

Promoting Hunger Awareness Through Volunteerism

**Mandy Ashton
Chris Beyers
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Introduction

Meal Exchange is a national student-driven, grassroots, registered charity with the mandate to address local and national hunger issues. Throughout the school year, volunteers on campuses across Canada host various events to collect non-perishable food donations for local food banks, shelters and soup kitchens in their communities. Meal Exchange mobilizes the talents and passions of students from various backgrounds and in all fields of study, allowing them to realize their potential to create lasting social change.

After I approached Meal Exchange about wanting to do a community based education project for them, they determined that they wanted to know whether or not their campaigns work to increase awareness of Canadian hunger issues and encourage long-term involvement in working to end hunger through community-building.

In an effort to get a balanced overview of the opinions and experiences of Meal Exchange volunteers, I have interviewed both volunteers and coordinators. As organizers of Meal Exchange campaigns, coordinators interact with the staff and clients of social service agencies and because of this may gain a better understanding of hunger in their community. Therefore, after they graduate they may be more likely to remain active in hunger alleviation campaigns than a regular volunteer. For this reason, I worked to collect information from respondents who have been involved through all levels of participation; from those who have donated meal plan points, to those starting their own chapters and those coordinating the most successful chapter in the country.

By comparing experiences of students at the University of Guelph, a well established campus, with students at a new and developing chapter, Trent University, I

hope to discover the attraction Meal Exchange has for students and how it impacts their understanding of hunger.

Hunger in Canada

Hunger is becoming an increasing problem in Canadian society. While the majority of Canadians do live comfortable and safe lives, there is a growing number of Canadians who are being left behind. Due to more rigorous eligibility requirements and cuts in social assistance and employment insurance as well as decreases in the number of full time jobs available and an increase in part-time, low wage jobs with little or no benefits, there is increasing inequality in Canadian incomes (Adams, 2000, p. 1).

Much of Canada's poverty is measured through the use of the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO). The LICO is a set mark where an individual's income is substantially lower than the average income (Adams, 2000, p. 1). It is important to note that no province or territory has a minimum wage rate above the LICO (Hyman, et al. 2004, p. 3). In 1998, 12.2 percent of Canadians lived below the LICO; in these cases, the average family lived \$8,265 below the LICO (Adams, 2000, p. 1). Of the 12.2 percent of Canadians living below the LICO, 1.4 million are children.

As families have access to fewer resources, they often need to make difficult decisions about necessities including paying rent and buying groceries. For this reason, food bank usage has increased drastically in the 23 years since the first food bank was created. There are currently five hundred fifty food banks in Canada which can be found in all provinces and territories. In 2004, 841,640 Canadians, 317,242 of which were children, used food banks each month; this is an 8.5 percent increase from 2003 (Hyman

et al. 2004, p. 3). Due to this increase, 47.8 percent of food banks are having a problem meeting demand and fifty-five new food banks have been created since 2000 (Hyman et al. 2004, p. 3).

Hunger Awareness among Canadians

According to the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB), the majority of Canadians asked believe that hunger is a serious issue in Canada (Heimann, 2004, p. 1). In their 2004 study of perceptions of hunger, the CAFB asked 1240 adult Canadians to respond to questions about hunger in Canada. 67 percent of Canadians surveyed believe that hunger is a serious issue, 21 percent believe it is a very serious concern (Heimann, 2004, p. 3). However, only 16 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 24 said they were seriously concerned about Canadian hunger issues. As well 18-24 year olds were the most likely group to say that food banks should be responsible for finding solutions to hunger in Canada and very few believe that individual citizens have a role in improving conditions in Canada (Heimann, 2004, p. 3).

Meal Exchange

A student at Wilfrid Laurier University started Meal Exchange in 1993 as an attempt to allow students to donate their surplus meal plan points to social service agencies in their community. This program became very successful and resulted in an expansion to other schools and the creation of new programs for hunger relief and awareness. Meal Exchange is currently active on 40 campuses across Canada and hopes to expand to the United States and high schools in the near future. Since its creation in

1993, 50,000 students have been involved and the equivalent of 300,000 meals has been donated throughout Canada (Meal Exchange, 2004).

Meal Exchange is working to address hunger by educating volunteers about Canadian poverty statistics and providing opportunities for discussions of possible solutions. Meal Exchange has the goal of assisting community agencies in providing emergency food to meet the basic needs of people who are food insecure; however, it also hopes to encourage alliances with those living in poverty as well as further action on hunger issues.

Meal Exchange has the mandate to:

- Actively involve students in the creation, planning, and execution of all programs;
- Provide opportunities for students to show leadership at all levels of the organization;
- Build awareness among students about hunger in their community;
- Encourage innovation in programs;
- Promote inclusiveness in all Meal Exchange activities (Meal Exchange, 2004).

Meal Exchange campaigns include:

-Trick or Eat - On Halloween Meal Exchange volunteers go around their community collecting non-perishable food items rather than candy. This is a fun evening for supporting local food banks and letting the community know about the hunger problem in Canada.

- Skip a Meal - This is a way for students on the meal plan to donate their extra meal plan points to food banks. Coordinators choose the social service agencies they

want to support and determine which food items they most need. This food is then ordered through the school's food provider and purchased at wholesale prices.

- *Delivery Day* - This happens after Skip a Meal. The food that was purchased through Skip a Meal is delivered to the social service agencies. This gives volunteers the opportunity to see the agencies they are assisting and interact with clients of such agencies.

- *Conference* - Meal Exchange organizes an annual conference for their coordinators. This conference gives coordinators the opportunity to interact and share ideas with coordinators from all over Canada. Throughout the conference, various community development projects are highlighted and experiential learning experiences are provided (Meal Exchange, 2004).

Food Banks

One possible concern of Meal Exchange campaigns is that involvement with emergency food providers such as food banks and soup kitchens only provides short-term aid to those in need. Although food banks were never meant to be a permanent solution to hunger in Canada, in the 23 years since the first food bank was created in Edmonton, food banks have become ingrained in Canadian society. As the Canadian Association of Food Banks study explains, many people, especially those between the ages of 18 and 24 believe that food banks are the solution to hunger in Canada (Heimann, 2004, p. 3).

Although food banks do solve the immediate need for food, supporting food banks alone does not create lasting change. Many people may feel they have worked to solve hunger once they make a donation to an emergency food agency and fail to recognize the issues

surrounding the need for that donation. In other words, simply donating to a food bank may not raise the critical questions necessary to ensure that fewer people will require the use of food banks in the future (Hilton, 1993, p. 22). However, it is unclear whether or not the act of donating through a Meal Exchange campaign works to engage students more effectively than with traditional food drives. This will be the focus of my research.

Research Question

The dominant goal of Meal Exchange is generating donations for social service agencies and therefore allowing young people to meaningfully contribute to the community. This goal is guided by the broader focus of generating discussion, critical thought and debate about hunger in Canada. The donation amounts collected by Meal Exchange volunteers across Canada are relatively easy to calculate, however, the long-term social impact of involvement with Meal Exchange is much more difficult to tabulate. This is the goal of my research: to better understand the role involvement in Meal Exchange campaigns plays in influencing volunteers to become more involved in challenging hunger within their communities.

In order to answer these questions, I will be working to determine:

- Whether or not volunteers' participation in Meal Exchange programming increases awareness of hunger issues in their local communities.
- If involvement in Meal Exchange programming motivates volunteers to maintain or deepen their involvement in addressing hunger in the future.
- Whether or not volunteers' attitudes about the hunger problem change through participation in the program.

- Whether or not they would consider future involvement in Meal Exchange as a means to deepen their involvement.

Since this is a very large goal, this project will be carried out over two terms. Throughout this first stage of the research, I have used telephone interviews to collect qualitative data to better understand whether or not Meal Exchange volunteers use the knowledge they gain through Meal Exchange campaigns to further engage in hunger related causes.

The second portion of this research will take place in winter 2006 when I will be collecting quantitative data from a larger number of Meal Exchange volunteers. This research will most likely be done with a partner and will be completed as a part of Chris Beyers' International Development 422 class - Assessment of development projects. The second stage of research will be the research that Meal Exchange originally asked for; however, they will gain from the information collected in both research projects as the first stage of this research is setting a foundation for the second phase.

Ethical Concerns

An ethical concern that needs to be addressed in this research is my role as the coordinator of Trent Meal Exchange. This may be of concern because my role as coordinator will lead me to have certain biases and opinions about Meal Exchange. At the same time, it may strengthen my research because I am truly interested in seeing Meal Exchange expand and become more effective. I feel that I have been able to put aside my biases and base my findings as much as possible on the interviews I held with Meal Exchange volunteers. As well, my knowledge of Meal Exchange helps in my

understanding of the responses of the subjects and will allow me to offer attainable recommendations for improvement.

