

# **The History of a Young Non-Profit**

**By: Rebecca Anderson**

Completed for: Sylvia Dick at the Seasoned Spoon  
Supervisor: Jim Struthers, Trent University  
Trent Centre for Community-Based Education

Department: Canadian Studies  
Course Code: CAST 477  
Term: Fall/Winter, 2008-2009  
Date of Project Submission: April, 2009

Project ID: 908

**Call Number:**

# **The History of a Young Non-Profit**

**By: Rebecca Anderson**

**Instructor: Prof. Jim Struthers**

**Course: CAST 477 – Canadian  
Social Policy**

**Supervisor: Sylvia Dick - Seasoned  
Spoon and Barb  
Woolner - TCCBE**

## **Abstract**

This project offers two different products from the primary research conducted through interviews. Part 1 is a report on the institutional memory of the organization along with suggestions for the future to ensure maintenance of and encourage the creation of new institutional memory. Part 2 discusses food security in relation to the Seasoned Spoon. Both sections describe the methods in which the information used was obtained including interviews, secondary research, government documents, etc. The report is accompanied by a pamphlet that address institutional memory in student driven organizations and a research journal that chronicles the past months of work, discoveries, thoughts and ideas about the aforementioned topics.

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## **Part One**

# **The History of a Young Non-Profit:**

**Institutional Memory of the Student Driven Organization**

**“The Seasoned Spoon”**

**By: Rebecca Anderson**

**Instructor: Prof. Jim Struthers**

**Course: CAST 477 – Canadian  
Social Policy**

**Supervisor: Sylvia Dick - Seasoned  
Spoon and Barb  
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## **Preface**

This project began in the late Fall of 2008 as part of my course research for the Canadian Studies 477: Canadian Social Policy course with Professor Jim Struthers. It has been entered into in conjunction with the Trent Centre for Community Based Education and the Seasoned Spoon Café. This report will discuss the current level of institutional memory at the Seasoned Spoon that was established through volunteer hours, personal interviews, documents from the organization and newspaper articles. It will also provide suggestions about how the Seasoned Spoon can improve the practices they have in place to ensure institutional memory is documented and offer ideas for new initiatives for the future. This report has been created in hopes that other students or interested parties, from Trent or elsewhere, are able to gain a general understanding of how the Seasoned Spoon operates as a café and as a student organization, and how it maintains best practices of the organization, and how other student organizations can adopt these practices.

This project is important because as a student that has been heavily involved in student government and student organizations I have been a witness and casualty of poor institutional memory. Student driven organizations experience such a high turnover rate; at best they have someone involved for four years at a time but more often less than two full years. There is significant disconnect that can be experienced due to the frequent breaks at any school, but particularly here at Trent as we have a fall reading week as well. Also, because there is a greater purpose than simply serving food, the



Seasoned Spoon is a vital part of Trent University's food service, ethical standards and student movement.

## **Introduction**

The Seasoned Spoon (the Spoon) is a student-run, co-operatively structured, not-for-profit café that strives to serve fair trade, organic, locally grown and affordable meals to the students, staff, faculty and community of Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario. Resources about the Spoon in particular are quite limited. While there are TCCBE projects, feature articles or minutes from the Board of Directors the accessibility or availability of such documents affect the level of institutional memory as well.

There is little academic information available on institutional memory, the value or benefit of documenting institutional knowledge or even reliable sources on how to keep records for student organizations specifically. Student driven groups have their own unique set of dynamics because of the student population that they draw from, leaders lacking professional training, mass turnover and breaks throughout the year as well as only an eight month long year. There are numerous characteristics that make student organizations unique, but the Seasoned Spoon being a longstanding student driven café is one of a kind compared to many other Ontario universities.

Interviews were conducted with Seasoned Spoon staff, volunteers and members of the Board that have proven useful in establishing the Spoon's current level of institutional memory, practices of the organization, and their own ideas of what could be

improved. These interviews were conducted throughout March and April of 2009 those that were and are involved with the Seasoned Spoon. I was also able to experience the daily operation of the Spoon first hand by volunteering and attending a meeting of the Board of Directors. The information gained from these interactions have helped shape an understanding of the Seasoned Spoon as it is now; what is available, who is in charge of updating, where it is stored, etc.

