

# **Come Cook with Us**

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Completed for:

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Trent Centre for Community-based Education

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**Project Proposal: "Come Cook with Us" pilot project**

**Background**

As defined by the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA)(2002) community food security is *"ensuring secure access to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate food for everyone, produced in an environmentally sustainable way, and provided in a manner that promotes human dignity. It features cooperation among all contributors in a local/regional food system, including growers and producers, citizen groups, community agencies, governmental organizations, businesses, academic researchers and environmental advocates"*. Community food security therefore encompasses social, economic and environmental aspects of the food system.

Community food security has grown into a public health issue over the last 3 decades as more and more people face food shortages. It was initially thought that food security issues and increased reliance on food banks in the 1980's was due to the economic recession, however the use and demand for food assistance has not decreased but has grown (Tarasuk, 2001). In 1995, 250,000 Ontarians used food banks on a monthly basis; 45% were youth under the age of 18 (OPHAFSWG, 1995). In a Toronto Perinatal and Child Health survey, 19% of low-income households and 14% of single-parent households reported not being able to provide their children a balanced meal, and a total of 5.8% of the households surveyed were classified as having "food insecure children" (McKeown, 2006).

Many factors can contribute to food insecurity including social isolation, exclusion, high unemployment, inadequate social assistance, poverty and income security, high costs of living (housing, transportation), access to healthy, culturally appropriate food, and food preparation and literacy skills (McKeown, 2006; OPHA, 2002 and OPHAFSWG, 1995).

Measures against food insecurity have largely taken a top-down, centralised approach with government and policy makers controlling and deciding the best ways to deal with food and poverty issues. These solutions tend to be direct-service programs (McCullum *et al.*, 2004). There has been an increasing emphasis on decentralised, community-level initiatives in many communities. These initiatives



focus on meeting the needs of low-income people, empowerment, increasing the self-reliance of communities, education, and promoting sustainable solutions for local food, farm and nutrition issues (McCullum *et al.*, 2004). A 2004 study looked at the issues some socially disadvantaged community members experience after participating in a community-based food security program (McCullum *et al.*, 2004). The empowerment of the participant, not only to gain skills and make healthy food choices, but also to feel that their decisions will affect change is extremely important. A group of low-income women who participated in a skill-building food security program in Canada were able to take initiatives in their community and succeeded at lowering prices in a neighbourhood supermarket, however they did not feel they had any power over the way corporate advertising influenced their food needs and choices (McCullum *et al.*, 2004). There is potential for a community-based food security program to address all the areas in which its participants feel empowered, making it a truly sustainable program. It is therefore imperative that when trying to sustain and create a healthy community, a holistic approach involving social, environmental and economic sectors must be incorporated.

It has become a growing priority to create sustainable long-term solutions to food security issues instead of just supplementation programs like emergency food banks and free meals, by implementing initiatives through the public health units. These programs can include education and skill-building projects revolving around healthy lifestyles and community development like community kitchens, community gardens, "food box" programs, and youth cooking programs (PCCHU, 2006).

As families fight to make ends meet, family time and relationships also suffer. Family meals are becoming uncommon and less frequent with the children left to fend for themselves or eat with siblings because of conflicting schedules. In addition, there is less knowledge and skill-sharing between the generations. It is the experiences with food in early childhood that shapes the foundation of good food habits in adult life (McKeown, 2006 and OPHAFSWG, 1995). In the past, safe food preservation and preparation skills were passed down to the youth by a parent or grandparent but this is decreasing, producing a generation with a lack of essential life skills and a dependency on the food industry for processed, ready-to-eat foods (OPHAFSWG, 1995). Access to convenience and snack foods (which are less nutritious) helps to lessen hunger without having to spend time preparing or sitting down to eat and share a meal with family members. Children are thus not learning proper, healthy eating habits and personal food skills are lacking. Cooking programs

help to address the loss of food skills while also promoting money-saving techniques through the discouragement of purchasing processed foods and utilising fresh ingredients. They can also have important community building social and environmental benefits (FAHC, 2000).

