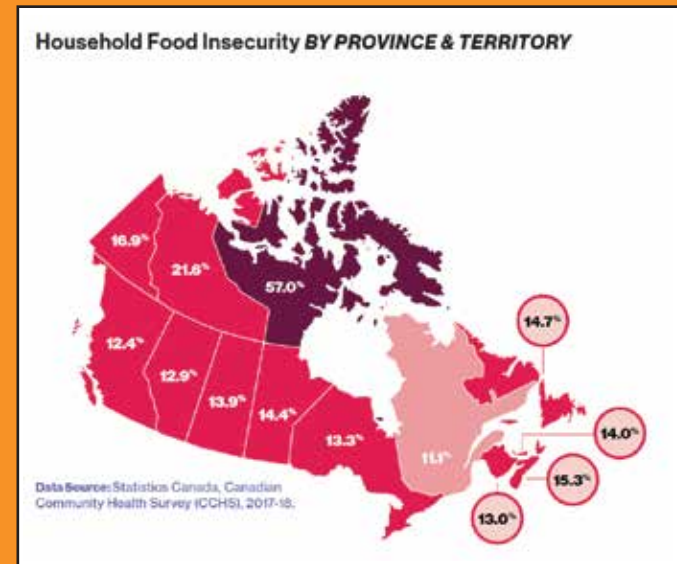
Changing the Story of Food Insecurity



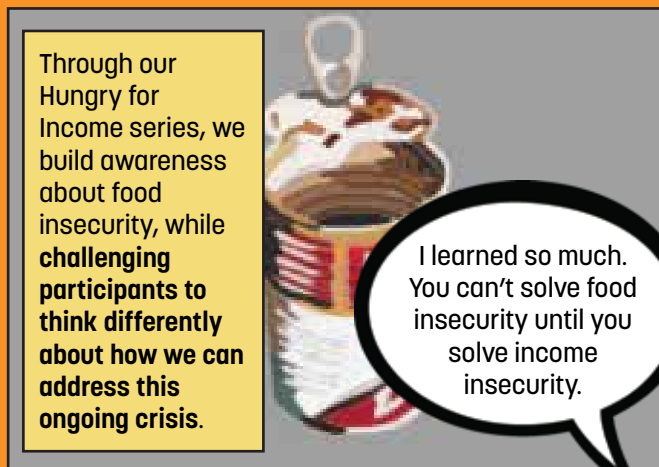
Household food insecurity is inadequate or insecure access to food **due to financial constraints**. It is a serious public health problem that negatively impacts physical, mental, and social health.



14.5% of Peterborough households are food insecure, compared to 13.3% in Ontario, according to 2017-2018 Canadian Community Health Survey data.

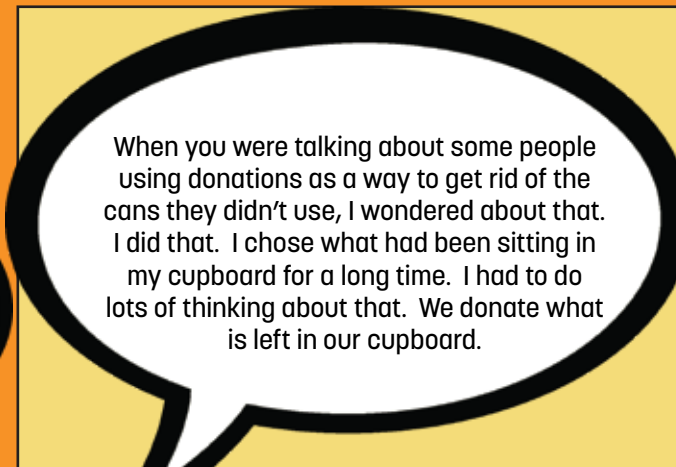



In Peterborough, **half of female lone parent families are food insecure**, compared to the national average of 1 in 4. (2011 - 2014)



Through our Hungry for Income series, we build awareness about food insecurity, while **challenging participants to think differently about how we can address this ongoing crisis.**

I learned so much. You can't solve food insecurity until you solve income insecurity.