Methodology

Meal Exchange believes that involvement with their campaigns provides students with an opportunity to witness and discuss hunger, and through this engagement students gain a better understanding of the reasons for and effects of hunger among members of their community. However, many Meal Exchange campaigns do not involve direct contact and discussion with the community members experiencing food insecurity. Therefore, I would like to know if volunteers are encouraged to participate in activities that better support dialogue with people experiencing food insecurity following participation in Meal Exchange campaigns. To understand whether or not students involved in Meal Exchange campaigns are becoming more aware of hunger and take on further involvement in their communities, I hope to determine whether or not respondents' perceptions of hunger are changing as a result of their exposure to hunger through Meal Exchange activities.

In order to do this, I have asked a series of questions to determine respondents' past community involvement, including their past involvement with hunger-related campaigns; the reasons they chose to become involved with Meal Exchange; how they currently understand hunger after being involved with Meal Exchange; and the groups and issues they have become involved with as a result of Meal Exchange.

Please note that response charts can be found in Appendix 1 and the following demographic information represents the information found in questions 1 to 4.

Throughout this research, I interviewed eleven Meal Exchange volunteers, four of which are students at Trent University, five from Guelph University, one from McGill University and one from Dalhousie University. Of these volunteers, one has moved onto graduate studies, one has switched from full time studies to part-time and is taking on full time work and two other respondents are in their final year of school. The remaining respondents are in second and third year.

Three of the respondents are coordinating new chapters at Trent and Dalhousie, one respondent is currently coordinating the Guelph chapter and one is the past coordinator of the Guelph chapter. Two of the respondents have participated in Trick or Eat and one has participated in Skip a Meal and Trick or Eat. Three of the respondents have participated in various Meal Exchange events including: Trick or Eat, Skip a Meal and Delivery Day, but not at an organizing level.

The years in which these respondents participated in Meal Exchange range from 1999 to present. The majority is currently involved in the organization and began their involvement in 2003 or 2004. One respondent has been involved for 5 years; however, the remaining respondents have been involved for one or two years.

Question 5 & 6 - *Have you volunteered in the past? Have you been involved with other university groups?*

I wanted to know about the respondents' past volunteer experiences both prior to University and those through the University other than Meal Exchange. Past volunteer experiences tend to encourage future volunteer work and community involvement. If the respondents are taking an active role in extra-curricular activities they will be likely to want to be increasingly involved in the school and broader community over time. The

past and current volunteer experiences, even those not relating directly to hunger, held by the respondents help to determine their draw to Meal Exchange. Because a major goal of Meal Exchange is involving students who have not been involved in the past, these questions are aimed at answering whether or not students with no volunteer experience do become involved in Meal Exchange.

All of those interviewed have volunteered with community groups in the past. Although all of those interviewed have also been involved in university-run groups, the respondents are not as involved in university-run groups as they are in community organizations. All of those interviewed have taken on leadership roles as well as roles as team members in the various groups they have been involved with. As well, six of eleven respondents have volunteered internationally and through these volunteer experiences have witnessed global poverty and hunger. In contrast, of the eleven respondents, only four had been previously involved in groups or organizations that directly relate to local hunger. These volunteer experiences include working in food banks, organizing food drives and being part of church groups that did work with those experiencing hunger. Other groups that respondents have been involved in include: Canada World Youth, student associations based on specific fields of study, recreation centres, distress lines, environmental groups, student council, sports teams, hospitals, residence life teams, youth groups, the Red Cross, model UN and peace organizations.

Question 7 - *What attracted you to Meal Exchange?*

The focus of this question was determining what the attraction to Meal Exchange is; whether it is the goals of the organization, the campaigns themselves or a desire to become more involved in the community.

The respondents were attracted to Meal Exchange for the following reasons:

- Flexible and non-bureaucratic group - 9 respondents
- Cause of local hunger - 9 respondents
- Meet people with similar interests - 8 respondents
- An opportunity for community involvement - 6 respondents
- Concrete results - 5 respondents
- Local rather than global focus - 4 respondents
- Previous exposure and understanding of hunger - 2 respondents

Those who stated that they were attracted to Meal Exchange due to its flexibility and non-bureaucratic nature said that unlike other groups they have been involved with, they felt that they had the ability to organize their own events according to the needs of their community. These volunteers feel that although Meal Exchange has annual events such as Skip a Meal and Trick or Eat, if they have their own event that they want to plan, they have the support of Meal Exchange to do so. For example, one of the coordinators from Trent heard about a youth shelter that was experiencing financial difficulty and he was able to organize a fundraiser through Meal Exchange on behalf of this shelter. As well, a former coordinator from Guelph stated that she was able to help her group target issues that affected their community specifically, such as rural poverty - issues that could not be tackled on a national level. Through this flexibility, students are able to explore issues of hunger that are affecting their communities specifically and because they are able to do so through their own initiatives, they feel more of a connection to the issue of hunger.

As well, because the meetings and events held by Meal Exchange chapters are informal and fun, more people become involved and stay involved in Meal Exchange. Although Meal Exchange is addressing a very serious issue, these chapters are able to make addressing the issue of hunger fun while still creating an understanding of the local problem, thus making the task of addressing hunger much less daunting. This outlook is necessary to keep students interested in the issue of hunger, by showing volunteers that every little bit helps to make a larger difference, people are more likely to remain involved in the issue. Respondents also stated that it is this flexibility that is creating concrete results - most Meal Exchange campaigns are very successful and this success encourages further involvement. Many respondents stated that groups they had been involved with had been too bureaucratic to actually accomplish anything productive.

Those who said they were drawn to Meal Exchange, because of the focus on local hunger, said that Meal Exchange is one of the few university groups that are addressing the issue of hunger in Canada. While other groups may hold food drives or look at global food insecurity, the focus of Meal Exchange is solely addressing hunger in Canada. While several respondents were interested in Meal Exchange because they had seen food insecurity internationally or in extreme situations such as homelessness in Canada, most of the respondents had very little previous exposure to hunger on a local level. Several students, especially those who have traveled, stated that they appreciate the fact that Meal Exchange looks at hidden-hunger that is prevalent in Canada as opposed to extreme hunger and famine that seems to be the focus of so many other university groups and courses. Meal Exchange has provided the opportunity to learn more about local food insecurity and gain an appreciation for the food they eat. As well, many respondents

stated that they were drawn to Meal Exchange because they saw it as an opportunity to meet people with similar interests. This shows that students do have an interest in the issue of local hunger and that Meal Exchange is giving the opportunity to expand their knowledge and dialogue on the issue.

Many people are drawn to Meal Exchange because they see participation in these campaigns as an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the community. Several students stated that they wanted to feel a stronger connection to the towns and cities in which they attend school and felt that Meal Exchange would provide this opportunity. Along with contributing to the community through food donations, several students stated that they were drawn to Meal Exchange because they saw involvement in this group as an opportunity to create dialogue with people experiencing food insecurity.

Throughout these responses, it was clear that students have become involved with Meal Exchange to expand their knowledge on the issue of hunger in Canada and generate donations for social service agencies, while at the same time having fun and meeting new people. As will be shown in the following responses, it is these aspects that have both attracted people to Meal Exchange and kept them involved in the organization and the issue of hunger.

Question 8 - *What do you hope to get out of Meal Exchange?*

This question was asked in order to understand what keeps students involved in Meal Exchange, again whether it is the cause, the issues surrounding hunger, becoming a part of the Meal Exchange team or gaining a better understanding of hunger locally and nationally.

Volunteers have remained involved with Meal Exchange for the following reasons:

- Connection to the community - 6
- Meeting people with similar interests - 5
- New understanding of hunger in their community - 5
- Leads to further activism and volunteer work - 4
- Fun during campaigns - 3
- Effectiveness - 3

Again, forming a connection with the citizens living in the towns and cities in which these students attend university has been a very strong incentive to remain involved with Meal Exchange. Many respondents stated that they feel students often have a bad reputation and their involvement with Meal Exchange works to challenge this by showing that students really do care about important issues. At the same time, by becoming more involved in the communities in which they attend school, volunteers gain a better understanding of the issues creating the hunger problem in their community as well as ways to address hunger in their community. Also through this increased community interaction, students are gaining a better understanding of the social service organizations that Meal Exchange works with and the role they play in the community.

The respondents also stated that a very important reason for remaining involved with Meal Exchange is the connections made between peers. One person stated that although most students do not have a lot of financial resources, they have energy and by working together can work to make a change. By bringing people together to do something positive such as collecting food for a food bank, important discussions and social networks can be formed - students can learn from each other while learning about hunger.

Students are remaining involved with Meal Exchange because they are learning more about hunger and they feel that Meal Exchange is effective in collecting donations.

Most students stated that they have learned more about hunger as a result of their involvement with Meal Exchange. Again, since most of the respondents had very little prior knowledge of hunger in Canada, they are using Meal Exchange to become aware of Canada's hunger problem. As well, because Meal Exchange campaigns are fun, students are successful in collecting donations, these campaigns are encouraging further involvement in Meal Exchange and further involvement in hunger alleviation.