Institutional memory is an issue that may not be thought of in the moment but is one that is becoming increasingly important to student organizations as they become more established, politicized and professional much like the Seasoned Spoon has over the last seven years. Being one of the longest standing student driven cafés of its type in Ontario, the Spoon has recently become incorporated and has been undertaking numerous steps to professionalize the business aspect of the organization. In order for the Seasoned Spoon to be able to continue to effectively fulfill their mandate, pass on the history to newer members, and make information about the organization, past and present, available and accessible by all, the Seasoned Spoon needs to address their practices of institutional memory.

## **Methodology and Definition**

Research for this report has involved a number of different. Early on in the project volunteer service was completed as well as attending a meeting of the Board of Directors to gain insight into the regular operation of the organization. Personal

interviews were conducted with student staff and volunteers, members of the Board of Directors, and full time staff members as well, which provided more specific insight into the Seasoned Spoon's operations.

The primary research undertaken has employed qualitative research methods for the project. This will take on the form of a standardized set of questions that have been formulated, reviewed and finalized with the assistance of my supervisor at the Seasoned Spoon, Sylvia Dick, my supervisor through the Trent Center for Community Based Education, Barb Woolner, and Professor Struthers. They have been formatted to include an introduction, instructions, definitions and a conclusion that includes contact information. The final questions can be found in the following section entitled, "Research Questions."

All standard procedures were completed prior to commencing research. Once input had been received and the questionnaire updated, the questionnaire, a template of the Informed Consent Form and the accompanying forms were submitted to the Canadian Studies Department and the Research Ethics Board at Trent University. Once the Ethical Review and all other necessary steps were taken to ensure the quality of the questions and consent of participants, preparations for the interviews began.

The participants for these interviews have been drafted from a number of areas. Participants from the Seasoned Spoon are either previously known or have volunteered to complete the questionnaire. Those that were previously known to me, who I have worked with throughout the duration of this project thus far, were initially recruited to complete the survey. Staff and volunteers of the Spoon were contacted via email asking

them if they were interested in voluntarily completing the questionnaire, which secured additional participants.

Part of the intent of this project was to contact and interview members of other organizations to get more information about their history, practice of institutional knowledge and other practices that may be useful to the Seasoned Spoon. The initial list of these potential participants from other universities was compiled during first semester. Meri-Kim Oliver, the Director of Student Affairs here at Trent University, assisted in contacting the other Student Affairs offices at universities across the province asking for a list of food service providers they had on campus and some general information on them such as for profit or not for profit, vegetarian or not, and the name of the person running it. This provided a jumping off point for research that allowed the list to be narrow down to a select few that seemed to mesh with the Seasoned Spoon's structure and mandate. From there online research about these organizations has been conducted and everything from newspaper articles, to pictures, to contact information was discovered.

With that said, there was an initial response from some students and staff from other organizations. Contacts from the People's Potato at Concordia University, Hot Yam at the University of Toronto, Tea Room at Queen's University, and the Garden Spot at Carleton University were all contacted asking to voluntarily participate in the questionnaire. Each organization was contacted twice, with even further efforts given to those the initially responded, but in the end no members were able to be interviewed. However, the information of these organizations will be included for future contact.

For those that were able to complete the questionnaire, it was delivered through individual interviews with those living in the Peterborough area. Due to the busy time of year and waiting on response from others, simply booking interviews is a timely process. Some exceptions have been made for participants willing to provide information, but unable to schedule an interview in person. Some participants completed the questionnaire electronically. The project was thoroughly explained to all participants, with opportunity for questions to be answered before beginning the questionnaire, whether they opted for the in-person or electronic means of completion.

For the purpose of this project approximately 10 people were expected to be interviewed. In total there were seven participants from the Seasoned Spoon. Four were employees of the Seasoned Spoon, two were members of the Board and another was a previous faculty member that had helped with the initial construct of the Seasoned Spoon. Within these participants, four were students and one was a current faculty member, while the others were not students or faculty at Trent.

With the limited secondary sources available a definition of institutional memory was established for the use of this report and the questionnaire. This definition was included in the questionnaire instructions that participants read before they began the interview. The definition is as follows:

Institutional Memory is a collective set of facts, concepts, experiences and know-how held by a group of people that are effectively translated into useful knowledge and wisdom to help preserve a group's ideology, way of work, etc.