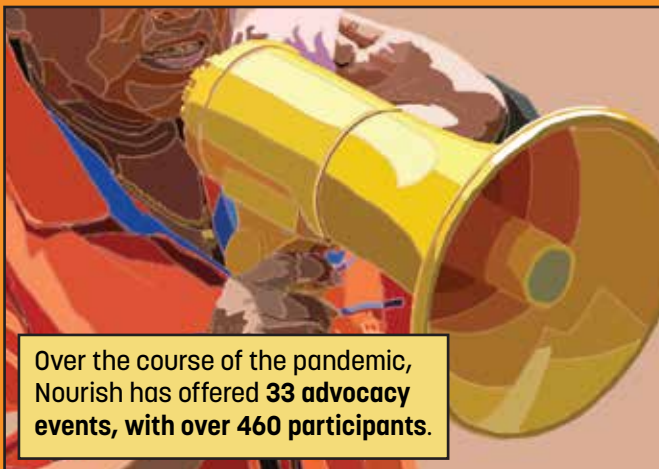


When you were talking about some people using donations as a way to get rid of the cans they didn't use, I wondered about that. I did that. I chose what had been sitting in my cupboard for a long time. I had to do lots of thinking about that. We donate what is left in our cupboard.

ADVOCATING

Through our civic engagement work, Nourish provides training opportunities to people who have experienced marginalization. These trainings amplify voices that are not often heard by providing new skills and building the confidence of participants so that they can become advocates for themselves and others.

Amplifying Voices in Our Community



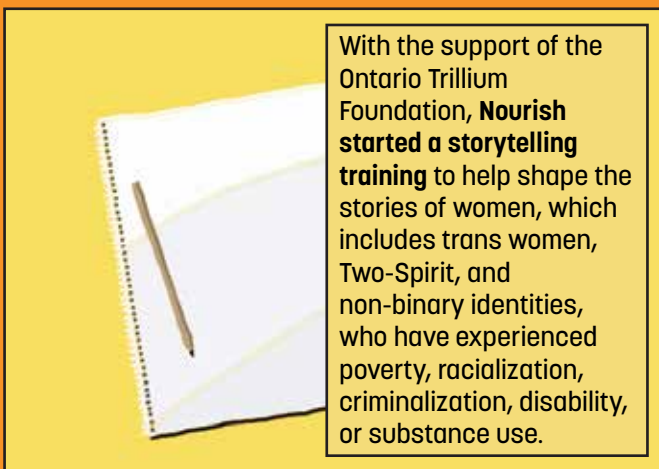
Over the course of the pandemic, Nourish has offered **33 advocacy events, with over 460 participants.**



We were able to finish our Peer Advocacy pilot project between lockdowns, and **created opportunities for participants to develop new skills with us online.**



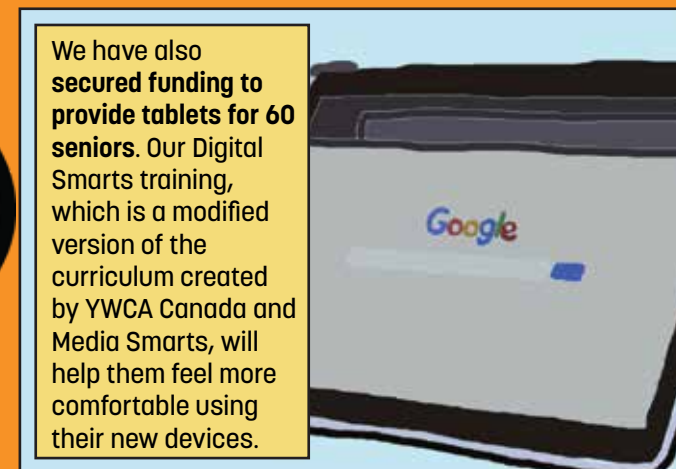
I'm feeling more empowered to discuss community issues with people.



With the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, **Nourish started a storytelling training** to help shape the stories of women, which includes trans women, Two-Spirit, and non-binary identities, who have experienced poverty, racialization, criminalization, disability, or substance use.



I was afraid of my story being irrelevant. But it was not. The group I was in welcomed and accepted my story compassionately.