Several students stated that as a result of their involvement with Meal Exchange, they are going to continue to be involved in activism, volunteer work and careers involving hunger. Because of their positive and engaging experiences with Meal Exchange, they want to continue to be involved in alleviating hunger.

Becoming involved with Meal Exchange has been a way for many of these respondents to challenge their opinions about those facing insecurity and gaining a better understanding of the extent of the problem. As will be seen in later results, this involvement has led to a better understanding of food insecurity in Canada, in communities and an incentive to remain involved.

Question 9 - *What are some of the lessons you have learned through your involvement with Meal Exchange?*

This question focuses on what the respondents have learned as a result of their involvement with Meal Exchange. This involves responses both regarding their specific understanding of local hunger issues as well as the lessons they have learned about the group itself.

Respondents stated that they learned the following through Meal Exchange campaigns:

Challenge misconceptions about food insecurity - 7
Extent of hunger - 6
Small actions can make large difference - 6
Volunteering is fun - 3
One step in finding solution - 3
Difficult to initiate a student group - 2
The role of social service agencies - 2
Homelessness - 2
Importance of exchanging skills - 1
Not enough about local hunger -1
New appreciation for average citizens - 1

Several respondents were surprised to learn that many Canadians are facing food insecurity. These respondents learned that even though Canada is a wealthy country, there is a lot of inequality among citizens; however, much of this inequality is hidden from public view. These respondents stated that through Meal Exchange they became more aware of the social impacts of hunger and as a result were able to challenge their misconceptions about people experiencing food insecurity. This was done through interactions with people experiencing food insecurity. Respondents from Guelph were able to do so through events such as a Delivery Day, whereas students from Trent did so through their involvement in other groups such as the Peterborough Coalition Against Poverty and a youth shelter, groups that these respondents became involved with because of interest sparked through Meal Exchange activities.

Respondents also stated that they appreciate that Meal Exchange started as a small idea by one person and has turned into something so large. Since Meal Exchange was started by one person but is now working to engage thousands of students, the organization itself shows volunteers that individuals can make a huge change in society. As well, because Meal Exchange uses fun activities to educate students about hunger,

several respondents now realize that volunteering can be fun and when it is fun, more people want to become involved.

Some respondents stated that although Meal Exchange is doing important work to raise awareness about hunger, Meal Exchange is just one step in bringing an end to hunger. By educating people about hunger, steps can be made to make more effective change. Similarly, one respondent noted that he was surprised by the amount of interest, among citizens, in learning more about hunger. As well, he was surprised by their generosity and eagerness to give during Trick or Eat. He stated that even though people may not have expected to be approached for a donation, they were very happy to contribute and recognized that hunger is an important issue.

Other respondents stated that they learned more about the local social service agencies that Meal Exchange supports. Through Meal Exchange campaigns volunteers spoke with the employees and volunteers of such organizations and in many cases were able to visit these agencies. Because of this exposure to these agencies, many volunteers have become further involved with these community organizations. Also through exposure to these agencies, many volunteers learned about other issues such as homelessness. As well, through campaigns such as Delivery Day, volunteers learned about the importance of exchanging skills with community members. Just as students have energy and knowledge, community members have knowledge and experience that needs to be shared in order to create lasting change.

Coordinators noted that they now realize that it is difficult to organize a university group. Respondents stated that especially with a group like Meal Exchange, there needs to be a huge amount of support among the school community and among the citizens of

the town or city in which the university is located. As well, respondents stated that it is very easy to judge other university groups for being ineffective, because there is so much additional work that needs to be done to make the group run smoothly, that regular volunteers do not see. As well, one respondent, a volunteer who participated in Trick or Eat, stated that she did not learn enough about local hunger issues. Although she had a very fun time and knew that the food she collected was going to a good cause, she did not feel that there was a strong enough focus on educating volunteers about local hunger.

The respondents explained that they have gained a better understanding of the social service agencies in their communities and most volunteers feel that they now have an increased sense of Canada's hunger problem as a result of being involved in Meal Exchange campaigns. Because, for the most part, the volunteers are meeting and exceeding their goals for participation in Meal Exchange, these volunteers will be more likely to remain involved in Meal Exchange and other hunger-related causes.

Question 10 - *Is hunger a problem in Canada?*

By asking respondents if hunger is a problem in Canada, I can understand whether or not they are aware of hunger in their communities. Also, through the explanation of the problem of hunger in Canada, respondents will explain whether or not the problem of hunger has become more evident through Meal Exchange activities.

Respondents feel that hunger exists in Canada for the following reasons:

- Hidden problem - 9
- Large and small communities - 4
- Everyone's problem - 3
- Systemic issue - 2
- Dependence on food banks - 2
- Difficult choices - 2

Social issue - 1

Growing problem among youth - 1

All respondents said that hunger is a problem in Canada. Most of the respondents said that most of hunger in Canada is hidden from public view. Many of these respondents said that because Canada is a very wealthy country there is a misconception that hunger does not exist here. For this reason, many people do not make an effort to address the issue or accuse those experiencing hunger of being lazy. Several people stated that because hunger in Canada is hidden, we are taught to blame those experiencing hunger rather than understand the causes and work to find a solution.

Because respondents recognize that Canadian hunger is often a hidden problem, they now realize that people throughout Canada, both in cities and in towns, are experiencing food insecurity. This realization is helping to make hunger more of a personal issue because the respondents I spoke with now realize that hunger is affecting people they know and people they grew up with.

Although many of the respondents simply stated that, yes hunger is a problem in Canada, several elaborated on why they think hunger is a problem. In such cases, several people put the blame on the decline of governmental programs and the tendency of the government to “focus on profit rather than food, sustainability and equality.” At the same time, several respondents stated that Canadian hunger is a social issue intertwined with other issues and when people do nothing to stop the problem it only gets worse. In other words, as apathy increases, the number of people experiencing hunger will continue to grow. Others stated that when anyone in the community is suffering from hunger than it becomes everyone’s problem - when one person is hungry, the community must come together to ensure that hunger does not exist. These students focused on a community-

based approach to finding a solution to hunger and although they may feel that people are hungry due to governmental cut-backs or unemployment, community members must take care of one another and find sustainable solutions to hunger.

Several respondents noted that as a result of food insecurity among Canadians, food banks are being increasingly resorted to as a way of finding food and many Canadians are being forced to choose between food and shelter. These choices are leading to personal physical and psychological insecurity. As well, one respondent stated that hunger is hitting people at an increasingly young age. This issue of hunger among youth again makes the issue of hunger more of a personal issue because this respondent realizes that people she knows may be experiencing hunger.

All of the respondents recognize that hunger is an issue being faced by thousands of Canadians. Although issues of global hunger are often made more prevalent than the hunger experienced by Canadians, these respondents recognized that Canadians have unique circumstances that contribute to the prevalence of hunger. As well, most of the respondents acknowledge that much of the hunger in Canada goes unseen and is affecting people from all backgrounds. With this knowledge, the issue of hunger becomes much more personal and for this reason, people are more likely to take an active role in addressing the issue.

Question 11

Before being involved with Meal Exchange, were there any experiences that would shape your perceptions about hunger?

I asked this question to determine whether or not these volunteers were aware of hunger issues in Canada prior to being involved in Meal Exchange. This could have

included personal experiences with hunger, past volunteer or advocacy work on hunger issues or times in which they had seen or heard about hunger. The responses given to these answers help to determine the reasons for wanting to be involved in a group looking at hunger issues as well as the changes in perceptions of hunger since being involved with Meal Exchange.

The respondents stated that they had heard of hunger through the following experiences and of the following examples of hunger:

- Past volunteer work - 4
- Discussions with family and friends - 3
- International exposure - 4
- Homelessness - 4
- Aware of hidden hunger - 2
- Personal experience with hunger (as a basic need) - 1

None of the respondents had previous personal experience with hunger as a social issue; however, one respondent stated that he felt a connection to people experiencing food insecurity because he had experienced physical hunger in the past. This respondent clarified that although he had never been hungry due to lack of resources or the inaccessibility of food, he could empathize with anyone experiencing hunger for such reasons. He stated that knowing how he feels when he is hungry helps him to understand the severity of hunger as a constant sense of insecurity resulting from social and economic constraints. This response shows that hunger truly is an issue that can connect everyone regardless of socioeconomic background or past political or community involvement.

Several of the respondents had experience volunteering for emergency food organizations prior to their involvement with Meal Exchange. Of these respondents, two had organized food drives; one had been a part of church groups dealing with hunger and

one volunteered in a food bank throughout high school. As a result of this volunteer work, these respondents gained an interest in food security issues and this is why they became involved with Meal Exchange. However, even though they gained some understanding of hunger issues in their communities through volunteering for emergency food agencies, none of these respondents felt that they had gained a strong grasp of the extent of the hunger problem in Canada through these activities.