There are obviously many available definitions of institutional memory; this is a cohesive version of many that are available. Also, part of the difficulty with the concept of institutional memory is that the language of it is not consistent. Some refer to it under this name while others may use such terms as best practice, institutional knowledge, etc.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions were presented to participants in the form of a questionnaire. This questionnaire was used to gain insight about both institutional memory and food security, which is the focus of a supplementary report produced for CAST 477 course work. While not all questions ask directly about institutional memory, the entire questionnaire allowed for responses that had a significant amount of overlap, therefore all questions are being included. The questions were divided into three categories, as can be seen below; one for all to answer, one for just people connected to the Seasoned Spoon and another for people from other universities.

### **Overall Research Questions**

- How does your organization address food security issues within your community? How does your organization address nutritional and hunger needs of the community?
- How does your organization fit within the local and more global context of food security?
- What educational programs does your organization offer that address issues of food security? Do they offer practical advice that the attendees can put to use or more theoretical and informative sessions?

- How does your organization fit into the bigger picture in terms of the government's role in addressing food security? It has been suggested that food banks, although in high demand, actually enable the government to rely on them for temporary relief rather than actually working to solve the problem of food security.
- Do you see a correlation between maintaining institutional memory of the organization and upholding the values of it as well? How important is having a clear structure to maintain the mission of the organization?
- Approximately what percentage of food or ingredients used is local, organic and/or fair trade?
- Where is your organization located? How does the location affect business and uphold the values of the organization? (i.e. the Spoon is located in a residential College, but is not accessible)
- How has your organization dealt with the impact of the first generation that was involved with the initial creation of the organization leaving, and newer generations coming in? What has been done to help ensure that students, staff, faculty and the community still see your organization as a necessity?
- What sources of funding does your organization receive? (i.e. levies, community support, donations, profit, etc.)

#### **Questions for Seasoned Spoon Insiders**

- What aspects of the running of the Seasoned Spoon Café affect the quality of our institutional memory?
- How do you feel about the current level of institutional memory at the Seasoned Spoon?
- What processes are currently in place to address the institutional memory of the Seasoned Spoon café, board of directors, etc.?
- How can the institutional memory of the Seasoned Spoon be improved?

#### **Questions for Insiders of Cafés at other Universities**

- How does your organization deal with instability, high staff turnover, operating costs, etc? In particular how do you cope with the regular closing and reopening of the organization (i.e. closing for holidays, reading breaks, summer session, etc.)

- Are there any academic connections with other organizations and academic programs at your university with your organization? What academic programs are involved? When did these connections start?
- How long has your program been operating at your university? How has the program evolved since its inception?
- What is the structure of your organization? Is there a governing board? What is the staff structure? How do these organizational structures address institutional memory?

### **A Brief History of the Seasoned Spoon**

The Seasoned Spoon grew out of another student initiative at Trent called The Stone Soup Project (Stone Soup). With close connections to Peterborough's branch of the Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) and the Food Issues Action Group, Stone Soup took off in September of 2001.<sup>1</sup> Originally Stone Soup was meant to tackle the food monopoly held by Aramark Canada Ltd. (Aramark) on the Trent University campus. Once obtaining permission to sell soup and bread by donation on campus the project took off! This soup kitchen style of operation went on for just a short time. In 2002, when the University was renegotiating its contract with Aramark more leeway was given to the project and allowed it to open more regularly.<sup>2</sup> By December of 2002 those working on this food initiative were starting to come together more formally and by this time had elected a Board of Directors.

During this time the Stone Soup Project had shifted names and became the Seasoned Spoon Café. The Spoon sought out space in one of the campus pubs, finally deciding on the Cat's Ass Pub in Otonabee College. It operated out of this space for

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<sup>1</sup> Holly Sullivan, "Back in the Day: Humble Beginnings of the Seasoned Spoon Café." 2

<sup>2</sup> Sullivan 4



about one year until having to move once again because of a combination of the universities potential need for the space and the Spoon's growing needs in terms of kitchen equipment.<sup>3</sup> With the help of Champlain College and the Champlain College Cabinet, the Spoon set up in the former Junior Common Room (JCR) as what has since been its permanent home. Alongside negotiations of their tri-lateral agreement with the University and Aramark, the Spoon developed into a very unique student-driven organization as it incorporated a wider variety of food, had the opportunity for leadership within it and had close connections to departments and academics with the Trent Center for Community Based Education (TCCBE) projects.