Food education in general is an important part of any food insecurity solution. A study done in the US examined the food insecurity levels of low income families before and after food education (Dollahite, 2003). They used an Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program and saw a significant decrease in the food insecurity scores of people who completed the education program and also of those who left before the program was complete. This study was an example of effective education in food selection and resource management skills (Dollahite, 2003). An emphasis on education is part of the PCCHU's proposal for hunger solutions. They require that the programs implemented by the funding received from the Ministry of Health focus on knowledge and skill building to try and avoid food insecurity, as opposed to a quick fix program that meets hunger needs but has no lasting effect.

In 2000, there were more than 300 children's food programs operating in Toronto through schools and community centres (FAHC, 2000). The Toronto Public Health Unit is already successfully implementing the "Come Cook with Us" program and other similar adult and child health and nutrition skill-building programs (McKeown, 2006). These along with the dire need for long-term security solutions stimulated the Peterborough Health Unit's interest in bringing more programs to Peterborough and apply for funding from the federal government. The government funds projects that are related to skill-building community projects and promote sustainable community development. The health unit received funding to help subsidize the pre-existing community kitchens and food box programs as well as to initiate the "Come Cook with Us" pilot project. The "Come Cook with Us" project has excellent potential to grow into something that is not just a "band-aid solution" for food insecurity in Peterborough but can reach directly into families' lives and promote positive change in healthy living.

There is therefore, a direct need for this program in the Peterborough community in order to help promote and foster a healthy community and create sustainable food security through the implementation of skill-building, sharing and education around food, nutrition and healthy lifestyles, and by encouraging family time, participation and relationship building within the community as a whole. The program will not only provide a weekly meal for families, but will also teach valuable

skills to the youth about food preparation, nutrition and budget-wise shopping in a safe space. It will also supplement the family with food vouchers so they will be able to purchase the food and create the same meals together at home.

### **Community Context**

In Peterborough, many members of the community face food insecurity on a regular basis. Those who are most vulnerable are children and single-parent families. The Report on Hunger in Peterborough (1996) found that in low-income families, 87% had faced food insecurity at some point and 62% had used a food bank or place with free food (PSPC, 1996). Poverty is the single most important reason why so many are going hungry in Peterborough. Social assistance benefits were cut by 22% in 1995, living costs (i.e. rent, hydro and electricity, food) are on the rise, and minimum wage is still insufficient to raise a family on (PCCHU, 2005). These factors all contribute to poverty in Peterborough. Housing costs make up 59% of the total monthly income for low-income families (PSPC, 1996). In June 2005 the Peterborough County-City Health Unit calculated the monthly food cost for a family of four to be \$564.24 if they were to purchase a nutritious food basket containing the basic essentials. This represents 39% of a low-income family's monthly budget compared to 13% of a middle-income Canadian family (PCCHU, 2005). Healthy food purchases are the most likely to be jeopardized when families are struggling to pay bills. The highest rates of low income by age group were among children and youth. About 18% of children under 15 were low income in 2000, with 22.3% of children under six living below the poverty line (PCCHU, 2006). The children and youth living in food-insecure households are suffering greatly and they are the ones who need to be learning about ways to prevent food insecurity in their homes as they grow up. How is a child to learn the skills and knowledge he/she needs to thrive in school and in the community if they are hungry and worried about food?

Currently in Peterborough, there are various food programs and food assistance options to help families cope with food insecurity. These include community gardens, collective kitchens, LETS Exchange, gleaning, food box program, "Food for Kids" breakfast and snack programs, programs for pregnant women and Kawartha Food Share. There are also various emergency food outlets that provide meals and/or foodstuffs (PCCHU, 1996).

In her article entitled *You Can't Start A Revolution On An Empty Stomach* (2000), Susan Hubay, a Public Health Nutritionist with the Peterborough County-City Health Unit in charge of the 2006 Hunger Proposal and funding for the "Come Cook

With Us” program, summarized the initiatives taken over the last 2 decades to overcome the hunger and food insecurity issues in Peterborough. She notes *“Peterborough, as a community, now looks for partnerships to find solutions to food-security problems”* (Hubay, 2000). Partnerships like the one the PCCHU has made with the Bridge Youth Centre are exactly those that she wrote about 6 years ago.