Other respondents had family members and friends who were active in addressing hunger issues. These friends and family members opening discussed their experiences with the respondents and through these discussions the respondents heard surprising statistics and stories about people living in poverty in their own communities. As a result of these discussions, the respondents both gained a better understanding of hunger and became interested in doing more to address hunger.

Many respondents stated that they had a better understanding of international hunger issues than local ones prior to their involvement with Meal Exchange. Many respondents stated that global food insecurity is visible in the media, in many university courses and various university groups. Several students are studying international development and others have been exposed to global poverty through trips to India, the Philippines and Mexico. These respondents stated that seeing poverty and hunger globally encouraged them to become more aware of local hunger.

Extreme examples of Canadian poverty such as homelessness have been evident to most respondents in the past. Four respondents stated that other than seeing homeless people and panhandlers in the past, they had very little knowledge of the extent of less obvious forms of poverty such as rural poverty and hunger among Canadians. Others

noted that they had heard of the problem of hidden hunger and they realized that food banks are used by Canadians, however, these respondents did not know the extent of hunger among Canadians, the number of citizens of small towns affected by hunger or the growing number of people having to use food banks.

Through this question, I have determined that none of the respondents had a strong understanding of hunger in Canada prior to being involved in Meal Exchange. Although many of the respondents were aware of extreme instances of poverty and hunger, such as the hunger seen globally and in large Canadian cities, all of the respondents openly stated that they were not aware of the extent of the hunger problem within their own communities. Although some of the respondents had discussed Canadian hunger with friends and relatives, they did not have a strong understanding of hunger until they were able to participate in alleviating hunger on their own.

Question 12 - *How do you define hunger? What are the various aspects of hunger?*

The way a person defines hunger works to explain how they feel hunger needs to be addressed. If someone feels that hunger is basic need that needs to be fulfilled for survival, they will be more likely to see emergency food aid as a way of addressing the problem. However, if a person looks at hunger as a multi-dimensional issue that both causes and results from social, psychological and emotional issues they will be more likely to see the need for community-based solutions to hunger. As well, the latter definition brings the issue of hunger to a more personal level and this will likely increase an individual's connection to the issue.

The respondents define hunger as the following:

Creates social and personal insecurity - 9
Social divisions and lack of support - 7
Lack of resources - 6
Lack of quality food - 6
Basic need - 5
Panic and anxiety - 4
Emotional and psychological insecurity - 4
Inability to provide food through their own means - 2
Difficult choices - 1
Lack of time - 1
Lack of choice - 1
Depression and low self-esteem - 1
Humiliation - 1
The inability to focus on anything but being hungry -1

None of the respondents stated that hunger was simply a lack of food. While all respondents stated that hunger results from social and economic constraints, nine of eleven respondents claimed that hunger creates social and personal insecurity. In other words, often those experiencing hunger face social marginalization and as a result experience panic and anxiety, emotional and physical insecurity as well as depression and low self-esteem. Some respondents stated that it is these emotional impacts of marginalization that enhance the cyclical effects of hunger - people remain in this cycle, which while making the personal impacts of hunger stronger, also makes escaping hunger much more difficult.

As well, respondents noted that hunger results from such social divisions and the lack of sustainable social and community support for people experiencing hunger. Several respondents noted that various groups of people within society, such as single mothers and students paying increasing tuition fees, are experiencing higher rates of hunger and yet have less access to support networks. So, along with a lack of social safety nets, respondents pointed to the unequal distribution of these few resources as perpetuating the problem of hunger.

Other respondents stated that hunger is directly related to poverty and the lack of money to purchase food. This inability to purchase food creates a lack of quality and nutritious food. Because unhealthy food such as junk food is inexpensive, many Canadians have to eat this food even though it has very little nutritional content. As a result, although people may not feel hungry, they may be malnourished and the respondents stated that this is a definite sign of hunger. Along with a lack of nutritional food, respondents stated that not having the resources to purchase food leads to a loss of choice in the food being consumed, including culturally appropriate food; humiliation at not being able to attain food through their own means; a loss of time and the inability to focus on anything other than a lack of food; and being forced to choose between necessities such as food, electricity or shelter. These respondents stated that hunger is a direct result of a lack of resources and this lack of resources has a large impact on so many necessities.

Several respondents stated that food is a basic human right and that every person needs it for survival. One respondent stated that because food is something that every human needs, being hungry is not as easily judged by the general public as is being on social assistance or being homeless. However, because food is a basic need, not being able to purchase food increases the instance of low self-esteem and depression.

As was determined in the question 11, the respondents had very little understanding of hunger prior to their involvement with Meal Exchange. However, as this question has proven, the respondents now have a strong understanding of the various causes and impacts of hunger in Canada. As a result, they will use this newfound knowledge to determine how they will work to address hunger in the future.

Question 13 - *What is the role of food banks in solving hunger in Canada?*

This question is also being used to determine whether or not respondents see hunger as an issue of basic need or if hunger is a broader community issue. Since food banks were established as a temporary solution to hunger but are continuing to grow, I wanted to know if respondents see their donations to food banks as truly addressing hunger.

According to the respondents, food banks do the following:

- Do not provide a sustainable solution - 9
- Feed people- 2
- Can be used for community building - 1
- Can be used to ignore the issue of hunger - 1

All respondents stated that food banks feed people when they face an emergency need for food. Nine of eleven respondents stated that food banks are not a solution to food insecurity as they currently exist. In these instances, these respondents stated that although food banks were started as a temporary solution to hunger, they are increasing in use and are running out of food as a result. One respondent stated that only those who are not hungry see food banks as a solution. Also in these responses, students stated that food banks provide emergency food relief and may relieve stress in the short-term, however, act as a band-aid solution and do not truly solve the problem of hunger. These respondents stated that to truly solve hunger, food banks, communities and politicians will have to address the causes of hunger, determine the systemic problems that are working to perpetuate the problem of hunger, create awareness of these issues, find better community-based solutions to end hunger, and work to increase community-building capacity of food banks.

Even though many respondents believe that these changes are necessary, all respondents stated that food banks are currently necessary to at least feed people in the short-term, but one respondent said that the danger of food banks and food drives is that people who do not experience hunger themselves may feel that by donating to a food bank the hunger problem will be solved and therefore fail to look at the real issues surrounding hunger - the causes and the cyclical nature of the problem. Two respondents said that food banks are good because they feed people but did not elaborate on whether or not they felt food banks are working to solve hunger. As well, one respondent said that depending on the food bank, very positive work can be done including important community-building projects, the reintegration of traditionally marginalized people into society, and preventing humiliating experiences while accessing emergency food.

The responses to this question show that these respondents have gained a better understanding of the role of food banks than they had prior to their involvement with Meal Exchange. While in the past these students were aware of food banks, they now have a better understanding of the increasing use of food banks and many respondents stated that although food banks are currently essential, new solutions need to be found.

Question 14 - *How do you see yourself contributing to ending hunger in Canada?*

This question focuses on determining whether or not students are taking the knowledge they gain through Meal Exchange to do more to address hunger - whether that is further volunteer work, activism, advocacy, increasing knowledge of the issue or talking about the issue with those around them.

The respondents stated that they do the following to contribute to ending hunger:

Being aware of hunger in Canada - 8
Volunteering when possible - 4
Respect food and becoming less wasteful - 3
Political actions - 2
Empowering volunteers and community members - 1

When asked what the respondents themselves can do to end hunger on an individual basis, all respondents said they do not do enough. However, all respondents said that making small steps can make a large difference. Among the personal actions people are taking to address hunger, eight of the respondents stated that being aware of the issue of hunger - both the causes and the prevalence of hunger in their communities, allows them to educate others about the issue. By discussing hunger with those around them, these respondents suggested that a better understanding of hunger can be created among the population. As well, by educating others about hunger, myths and stereotypes can be dispelled, thus encouraging more people to become involved in bringing an end to hunger,

Along with continuing to learn about hunger, several respondents stated that making small, personal actions such as volunteering when they have time can create a “snowball effect” that over time will work to create a large change in Canada's hunger problem. One respondent stated that she, as a Meal Exchange coordinator, is working to empower volunteers and community members through the campaigns she and fellow volunteers organize. As a result of empowerment, volunteers feel that they can be successful in continuing to work toward hunger alleviation and those experiencing hunger will be encouraged to find and implement their own solutions to end hunger.

Other respondents stated that they are beginning to reevaluate their relationship to food and their privilege in society by respecting food, not being wasteful and appreciating

what they have. This change in mindset and priorities is needed to make changes in the way that resources in Canada are being distributed. As well, two respondents stated that their political actions are working to create change. One of these respondents stated that he will use his knowledge of social issues in Canada to best assess which political leaders he will support, in the hope that resources will be better distributed. As well, other respondents are turning to activism such as lobbying the government to bring attention to issues of hunger and poverty and also encourage making social assistance and other resources more accessible.