While the overall aim of this report is not to provide a detailed description of the Seasoned Spoon, it is integral to understanding the work of the Spoon to have some concept of its roots. There have been TCCBE projects completed in the past that offer more succinct histories of the organization and its operations.

### **Background Information on Similar Organizations**

The Seasoned Spoon is primarily a student run, co-operative, food based organization. While researching the Spoon it is apparent that it is a unique organization compared to other Ontario Universities. While there are some similar organizations out of province and even internationally, the focus on Ontario was maintained during research. The People's Potato at Concordia University is a well organized group that is

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<sup>3</sup> Sullivan 11.

similar to the Seasoned Spoon and there are also numerous initiatives in the USA that have existed for decades.

A close comparison to the Spoon is the University of Waterloo's Eco-Café that is in its inaugural year. "With a focus on a healthy body and a healthy environment, the café will offer up wholesome food produced with seasonably available local ingredients, some organic food, fresh smoothies, soup, fruit, and fair trade products," the Eco-Café resembles the Spoon.<sup>4</sup> However Eco-Café is run by University of Waterloo Food Services; it is not a student run co-operative like the Spoon. There is hope for more collaboration between Food Services, the students and community members to address the issue of food security within the context of food on campus, but the Eco-Café is just a starting point for the University of Waterloo.

Former Trent student Linda Swanston, now pursuing further education at the University of Waterloo, discussed other initiatives that are being undertaken at the school. She explained that unlike Trent there is no food service provider with a monopoly over campus venues; almost each faculty has their own coffee and snack bar which is operated from within that department.<sup>5</sup> Linda spoke about her experience with the Environmental studies coffee bar. This venue currently only serves prepared food that is made offsite and beverages, there is no kitchen or space to build one at the present time. Linda and other students involved with a food issues group at the university started one new initiative of selling fresh apples at the coffee bar that come

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<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Gwun-Yeen Lennon. "The New Green Routine." *University of Waterloo Student Newspaper: Imprint*. 2 May 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Swanston, Personal Interview, 10 April 2009.

from a local farmer.<sup>6</sup> This group is pushing for more items to be introduced at the coffee bar that come from local producers, do not necessarily require preparation and help to promote a healthy diet.

The University of Toronto's Hot Yam! started in the fall of 2007 by students to offer ecologically conscious and environmentally friendly vegetarian food.<sup>7</sup> Hot Yam! is student run and works on a collective kitchen model which involves a group of people coming together, each with a few items and create large quantities of better food than they likely would have been able to make on their own. They offer two sittings on the days they serve food, mainly soup and bread, for just \$4 and ask that patrons bring their own Tupperware, plates or to-go containers. This soup kitchen style of operation has not been established for very long and does not have a permanent residence or set hours. It is operating closer to what the Spoon was in the beginning as the Stone Soup project.

Carleton University's The Garden Spot operates as a, "pay what you can vegan soup kitchen designed to serve healthy and affordable meals to all members of the Carleton community... 100% waste free."<sup>8</sup> Operated by the Carleton Food Collective the Garden Spot is a non-profit, consensus based organization like the Spoon. They also strive to be as environmentally friendly as possible by asking students to bring their own dishes and not using any disposable items. Again however, this does not fully align itself

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<sup>6</sup> Swanston, 10 April 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Tao-Ming Lao. "Hot damn! Look what they're cooking up at the Hot Yam!" *University of Toronto: The Strand*. 2 January 2007.

<sup>8</sup> The Garden Spot Wiki "The G-Spot FAQ," 3 September 2005, < <http://www.opirg-carleton.org/gspot/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/HomePage>> (last accessed 29 November 2008)

with the model of the Seasoned Spoon; the food is mainly acquired through donations from local grocers, does not have a governing board and does not appear to have paid staff.