The need for hunger solutions in Peterborough is evident, but the solutions need to be approached by making all levels of the community involved. The Health Unit approached the Government for funding in 2005, explaining the need for solutions to Peterborough's food-security issues. The purpose of the funding was to allow Peterborough City and County to work together in a coordinated effort to battle hunger issues. In interview sessions with various community members and organizations prior to the PCCHU's submission of the hunger report, the greatest need was indicated to be a cooperation of all parties currently working on hunger issues. The PCCHU's goal was *“to partner with community members and organizations to develop a coordinated system of food security programs that ensures all community members have access to affordable, nutritious and personally acceptable foods”* (PCCHU, 2006). The government allotted the PCCHU a sum of \$92,300 about a quarter of the amount that the PCCHU originally asked for (PCCHU, 2006). That money is being used to fund various programs that the PCCHU had proposed to the Ministry of Health as part of the *Working Together To Address Hunger and Food Security in Peterborough City and County* report submitted in 2005. The funds because they are significantly lower than requested; will be spread over fewer projects and for a shorter time span than proposed. The “Come Cook with Us” program was proposed to run from June 2006 to Dec 2007; however the program is now condensed into a 10-week pilot project running from Nov – Dec 2006.

With the success of this pilot project there are many prospects to expand and network with other community organisations and blend different family groups and communities to encourage skill sharing, build relationships and operate their own cooking programs. The overall goal of the project is to create a sustainable program that runs year-round, does not rely on external funding, and is run by the Peterborough community.

#### **Goals and Objectives**

- Build relationships between families within the Peterborough community



- Provide nutritious food to families in need in order to address food security issues in the community
- Inform about alternative “budget-wise” shopping strategies
- Facilitate the sharing of knowledge and skills between various parties
- Build relationships between local organisations and the community and foster community development initiatives
- Build capacity of youth in nutrition, healthy lifestyles and food preparation
- Encourage family meal-time interaction
- Encourage importance of knowledge sharing between parents/older generations and children
- Emphasize importance of nutritious meals
- Create a foundation for a sustainable community family meal program
- Gain better understanding through a human perspective of the realities many families face in the Peterborough community and their ways of coping
- Gain first hand experience setting up and facilitating a community-based program

### **Target Group**

This project has three target groups that it hopes to reach. The first group, the “food insecure” in the downtown Peterborough area is broad and encompasses the other two target groups. One of the goals of the project is to help cure the hunger issues of the people living in low-income households and minimum wage families who cannot afford nutritious food. A large number of the families living in the downtown core of Peterborough rely on assistance or live off of the minimum wage earnings of a single parent. These are the people whom the Bridge regularly involves in their programs and therefore are the target group of this project. The second group is more specifically the youth of these households, aged 10-14. This age group will be targeted because they are old enough to be responsible in a kitchen/cooking setting where some activities may require specific safety measures. They are also the age group that is most likely to take on responsibility roles in their home settings, such as childcare and meal preparation. The third target group is, again a sub-group of the first, the parents and/or caregivers of the youth in the downtown area surrounding the Bridge. Another goal of this project is to build family relationships by skill building and knowledge sharing between the Bridge and the parents of the youth involved. The parents will be invited to eat with the youth and

the program staff every week with the hope that they will build important meal-time rituals.

### **Methodology/Activities**

- i) Students will receive an organisation orientation in order to familiarize themselves with the Bridge Youth Centre and their coworkers
- ii) Initial preparation of the project will include creating posters and promoting the "Come Cook with Us" program to youth (ages 10-14) who live close to and are involved at the Bridge. Posters at the Bridge as well as word-of-mouth advertising will be used. The students will come to other Bridge programs and speak to the eligible youth about the program and encourage them and their peers to participate.
- iii) Permission forms will be distributed and collected prior to program commencement.
- iv) The students will help facilitate 10 sessions of the "Come Cook with Us" program. These sessions will involve 10-15 youth aged 10-14. Preparation for the session will involve some preplanning, food preparation and review of the session curriculum found in the "Come Cook with Us" manual. The students will also be directly involved in the cooking instruction and meal preparation with the youth. After meal preparation, the families are encouraged to come and share the meal with their children. They will also be able to take home the recipes that the youth used and food vouchers in order to purchase similar ingredients so they can make the meals at home.
- v) The students will also be required to meet weekly post-session to debrief with the other participating staff.
- vi) At the end of the 10 sessions, the students will help with and provide input and perspectives as active participants to the evaluation.