Surprisingly, most of the respondents felt that they are not doing enough to address local hunger. However, upon thinking about the impact they can have on those around them, the respondents stated that they can do a lot simply by talking about the issue of hunger and educating those around them. Similarly, while such efforts may seem small, many respondents stated that it is these small actions that will create an aggregate effect on hunger, as has been the common reaction regarding Meal Exchange and its campaigns.

Question 15 - *Are you involved with any community groups as a result of Meal Exchange? Which ones?*

This is both to determine whether or not volunteers take their knowledge of hunger to become more involved on the issue through further volunteerism, activism and advocacy and if connections are created with other organizations as a result of Meal Exchange activities.

Meal Exchange volunteers have become involved in the following initiatives:

Youth shelters - 3
A free store - 3

Continued involvement with Meal Exchange- 3
Community development work - 1
Writing a thesis relating to hunger - 1
Further experiential learning - 1
Non-hunger related volunteerism - 1

All of the respondents are either currently involved, planning to be involved in other groups or have gained an awareness of community agencies because of Meal Exchange. As well, all of the respondents have become more aware of specific community agencies, how they work and who they work with through Meal Exchange events. Specifically because of involvement in Meal exchange activities, three of the respondents have become involved with youth shelters. These respondents had heard about these agencies during Meal Exchange campaigns and decided to do additional volunteer work with these agencies.

In association with Meal Exchange, three respondents from Trent are working to create a free store with other Trent students and citizens of Peterborough. This store will be a place where all citizens of Peterborough can come to pick up free clothing and furniture and will be a space to discuss living well on a low income. This initiative is working to bring Trent students together with Peterborough citizens to create a space where new interactions can take place and where citizens can obtain goods at no cost in the hope that they will be able to use their incomes on other items.

Three respondents stated that they hope to continue their involvement with Meal Exchange, even after graduating. Through Meal Exchange, they hope to continue learning about hunger; meeting new people with similar interests; meeting people experiencing hunger, and working to develop new Meal Exchange programs.

One respondent stated that she will always want to be involved in community building no matter which community she lives in. She stated that her experiences with Meal Exchange have helped her to realize the importance of community development work, so whether she takes this on as a career or as continuing volunteer work, she believes community building is essential in establishing a cohesive society. Similarly, one respondent stated that she wants to remain involved in service learning and experiential learning. She has found that by being able to do something hands-on rather than simply reading about hunger, she has learned gained a better understanding of Canadian hunger, as a result, she hopes to learn more through similar experiences.

One student, who is entering her fourth year, will be writing her thesis on the way relationships are changing between citizens and the food they eat as a result of globalization. Throughout her essay, she will be discussing food distancing and the inability of communities to remain self-sufficient as well as the impact this is having on local food security and the increasing numbers of people experiencing hunger.

Some of the examples of volunteer work that the respondents are planning to take on as a result of their involvement in Meal Exchange include: the Rotary Club, United Way, Development and Peace, an AIDS awareness and prevention group and other community hunger agencies. One respondent stated that through his involvement with Meal Exchange, he became involved in several groups because of the shared volunteer base that Meal Exchange has. Some of the groups this volunteer has become involved with include: the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, an international issues education group, an aboriginal rights group and a youth shelter. This volunteer stated that without his involvement in Meal Exchange, he would not have heard about these groups.

While prior to becoming involved with Meal Exchange only four respondents had been involved in community hunger organizations, all of the respondents have stated that they are at least thinking of becoming more actively involved in the issue of hunger. All of the respondents have stated that they have gained a better understanding of the role of the community organizations they hear about and many respondents are becoming actively involved in these organizations, or initiating their own.

Question 16 - *What has inspired you to become actively involved in the community?*

This question was asked to understand why respondents feel they should be involved in the community and what role they want to play in shaping their community.

Those interviewed have become involved in their communities for the following reasons:

- Community work needs to be done - 4
- Rewarding experience for the community and participant - 4
- Fun - 3
- Build community - 3
- Become active in the community - 3
- Dispel stereotypes - 3
- Address hunger - 3
- Had met people experiencing poverty and hunger - 3
- The success of Meal Exchange - 2
- Meet people with similar interests - 2
- Exchange skills - 2
- Past volunteerism - 1
- Gain a better appreciation for what they have - 1

Respondents stated that community work is necessary for the growth and sustainability of society; without attempting to improve the community, society would fall apart. They also stated that too many people believe that nothing can be done to improve society and problems such as hunger and for this reason, such problems are growing. One of these respondents stated that if a large enough group of people makes

an effort to become involved and work to make effective change then change can happen and be maintained.

Similarly, other respondents feel that community work can be very rewarding both for participants and for those experiencing hardship. When the community work being completed is seen as social justice as opposed to charity, those experiencing hunger and poverty can become just as empowered as those initiating community work - through community work, the entire community can become stronger. Along with being a rewarding experience, respondents stated that they enjoy being involved in the community because they have been involved in fun and interesting community projects.

As well, respondents stated the importance of working to build community and becoming active in the community they live in. In these instances, respondents stated that building community involves interaction with all members of the community to ensure that everyone's needs are being met. By participating in community development, the respondents feel that they can become active members of the community and become better engaged in community issues. At the same time, by interacting and working with those experiencing food insecurity and economic instability, skills can be shared and stereotypes can be dispelled. By dispelling stereotypes, relationships can be built on respect and effective change can be made.

Many people became involved in volunteerism because of the cause of hunger. These respondents feel that no person should be hungry and want to work to bring an end to hunger. At the same time, respondents have been drawn to further community work because of the success of Meal Exchange campaigns. Because the campaigns they have

been involved in have been fun, engaging and successful, they want to continue to do more to address hunger.

Along with meeting and forming relationships with community members, many people have made an effort to volunteer as a way of meeting people with similar interests. As a result of these connections, respondents feel that people working together can make a difference. These forms of interaction between peers allows for a different kind of dialogue and exchange of ideas.

Several people have remained involved in community work because they have been involved in volunteerism throughout their lives. For these respondents, volunteerism has become a regular part of their lives and it makes sense to continue to be involved. As well, respondents see volunteerism as a new way to gain an appreciation and respect for what they have. Volunteerism is a way to learn about other people and the struggles they face, through this enhanced understanding, volunteers can gain appreciation material possessions as well as their own talents and abilities, while at the same time learning to challenge their priorities and gain a new perspective on what they have.

Many of the respondents feel a sense of duty in participating in volunteer work. Through community involvement, these respondents feel that they can help to address the needs of the community, while at the same time form new relationships with various members of the community. It is this involvement that working to allow volunteers to gain a better understanding of the issues faced by members of the community, thus creating awareness. As well, it is this community involvement that both positively impacts the community and those participating in the volunteer work.

Question 17 - *Which Meal Exchange activities have inspired you to become more involved?*

This question works to determine which activities create a desire to further address hunger in Canada. As well this question works to determine which activities are most effective in exposing hunger in Canada and what the strengths of these campaigns are.

Volunteers were inspired by the following campaigns:

- Trick or Eat - 9
- Skip a Meal - 5
- Delivery Day - 2
- The Meal Exchange conference - 2
- Respondents' own initiatives - 2

Nine of eleven respondents, two of who had only participated in Trick or Eat, stated that Trick or Eat was an event that greatly inspired further involvement in ending hunger in Canada. The respondents found this event inspiring because it was a fun event, there was instant gratification because a lot of food was collected and great people were involved, the event encouraged further involvement in Meal Exchange events and encouraged further learning about local hunger.

Trent volunteers said that if Skip a Meal was to happen at Trent, this would be very inspirational. As well, Guelph volunteers said that Skip a Meal is inspirational because Meal Exchange volunteers start with nothing and with the help of hundreds of people are able to raise thousands of dollars and give the clients at food banks the food that they need and want most. This was very important to the respondents because unlike most food drives where clients of food banks have very little say over the food they receive, Skip a Meal provides an opportunity to give those who use food banks the food they want and need most.

Volunteers from Guelph also stated that Delivery Day is very important because it provides students with the opportunity to go into the community and meet various community members. These respondents stated that Delivery Day works to renew hope among the community and among students. These respondents stated that Delivery Day is very unique because it provides students with an opportunity to see exactly where the food they collect is going and at the same time they are able to meet many new people.

Two coordinators stated that the Meal Exchange conference in the summer of 2004 was very important. These coordinators enjoyed the conference because it also gave them the opportunity to meet people living on a low income as well as discuss hunger issues that exist in communities throughout Canada. This conference gave coordinators an opportunity to meet one another and discuss issues of hunger and poverty including hearing speakers from food banks, visiting community gardens and talking to people who live on the streets. These respondents stated that this conference gave coordinators an opportunity to step outside of their everyday lives to gain a new perspective on very serious issues.