All of the aforementioned food operations show similarities to the Seasoned Spoon but also highlight how unique the composition and structure of the Spoon. More significantly each highlights the need for affordable, healthy food; they all emphasize food insecurity within Ontario and post-secondary settings and the need for change. Unfortunately since many of these locations are recent in their existence, are run by non-profit student groups, little professional assistance and receive little funding, the only information available stems from student newspaper articles and independently hosted websites. It does not appear that there is much reliable and up to date information widely available about the structure, governance, operations or history of these organizations, which speaks to the need of institutional memory for student run organizations overall.

### **Institutional Memory at the Seasoned Spoon**

"It's just the nature of how the Seasoned Spoon is run there will never be a perfect uniformity."<sup>9</sup> There are many issues that plague student organizations, none of which the Seasoned Spoon is immune to. From both interviews and volunteer experience, the current level of institutional memory and practices were established and evaluated. While there are some initiatives already underway there is always room for improvement! The staff, students, members, and volunteers of the Seasoned Spoon are

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<sup>9</sup> Sylvia Dick, Personal Interview, 10 March 2009.

very committed to the organization and its success, and therefore hope to be able to pass on the knowledge they have gained during their time at the Spoon to future generations.

Looking at the broad scale of issues that affect student organizations, the gaps that are experienced throughout the year have, by far, the most significant impact to the organization. While some groups run through the summer the Seasoned Spoon closes its doors every April and re-opens each September. There are also breaks for the reading weeks in October and February and the winter holidays, and interruptions from exam time as well. In total there is over five months of the year that the Spoon is not operating. This off and on schedule interrupts the work that staff are completing, like the information binders that Katherine (Kat) Lapointe is creating for the Spoon, as well as limiting the amount of time they have to complete these tasks that would lend towards improving the Spoon's institutional memory. Kim Wilson, a member of the Board of Directors, also identified that it is difficult when the Board is not able to meet throughout the summer months.<sup>10</sup> It should be noted however that the Seasoned Spoon has a summer board and will offer summer training for members as a means to encourage productivity and efficiency during the school year.

With most students completing four year degrees, there is a high turnover rate that is experienced across the board by student organizations. If they are lucky, a student may begin their participation in first year and continue on with the organization for the duration of their time at university. However, students often use first year as a testing ground; they may go to the Spoon, stop and talk at Clubs and Groups day, or

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<sup>10</sup> Kim Wilson, "Spoon Questionnaire," email to the author, 18 March 2009.

ask someone else about it, but many first years are exploring their options. Many students become more committed and more involved in their upper years of university from what I have gathered. Almost all interviewees identified the high turnover rate, that is having a lot of experienced people leave each year and then having a whole new set of inexperienced students join the next, as one of the main hindrances to creating and maintaining institutional memory. Staff member and long time supporter of the Spoon, Robyn Smith, identified this as, "the biggest factor that affects our institutional memory."<sup>11</sup>

The turnover effectively removes those who are holding the institutional memory, be it the day to day jobs in the café or the Board decision from six months prior. Sylvia Dick, Educational Outreach Coordinator, notes that thus far the Spoon has been lucky that they have held onto a few key people like Annie Whitty, Coordinator, and Karen Sutherland, co-founder and current co-treasurer of the Board, that have been around since the beginning.<sup>12</sup> Others interviewed shared the concern with relying on few; most of those involved will leave after a few years and likely not leave behind anything formal to share their experience. The organization should not rely upon a few people for the whole or majority of the institutional memory but at the same time they should instead recognizing the value of the people that are there now and seize the opportunity to document their knowledge and experience. Suggestions on how to effectively document such information will be discussed in the following section entitled "Suggestions for the Seasoned Spoon."

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<sup>11</sup> Robyn Smith, "Spoon Survey," email to the author, 5 March 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Dick, 10 March 2009.

Simply documenting the experience will not be enough as it needs to be organized, accessible and available to those who need it. A few of those interviewed noted that organization is one area that perhaps the Spoon could improve upon. "I think that we are basically trying to keep ourselves afloat and we don't think too much about the future."<sup>13</sup> This leads into another area of discussion about the Spoon's finances effect on their level of institutional memory.