### **Timeline**

- **Oct. 16-20** – Begin advertising and recruiting youth aged 10-14 by distributing materials provided by The Bridge, and by visiting weekly programs that are run at the Bridge where interested parties may be in attendance.
- **Oct. 23** – Meet with the Peterborough county-city Health Unit to discuss their involvement with the project and to use any resources they may have surrounding the project.

- **Oct. 23-27** – Use the “Come Cook with Us” cookbook and the resources from the PCCHU to organize 10 weeks of the cooking program. This will include menu planning and organization of each week’s activities. During this week, orientation with The Bridge Youth Centre will take place to enable the students to volunteer with the youth.
- **Nov. 1** – The first official cooking class and community meal.
- **Nov. 1- Dec. 20** – Every Wednesday from 3:00pm-7:00pm at the Bridge Youth Centre, the cooking classes and community meals will take place.
- **Sun. Nov. ?** – Special Event dinner from 3:00pm-7:00pm (date is yet to be scheduled by The Bridge)
- **Sun. Dec. ?** – Special Event dinner from 3:00pm-7:00pm (date is yet to be scheduled by The Bridge)
- **Dec. 20 – 31** – give feedback and evaluation of project to PCCHU and The Bridge

November 1st  
 November 1st - December 20th  
 Sunday November ?  
 Sunday December ?  
 December 20th - 31st

**Projected Outcomes**

- Success of pilot project fosters networking between various community groups in Peterborough to create a permanent and sustainable program.
- Awareness within community spreads about the importance of healthy eating and family time.
- Youth benefit and utilise skills gained in the program at home.
- Families make effort to have more family-meal time together.
- Families utilise strategies from program to purchase and prepare more healthy and nutritious food.
- Youth take an interest and pursue further food related skill building.
- Youth encourage and educate their peers about healthy lifestyles and the importance of nutritious food.
- Students gain first-hand experience in organising and running a community-based program.
- Students are able to put a human perspective on issues related to food security and continue to pursue and remain actively involved in the community.
- Students build lasting relationships with different community members they may never have had to opportunity to connect with.

## References

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**The Bridge Youth Centre  
Volunteer Job Description  
Come Cook With Us**

**Name:**

Title: Volunteer – Come Cook With Us

Supervisor: Kerri Kightley

Staff Mentor: Kerri Kightley

**A. Personal**

1. Participate in training opportunities, as approved by Youth Centre Director, to better equip him/her for position.
2. Establish relationships for accountability and mentoring through weekly post-program de-briefing and access to weekly consultations/supervisions with supervisor.

**B. Direct Contact With Youth**

1. Preparedness to provide consistent and fair guidance and/or conflict resolution for youth accessing The Come Cook With Us Program.
2. Initiate and maintain contact with parents and families to ensure positive impact of program for the family.
3. Participate in the development and implementation of an evaluation of the program.
4. Personally staff a set number of Come Cook With Us program times.


**C. Community / Public Relations**

1. Respond to concerns and/or questions from the surrounding community as they arise.
2. Strive to project a visible and positive image of the Youth Centre to community groups, individuals and parents.

**D. Organizational / Administrative**

1. Keep records of encounters with youth, recording observations, activities and events.
2. Meet weekly at post-program debriefing sessions.

  
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Volunteer – Come Cook With Us

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kerri Kightley  
Director – The Bridge Youth Centre

18-Oct-06  
Date

18/10/06  
Date



This is a GREAT new get together for youth  
ages 10 - 14 and their families! Each  
Wednesday kids will learn to cook, have fun  
and eat with their families.

Program runs from Nov 1 to Dec 20  
Kids start preparing food at 3:30 and  
parents arrive to be served dinner at 5:45.  
At 6:45 clean-up and menu planning begins for the next week.  
Each night, families receive the recipe and a \$10 voucher!



Held at The Bridge Youth Centre. Located at 256 Brock St.  
Phone 743-2900 for any questions.