One respondent, a former coordinator at Guelph, said that she was very inspired because she was able to lead her group in supporting and learning about rural emergency food agencies. She stated that this was very important because these agencies and rural hunger are often not the focus of regular food drives. Because rural hunger is a form of hunger that often goes unnoticed, she was able to raise awareness of rural hunger among Guelph's volunteers. Similarly, a coordinator at Trent was inspired when he was able to learn about a youth shelter and organize a fundraiser on their behalf. As a result of this

fundraiser, he was able to fundraise for the shelter and raise awareness of both the shelter and homelessness among youth.

Each of the respondents was inspired by different Meal Exchange events for different reasons. Among all of these responses, volunteers were inspired by the fun they had while participating in these events. However, even though they were able to have a good time, they were also able to learn about hunger and assist social service agencies in collecting donations.

Question 18 - *How do you compare Meal Exchange to other organizations you have been involved with?*

This question hopes to answer why students stay involved in Meal Exchange and why they were attracted to the group in the first place. As well this question addresses what makes Meal Exchange unique from other groups and what makes it inclusive.

Respondents stated that Meal Exchange is different for the following reasons:

- Non-bureaucratic - 4
- Fun - 4
- Effective - 4
- A strong energy among volunteers - 4
- Good goals - 4
- Well organized and successful - 3
- Engaging - 3
- Unique campaigns - 2
- Visible on campus - 2
- Focus on local issues - 2
- Run by volunteers - 2
- Inspiring - 1
- Constantly changing and growing - 1
- Involves “real students” not activists -1
- Relies on the generosity of the community - 1
- Builds community - 1
- Shows that individuals can make a difference -1

Volunteers find Meal Exchange different than other groups that they have been involved with because it is not bureaucratic and for this reason, much more fun than other groups. Several respondents stated that they had been involved with other groups that had been so bureaucratic and formal that it felt like a chore to be involved. However, Meal Exchange is informal and this makes the group fun to be involved with. Because Meal Exchange is fun, people stay involved and as a result, Meal Exchange campaigns are very successful at education people about hunger and collecting donations for social service agencies. Because people stay involved and remain motivated, respondents stated that Meal Exchange has a unique energy that other groups do not have.

Unlike many other groups, Meal Exchange does focus on local hunger. Respondents stated that because of this focus, they truly are gaining a better understanding of hunger in Canada and their communities specifically. Respondents stated that this is a very good goal and it is keeping them involved in the organization. As well, because Meal Exchange uses unique campaigns to educate people about local hunger, more people want to become involved and as a result, learn about hunger.

Respondents stated that Meal Exchange is very visible on campus and because of this visibility more people become involved with the group. As well, respondents stated that Meal Exchange is very inspiring because so many people come together to do something good for the community and become engaged in the issue of hunger. Since Meal Exchange events are usually very successful, people are inspired to remain involved in the groups.

Meal Exchange is run by volunteers and as one respondent stated, “real volunteers” and not activists. These respondents stated that when groups target only

activists, other people who want to learn more about an issue feel excluded from becoming involved. Meal Exchange provides all students with an opportunity to participate in fun campaigns and decide how they want to use their newfound knowledge to further address hunger. Also, because Meal Exchange encourages individuals from all backgrounds and with all levels of knowledge about hunger, Meal Exchange events show that individuals can make an important difference within their community.

Respondents said that Meal Exchange is also different because as a group it is constantly changing and growing. As new volunteers become involved and new campaigns are encouraged more is done by Meal Exchange to address hunger. However, even as Meal Exchange grows, their campaigns still depend on the generosity and support of students and citizens. Without this support, Meal Exchange campaigns would have to change drastically. As well, Meal Exchange is unique, because unlike most university groups, Meal Exchange is known outside of the university, among citizens and community agencies. Respondents stated that it is this connection to the wider community that is working to build community through Meal Exchange.

Question 19 - *What would make Meal Exchange more effective?*

By asking the volunteers for concrete ways in which Meal Exchange can be improved as both an organization and in addressing hunger, the organization can build on these suggestions. This question looks at the problems faced by Meal Exchange chapters and campaigns, what is needed to make these activities more successful and what can be done to increase the educational value of Meal Exchange campaigns. As well, this works

to determine how the Meal Exchange organization can work to better harness and direct the energy of youth in ending hunger in Canada.

The volunteers from Trent have suggested: more frequent meetings to build a bigger volunteer base and to recruit more organizers as well as creating a community calendar or Meal Exchange calendar to bring in more volunteers. At Guelph, respondents suggested that there needs to be a smooth transfer between coordinators from year to year, facts about local hunger issues need to be stated more clearly - both statistics about local hunger and reasons for local hunger, new activities need to be encouraged to bring in more volunteers and that there needs to be more advertising for Trick or Eat within the community prior to the event to ensure a positive response from the community.

On a national level, several respondents said that campaigns need to both collect food and work more to educate people about reasons and statistics for hunger in each community, some campaigns should be created to encourage political involvement, national media attention would be very beneficial and a stronger network between campuses should be created to learn from each campus's strengths and weaknesses and learn about hunger in communities nationally. The stronger network between campuses will work to educate about national hunger issues (causes, solutions and community organizations) as well allow for an easier exchange of ideas for helping solve problems on individual campuses, thus ensuring a stronger and more effective organization.

Recommendations

Coordinators and the volunteers who have taken part in Delivery Day have had very rewarding experiences and based on the responses from those interviewed, Delivery

Day and other direct interaction with those experiencing poverty and hunger makes the issue much more real. As a recommendation, each Meal Exchange chapter, even those not participating in Skip a Meal, should be encouraged to participate in direct dialogue with people experiencing situations of hunger and poverty. Whether or not the topics of hunger and poverty are discussed, the connections and relationships formed through such activities will encourage more concrete involvement in alleviating hunger.

Also, many respondents stated that they appreciate the flexibility of Meal Exchange and this is a huge draw to the organization. The organization should continue to support individual fundraisers and campaigns both to address local issues that vary from community to community and to encourage the involvement of a larger volunteer base.

Two of the respondents, both of these students who had participated in one Meal Exchange event each - Trick or Eat and Skip a Meal respectively suggested that there needs to be more education about local issues surrounding hunger in these campaigns. Since the majority of Meal Exchange volunteers participate in these events, it is essential that these campaigns do more to educate volunteers about local hunger. In order to ensure a more in-depth focus on local hunger issues during Trick or Eat, there should be some form of debriefing for the volunteers following the event. This will ensure that students gain a better understanding of hunger in their community. The Skip a Meal campaign should also involve an awareness campaign so that anyone not participating in Delivery Day will still have some information about local hunger issues.

Conclusion

Based on these interviews, the majority of respondents had very little understanding of or experience with hunger in Canada prior to their involvement with Meal Exchange. Four of the eleven respondents had volunteered previously in food aid organizations, but nevertheless felt that they had a very basic understanding of food issues in Canada. However, when asked about their current understanding of hunger in Canada and the definition of hunger, all of the respondents were very quick to say that hunger exists in Canada even though it may be a hidden problem. These respondents elaborated on why they feel hunger is a problem in Canada and what they have learned through Meal Exchange campaigns.

These interviews have shown that Meal Exchange campaigns, even Trick or Eat and Skip a Meal, are working to engage students in Canada's hunger problem and encourage further involvement in the issue. Even though several of the respondents have stated that the educational value of these campaigns should be increased, they have gained a stronger understanding of hunger through their involvement in these campaigns.

As the respondents stated, the majority of those interviewed are going to continue working to address hunger and to participate in other forms of community work due to the experiences they have had with Meal Exchange. As well as being involved with other community projects, nine respondents stated that they will remain involved with Meal Exchange in the future.

It seems that although Meal Exchange coordinators do gain stronger connections to the social service agencies, including the clients of these agencies, than do the regular volunteers, for the most part the volunteers are just as aware of the issues surrounding

hunger and also motivated to stay educated on the topic of hunger. This is especially evident at Guelph where the programs are more established and volunteers take part in activities such as Delivery Day where they see the agencies they collect food for and interact with people using these agencies. However, on the question of whether or not the respondents are currently involved in other community groups as a result of Meal Exchange, the coordinators provided more concrete examples of further work that they are currently involved in, whereas volunteers stated that they are aware of more organizations due to Meal Exchange and hoped to volunteer more in the future.

Although this research has involved a very small sample of Meal Exchange volunteers, based on their responses, it seems that Meal Exchange is meeting their mandate of educating students about hunger and this awareness is working to encourage a change in perspective and further involvement on the subject.

Future Research

This is the first part of my research on behalf of Meal Exchange. This is the qualitative pilot research phase; the second step will take place as a part of a fourth year course entitled “Assessment of development projects.”

Based on the research that I have done so far, one interesting connection between all respondents is the desire to become a part of the communities, towns and cities in which their universities are located. Each respondent stated at some point throughout their interviews that they wanted to become involved in Meal Exchange as a way of becoming part of the community in which they attend school. Four respondents stated that students live in "bubbles" and easily become detached from the communities in

which their universities are located. Two respondents stated that being involved in Meal Exchange works not only to challenge the stereotypes held about those living in poverty and experiencing hunger, but also to challenge the stereotypes held about students. By challenging the stereotypes held by both those living in poverty and students, dialogue can be formed and effective social change can be made.