We have also **secured funding to provide tablets for 60 seniors.** Our Digital Smarts training, which is a modified version of the curriculum created by YWCA Canada and Media Smarts, will help them feel more comfortable using their new devices.

BELONGING

To conclude this reflection about the past year, we've used the metaphor of nurturing a garden to unpack the complexity of our approach. We hope this will be a useful perspective to others engaged in fostering equitable communities.

Our Recipe for Growing Healthy Communities

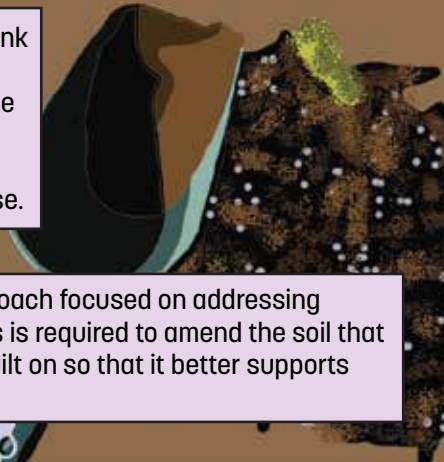
Cultivating Healthy Soil

The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the cracks in our society. Individuals and families who were already struggling to make ends meet were more significantly impacted. In fact, we have been dealing with two pandemics: one contagious, and the other rooted in inequities and poverty.



We need to rethink our approach to addressing these problems and encourage a broader response.

A systemic approach focused on addressing health inequities is required to amend the soil that our society is built on so that it better supports life.

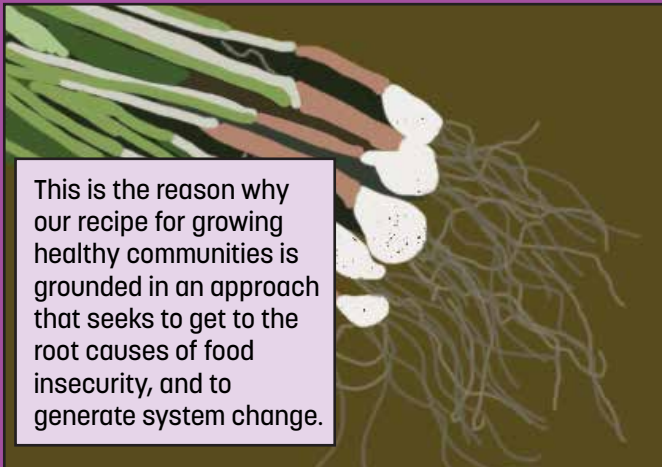


Getting to the Roots

Food offers a powerful avenue to address these inequities. Individuals and families vulnerable to and experiencing food insecurity are often most impacted by systems of oppression.



This is the reason why our recipe for growing healthy communities is grounded in an approach that seeks to get to the root causes of food insecurity, and to generate system change.



Sowing Belonging, Dignity, and Choice

Gardeners know that to cultivate good food, they need to start by using healthy seeds. The most powerful seeds for supporting participants who have experienced marginalization are belonging, dignity, and choice.



We define belonging as being seen, heard, and valued. Dignity affirms the right of people to be respected and valued for their own sake and to be treated ethically. Choice is grounded in the process of self-determination, or in other words, having options to manage one's own life.







Embracing an Organic Approach

Healthy seeds can't grow unless they're planted in healthy soil. The "Nothing About Us Without Us" principle is the foundation of that soil.

For healthy growth, a garden requires an environment well-suited to what is grown there. We find that the best way to develop the right environment is by adapting it to the needs of our participants. This is done by involving them directly in the development of our programs and practices.

Companion Planting

Our overall culture at Nourish is also one that is anchored in a "both/and" approach rather than an either/or one. For the past 40 years, since the first food bank was established in Edmonton, food programs have endorsed an approach that has emphasized emergency work rather than system change.



We recommend an approach of "both/and" by focusing not solely on programs supporting access to food, but also on engaging participants to push for system change.

Always Adapting

Finally, what we know is essential with gardening is that each year offers a new opportunity to strengthen one's approach and pilot something new.




Gardening is all about cultivating relationships between plants, the environment, the soil, and the gardener. Every growing season offers an opportunity to learn more, adapt, and transform one's work to yield better harvests.