As a non-profit organization that receives a minimal levy from student fees, some funding from the Ontario Work Study Program (OWSP) and the Trent International Program (TIP) for staffing costs, minimal profits off of the sale of meals and donations from the community but has many costs associated with the day to day running of the café there is little left over to provide for a new stove or savings let alone funding for institutional memory projects. Sylvia exclaimed, "I think that there is [sic] not enough paid hours to adequately ensure institutional memory to its maximum potential."<sup>14</sup> From the interviews it was gathered that the Spoon is currently not aware of any other avenues to pursue for extra funding.

Aside from external factors the Seasoned Spoon is affected by the day-to-day business of operating a café, organizing a Board of Directors and maintaining the behind the scenes administrative aspects of the organization. Since it is a student driven organization there are a lot of factors that impede consistency within many areas of the organization, including institutional memory. Since students have commitments to their education, other jobs, extra-curricular activities and of course themselves, it is

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, 5 March 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Dick, 10 March 2009.

difficult to expect a consistent level of investment into institutional memory projects. As mentioned before if some hours were paid it could positively affect the level of institutional memory, as finances are often an area of concern for students. Some of those interviewed that have been involved long-term exclaimed how in the summer the staff is focused on preparing for the September opening.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the month of September it has historically been full of activity which has kept members busy. It is also a demanding time for those overseeing administrative aspects such as ordering and purchasing, pay roll, or scheduling which consumes exorbitant amounts of time. Tasks that are seemingly more pressing, more immediate often take precedence over those that do not have an impending deadline, do not appear as important.

The Board of Directors for the Seasoned Spoon also shares in the responsibility of establishing and maintaining an adequate level of institutional memory. Being the governing body of the Seasoned Spoon they have a accountability to the membership to record accurate minutes of discussion and decisions of the Board. Coordinator Annie Whitty stressed the importance of having a trained and thorough Secretary.<sup>16</sup> Minutes from these meetings are an amazing example of institutional memory as they reflect the political, social, financial and other aspects of the organization at any given time in its history.

Upon receiving the by-laws of the Board of Directors it was apparent that this was an area that could receive some focus as well. While the Seasoned Spoon website does have a page dedicated to the Board of Directors there is no information available

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<sup>15</sup> Annie Whitty, Personal Interview, 19 March 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Whitty, 19 March 2009.



to contact the Board as a whole, a named list of those holding positions or their contact information, or a copy of the by-laws. In terms of institutional memory, it is important to have information like the minutes and most current by-laws available and accessible to those within the organization and other interested parties, most importantly the membership. To secure the by-laws for this project was difficult, even though I was well aware of who to contact and in the end I received a version that did not seem to be properly formatted and perhaps even missing a section. For those without prior knowledge of members or without access to contact information for the Board, it would be very difficult to obtain the documents therefore another hindrance to the Spoon's institutional memory.

Sylvia and others also explained that they saw great value in a joint meeting between the Board and staff that happened this past year.<sup>17</sup> This provided a venue for members of each component of the organization to come together, share their experiences, create connections based on each other's expertise, and in effect establishing a sort of oral institutional memory amongst each other. Communication amongst active members of the Spoon is an integral part to maintaining institutional memory; if members do not understand their roles, the standard expectations of them, or how to contribute to the history of the Spoon it is less likely it will happen altogether.

Part of effective communication amongst active members as well as the general population is to ensure that it is widely known, or at least easy to discover online or otherwise, where to access documents, information, contacts, etc. that are associated with the Spoon. Some members interviewed acknowledge that they know there have

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<sup>17</sup> Dick, 10 March 2009.

been Trent Center for Community Based Education (TCCBE) projects completed or that Board minutes are taken each meeting, but even they, active and considerably knowledgeable members of the Spoon community, were unsure about where or how to access them.<sup>18</sup> Establishing a definite location in either the café or the office would be beneficial for all those interested in accessing such information and would also help in itself with institutional memory as a set location of where to find information could be passed on from year to year. While the café and office are both cramped quarters there is surely somewhere accessible and logical that this information could be held.

Many of those interviewed also expressed an interest in making documents, like Board meeting minutes, available electronically via the Seasoned Spoon's website. Sylvia noted that they are making efforts with the new webmaster to post TCCBE projects online as well.<sup>19</sup> This is a great step forward in advancing the Spoon's institutional memory! Certain jobs and roles within the Spoon are particularly important to maintaining institutional memory and those who are responsible for updating the website are key players for the Spoon in today's technology driven world.