As a result of this focus on community, I would like to better determine what students mean by “community” and how they see their involvement with Meal Exchange as assisting them in becoming a part of the community. As well, I would like to focus on larger number of Meal Exchange volunteers and their experiences with the organization. At the same time, I would like to talk to some of the social service agencies Meal Exchange works with to determine whether or not Meal Exchange campaigns are of assistance, what more Meal Exchange can do address hunger in individual communities, and how they see that Canada's hunger problem can be solved. I would like to compare these ideas with those of the Meal Exchange volunteers that I have interviewed in this phase.

One goal of this phase of the research was to determine whether or not there is a difference in the engagement of students participating at a new chapter versus those participating in an established chapter. However, because of the limited number of subjects involved in this stage of research, I was unable to determine any conclusive distinctions. Therefore I hope to address this in the next phase of research.

As well, throughout this stage of interviews, all of the respondents had volunteered in the past. Since a goal of Meal Exchange is to involve students who have

not volunteered in the past, in the next stage of research I hope to determine whether or not students with no prior community involvement are becoming involved.

Appendix 1

1	2	3	4	5
Student	Trent	Coordinator	2004 & 5	SAID Free Market CWY
Part time student working	McGill	volunteer	2003	distress line, youth disease group, rec centre, student council, environmental group
Student - graduating	Dal	coordinator	2004 & 05	church groups- hunger related, ski patrol, engineering group - teaching about engineering
Masters student	Guelph	coordinator	1999 & 2000	food drives in high school, high school groups, hospital work
Student	Guelph	volunteer	2003-05	project serve, high school committees, trip to Mexico
Student	Guelph	volunteer	2003-5	Hospital, youth group, Cuernavaca
Student	Trent	volunteer	2004-05	CISV peace education, experience/national board - represent youth
student	Guelph	volunteer	2003-05	east hall, local music festival and theatre group
student - graduating	Guelph	coordinator	2000-05	red cross, leadership conferences, youth group, music
student	Trent	coordinator	2004-05	coaching, skating, running, student council, SAS, tri club
student	Trent	volunteer	2004-05	youth organization in Toronto
6		7		
SAID Free Market French play		IDST wanted something locally, volunteer work, hearing local stats, flexible org. - his own fundraiser, students live in bubble, become citizen, not just student		
trick or eat and rec centre		sounded like fun, combine Halloween with a good cause		
same as above		a friend, there is a need globally, also here. student based students have a bad rep. can work to create positive change in the community		
mostly MX but smaller things as well		good idea, so much waste with meal cards, so many people need food and we take food for granted, supports more than food bank, other support, friends		
rez life and sports		advertised well, easy to donate		
interhall council and mx		like the programs, fun, trick or eat, good cause, friends, SAM is easy, cool programs		
SAID		goals, people, idst student working locally is important, concrete results, don't see this often		
east hall interhall council		given the position, automatic connection, energy at meetings, not formal, know other volunteers, delivery day made a real difference		
student volunteer connections, model un		India, saw hunger, saw posters, target hunger locally rather than globally		
SAS, tri club, skating, cross country, women's studies		friends, interest in hunger & low income issues, fun group, more interesting than inactive groups, actually get to do things		
rowing club, fashion show, ywca		go trick or treating, fun and volunteering, hang out with friends, help people		

8	9	10
belonging to community, making effective change even if just for one night	volunteering can be fun, easy to critique an organization but hard to get one started, mx is one piece of the puzzle, one step in finding the solution, met ppl living on a low income through interest sparked by mx - pcap, many misconceptions realized	yes, hidden, not associated with Canada, communities not feeding themselves due to transnational food system
meet people, doing something good, dress up, go out for Halloween, have fun	not much about hunger in MO. Learned where the food went, which neighbourhood, some volunteering options, learned about a specific community food agency	yes for sure, if hunger exists it's a problem. It is present in Canada
educational, meet people with similar interests, a stepping stone to a future goal of following a similar career	conference hit home, slow down and talk to people, see what's going on see that people do need help, open your eyes	yes, every community
something to continue work from high school, group of people with similar interests, interesting	a lot of people getting help in different ways, one small idea has grown so big, matters to others - small group makes a large difference	yes a very big problem, very unfortunate
no expectations, easy to do, no inconvenience, giving money is good	students take for granted that hunger is a real issue, there is a real need	definitely, hidden problem
better understanding of hunger in Guelph and Canada, how other schools do it	teamwork, fun crew, work together, people who are hungry are not those you would expect, their perspective	yes, definitely, wealthy country, perception of no problem - \$40,000 of food is just enough to help the food banks remain open, not always visible
better awareness about ptbo, easy to get into the university student bubble	a few people can do a lot a few very committed people can do a lot, need support base to get things going	yes, growing problem with changes in politics, dangerous because it is hidden, we aren't taught, it's their problem, fault
hope to continue, do more, inspire	easy to raise funds for a cause with a large group, demographic, realizing problems in the community, average housing with hunger, hidden hunger, being involved is easy	definitely, most shelters say if SAM didn't happen they wouldn't be able to stay open
not what I got, saw a way of getting involved with Guelph, connect to community, get involved find solutions	power of young people, believe in what we can do, don't have resources but energy, help however they can, less time & money, educated about other communities across Canada, compassion, empathy, lots of skills to offer, learned to be an engaged citizen	yes, social issue intertwined with other issues, social justice builds community, ppl without food are ignored, ppl don't want to help, making it worse, hitting younger people, give up food or shelter
experience with community groups and members of community, sense of pride, tangible results	not everyone will show up, more about hunger in ptbo, looking at issues of homelessness	yes, system endorses profit over food and equality and sustainability
saw friends, help, have fun	good way to get food, people were very generous, changed perception of people, not just selfish	it's a problem everywhere, citizens need to help each other, Canadian problem - everyone's problem

11	12
growing up dad worked with St Vincent De Paul - realized even in wealthy areas ppl don't have food	feeling of panic - anytime without food access, no safety net
brother - food not bombs, OCAP talked about experiences with the family, especially in TO, in Lanark county it is a secret problem, working poor, people have homes and jobs but no food - number of food bank users surprising	not getting what you need, not eating at all or being malnourished, quality or quantity, poverty, can't deny - it's a right - no one can say any deserves hunger, food is a right, not as many value judgments as with poverty and welfare
friends judged people on the street, but I realized that that was wrong and we shouldn't judge	someone can't provide for themselves on a daily basis through their own means. Lack of nutrition, choose between hydro and groceries, social impacts
nothing very strong, from a good area of town, so nothing very obvious - hidden poverty	larger than needing food, time, hunger relates to other issues, basic need, influences other needs
Mexico- Cuernavaca, huge need at home, food drives at home, knowing volunteers	lack of proper nourishment, socioeconomic, class, lack of resources
Cuernavaca, la estación - squatter settlement	not having enough food to stay healthy, being hungry - 1 meal a day, malnourished, many other factors, not enough money
only passingly in Canada, more directly in the Philippines and other countries, involved in family based activities - family Christmas baskets	basic need, food security, need as an individual defines - nutritional and cultural, social factors contribute to who is hungry, single mothers, students, social barriers, social stress level with hunger, additional costs
somewhat ignorant, knew about food banks	people who can't afford to feed themselves, feeling of insecurity/depression, fear and frustration, low self esteem, not always their fault
TO - saw ppl on the streets, right now people are taught to turn a blind eye, large visible hunger, India - most people survive on nothing, different mindset - tackle locally, empower people, statistics don't speak for the real problem	social situation where people don't have access to food, hunger connected to different issues, government, social assistance, social programs too little, basic need, foundation of so much, mental and physical instability
worked in food bank, aware of hunger even in small towns, see large issue now, mx clarified that the problem is everywhere, not just in Toronto	not just access to food, also nutritious food, accessing food in a way that isn't humiliating, economic problem not based just on the individual, individual food problems and problems with the food system, look at systems and why we can't be sustainable
yes, I've been hungry, this is not a good feeling, can't imagine the feeling of not being able to afford food, belittling, never been hungry due to poverty - can't imagine not having food available	basic anxiety because basic need is not being met, don't have the luxury of thinking of anything other than hunger

13	14	15
emergency food, important until no one is hungry, eliminate worry, first step, not just a band aid	minimal, what I can, small piece of the puzzle, educating himself	PCAP, KWIC, SOS, YES, Free Market
provide food, not solving hunger, need to also work on finding causes and better social programs to prevent hunger	food not bombs, don't know if I contribute regularly, not wasteful, socialist - not daily	no, right now too busy, will work on an AIDS group outreach and prevention
one part of the equation, meal today, have to look at structures why people are going hungry, immediate relief	politically involved in the future, not sure that the answer is simply government based, priority in society needs to be reevaluated - community approach, look at the effects of actions	looking at groups to be involved with long term ex) rotary club, development and peace
not temporary, waiting until another solution is found, not solving, band aid	right now not much, but education on the issue, support organizations that actually help solve the problem	united way
important, provide food to those who need it, need a lot of food to feed people, serve the public	willing to contribute when possible, be aware not ignorant, educating those who may be ignorant	experiential learning, benefit society, something other than school
provide food to those who need it most - get back on track, resources	every little bit helps, even just donating helps, knowing, donating time	small organization Change Now - youth centre, drop in centre, more involved with that
potential to do more, access and awareness, structural issues - seen as the solution by those who are not hungry, hide broader issues, easier for gov't to pull out and allow hunger to become a private rather than public issue	don't do as much as I should, hope to do more through mx	no, but heard about KFS, free store, pcap
a great source for some people but you can't just give food and expect problems to go away, not always providing choices, may not always address hunger	mx is a huge thing, it should be everywhere, students are very open minded, being part of any mx activity - donate a few hours, part of the team, make fun atmosphere, getting a few ppl out creates a snowball effect	mx always, afterwards always wanting to help a community because of mx
provide emergency assistance, work to not exist, increasing numbers using food banks	power in numbers, empower volunteers, and community, make connections with people, educate, one person who cares can get others to care, people working through passion and love, change in small steps, focus energy to end hunger	different ones, connections to other people and groups as coordinator, volunteer when they need people, ongoing volunteer, welcome because of connections
depending on the food bank, can be used for community building, if positive environment, can work to help people, give job opportunities, etc. Sticking around but need to focus on community building not just food	by working with others, raise knowledge, spread the word, make it local	looking at hunger for thesis, YES, conferences next year
feed hungry people, bring awareness to the problem, think about why food banks are there, food banks alone are not a solution, needs to be addressed through government or more community, start a party, redirect /change constitution making every party ensure everyone is fed	not at all, appreciate what you have, but also work to help other people	no, I will continue to be involved with meal exchange, maybe a soup kitchen

16	17	18	19
seeing the success of the first event, rewarding, meeting homeless ppl through PCAP- human, grateful, real, friends, dispelling stereotypes of both homeless/students - idea that the rich don't care	TOE, YES Show, involvement with shelters, SAM, shelter issues	different than other organizations - not bureaucratic	more volunteers, encourage new campaigns
the issue, make friends with a similar point of view and interest, build community, make a difference - build the community you want to live in	TOE	makes it enjoyable, very important	education - talk about the issue more, action and information
feel good and help someone, something that has to be done, if I don't do it who will, to many people don't act	trick or eat, lead the event, hopefully it will be bigger next year	similar agendas and goals	more communication between groups people trying to do the same thing rather than doubling up
responsibility - people complain rather than doing something, use skills to help share skills	as coordinator, looking at rural areas, not always addressed in traditional food drives	more energy, promotes unique, crazy ideas, inspiring, make a difference	make sure coordinators transfer well from year to year
TOE and SAM, both very easy and fun	TOE and SAM	run well, very organized, great advertising, well known, visible, sign up in lecture	make facts about the community more visible, reasons
being involved in high school, wanted to carry that on	TOE - fun, neat, a few hours, cans instead of candy, make a difference	goals and reaching them, unique and fun, different, donate food, more engaging	more/new activities, keep volunteers involved
responsibility to realize privilege in the community, views of peace, realize and share future and fate if we active within the community, it is up to us to help with obstacles, involvement creates understanding	TOE, instant gratification food and people, SAM a lot of potential	goals are good, very local, mandate making concrete difference, stuff happens	more frequent meetings to build a bigger community, maybe a community calendar to attract volunteers
delivery day, it was very fun, not work, I have so much, getting to know people, I can do something, rewarding	delivery day, toe, - very fun, inspiring, SAM - start with nothing and get so much with it, how to be involved	run by volunteers, astounded by amount done by volunteers, feedback& energy, coordinators always make it work out, relying on the goodness of people to make it work	around toe very hectic - less awareness of toe so less donations and more people questioning motives therefore negative response from both community members and volunteers

community people in community dedicated to causes, selfless, humble, educated, caring, inspiring, seeing this wanting to do something, belonging - springboard, learning constantly, building	delivery day, go to community - mx team inspire campus to help community, day to renew hope in community and inspire hope in students	really great, see where effort and money goes, accessible to students, we have the power to do this, build community, happens in a new "home" huge impact on new home, educate, empower, make the difference, change within reach, respect in community, proud of work, always something new	stronger national network - strengths from students nation wide - should know students nationwide
going to the conference, hearing stories about what has been done so far, why people are involved, learning about the issues and not wanting them to continue	conference/ toe, was fun, would find inspiration in SAM and aramark coming through	organization and structure, target students who haven't been involved in these issues, target "real students" not just activists, not like other groups - accessible, organization is there to support	at our chapter, more members and organizers would make things run more smoothly
be out, have fun, volunteer	toe, do it again and help with meal exchange	less pretentious, more community, about people helping to help, other groups want something in return, effective locally	if it had more of a voice, more political, more events, draw in press

Appendix 2

Consent Form and Questions

Dear Participant,

My name is Mandy Ashton and I am a Trent University student in a third year community-based research placement entitled, “Promoting Hunger Awareness through Volunteerism”, the instructor of which is Chris Beyers. In fulfillment of the requirements of this course, I am conducting research on the role of Meal Exchange in promoting further hunger-related volunteerism. The objective of my research is to better understand the role Meal Exchange plays in educating students about hunger in Canada. As well, I will be looking at whether or not involvement in Meal Exchange encourages further involvement in hunger related issues, both while Meal Exchange volunteers are in school and once they graduate.

To meet this overall objective, I will use phone interviews as the method of gathering information.

This form asks for your permission to use information that I have gained through my interaction with you in compiling my research paper.

If you need to contact me with any further questions, I can be reached at the following phone number: (705) 743-8265, or through email: amandaashton@trentu.ca.

If you agree to give consent to my use of the information in my course research, you are guaranteed the following rights:

- You may withdraw your participation at any time, or choose not to answer certain questions
- You have the right to confidentiality of personal information and anonymity. Unless you wish otherwise, neither your name nor identifying information will be used in our research paper.
- There is no deception, or risk to yourself or other participants involved in this exercise.
- If you wish to receive a copy of the research paper, please provide your address below:

In addition, it should be noted I, as a researcher, reserve the right to terminate the research at any time.

Interview Questions

Are you currently a student? If not, what is your profession?

Which Meal Exchange chapter are/were you involved with?

What was your role (board member, coordinator, volunteer, etc.)?

In which year did you participate in Meal Exchange?

Have you volunteered in the past?

Are/have you been involved with other university groups?

What attracted you to Meal Exchange?

What do you hope to get out of Meal Exchange?

What are some of the lessons you have learned?

Is hunger a problem in Canada?

Before being involved with Meal Exchange, were there any experiences that would shape your perceptions about hunger?

How do you define hunger? What are the various aspects of hunger?

What is the role of food banks in solving hunger in Canada?

How do you see yourself contributing to ending hunger in Canada?

Are you involved with any community groups as a result of Meal Exchange? Which ones?

What has inspired you to become actively involved in the community?

Which Meal Exchange activities have inspired you to become more involved?

How do you compare Meal Exchange to other organizations you have been involved with?

What would make Meal Exchange more effective?

Appendix 3

In a similar study of food bank volunteers and their understanding of hunger, it was found that although respondents had a newfound respect for people experiencing food insecurity in their community, they did not have an understanding of the causes of hunger nor solutions to the hunger problem (Edlefsen and Olson, 2001, p. 5). In this study, seventeen food bank and soup kitchen volunteers were interviewed regarding their experiences volunteering (Edlefsen and Olson, 2001, p. 3). The researchers hoped to determine whether or not volunteer experiences broadened the volunteers' understanding of hunger (Edlefsen and Olson, 2001, p. 5). Based on research by John Dewey, the researchers believed that participatory actions should create interest in gaining further knowledge and involvement in a topic, like that of hunger (Edlefsen and Olson, 2001, p. 1). This form of experiential learning is important because it provides citizens with opportunities to participate in relieving hunger and poverty through experiences that are not typically available to most members of society.

The findings of this study showed that while volunteers at emergency food agencies did interact with food insecure community members, they were still very unsure of the validity of many users' claims to need emergency food (Edlefsen and Olson, 2001, p. 4). While these volunteers clearly understood the importance of the agencies they worked for, they did not have a clear understanding of what causes hunger in America and what can be done to end hunger.

Some of the obstacles in this study include the fact that because the interviews happened during a single period of time, the researchers could not contrast previous conceptions of hunger with current conceptions of hunger that have come as a result of volunteering. Also, although the goal of the research was held to determine whether or not the volunteers used their experiences to stimulate more volunteer work, these questions were not answered through this study (Edlefsen and Olson, 2001, p. 6).

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