While there are certain roles that may be more logically linked to institutional memory, it is important that all active members, staff, volunteers, faculty and anyone else involved with the Seasoned Spoon be included in creating, maintaining and distributing institutional memory of the organization. Sylvia really stressed the fact however that the Spoon is a co-operative, which means that it, "is an autonomous

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<sup>18</sup> Dick, 10 March 2009.

Smith, 5 March 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Dick, 10 March 2009.

association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise."<sup>20</sup> In other words it is governed by its members and based on democratic participation.<sup>21</sup> This structure paired with the constant flow of new staff and volunteers gives the Spoon a unique composition that encourages new ideas and fresh perspectives, but also presents some road blocks in terms of institutional memory. As mentioned before, between the time consuming life of a student, limited availability of paid hours for projects, a lack of accessibility or knowledge of documents, it is difficult to get everyone on the same page so to speak. Sylvia notes that she, and assumes that others as well, place a great value on the fluid nature of the Spoon, perhaps having some clear goals for the year ahead would help in establishing institutional memory.<sup>22</sup> Robyn and others suggested that perhaps a year-end report could be established as something that all those actively involved each year.<sup>23</sup>

While there are undoubtedly more areas of the Seasoned Spoon's operation that could potentially improve or detract from their current level of institutional memory the above is what was identified by members that have a great deal of background with the Spoon and are strongly committed to its success. Some of the above discussion has also been established from firsthand experience researching, volunteering and interviewing members. Overall it is apparent that as the Seasoned Spoon is becoming

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<sup>20</sup> "Structure: The Co-operative" *The Seasoned Spoon*, 12 January 2009. <<http://www.trentu.ca/stuorg/seasonedspoon/coop.html>>

<sup>21</sup> "Structure: The Co-operative"

<sup>22</sup> Dick, 10 March 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, 5 March 2009.

more established, one of the longest standing organizations of its kind in Ontario, and therefore should have a more established base of institutional memory that include organized and accessible projects, minutes, documentation, etc. Most members acknowledge the TCCBE projects as pillars of the organizations institutional memory but also recognize the need for new initiatives and updates on those that are already in place to create and maintain the institutional memory of the organization.

### **Suggestions for the Seasoned Spoon**

The following is a comprehensive list of suggestions for the Seasoned Spoon regarding institutional memory practices. Some of the suggestions stem directly from the interviews conducted with students, staff, volunteers and members of the Board of Directors of the Seasoned Spoon, while others have arisen out of discussion and firsthand experience volunteering and researching the Spoon and other similar organizations. This proposal is made with the intention of helping the Spoon to improve the practices they already have in place and hopefully create new initiatives that will facilitate further, better quality and more varied forms of institutional memory.

This past year the Café Manager Katherine Lapointe has begun to create staff kits and position manuals that lists the job description, important contact information, dates and timelines for certain tasks to be completed and any other relevant information. These manuals could provide a very thorough description of certain jobs at the Spoon and ensure carry over from year to year. If possible the update and/or

creation of the manuals could be worked into a job description or even formed into a TCCBE project. Once created the maintenance of these manuals would require minimal time but provide great results for the transfer of knowledge from one year to the next.

The training of staff members and volunteers is also an important time to impart the knowledge acquired from past experiences and to set up goals and expectations for the year. Even though the Seasoned Spoon is a co-op, which allows for much flexibility within the organization, it does not mean that specific goals and expectations cannot be established. Having something to work toward, such as a year-end report or collecting information for a staff manual, would allow the student, staff, volunteer or member to take their time and prepare a thorough product to leave the organization with. However, as mentioned previously, with the many factors working against student driven organizations it is difficult to expect a uniform result from all staff members as each person has different strengths. Perhaps creating a training program that includes both group interaction and individual sessions, overarching and job specific information and theoretical and hands on experiences. Sylvia noted in her interview that not all long standing members excel in teaching, so establishing a program could ensure that there are some standards being met in training all staff members and volunteers.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the summer the Board is also on hiatus. Kim Wilson reminded that there is training throughout the summer season for the Board of Directors so that they

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<sup>24</sup> Dick, 10 March 2009.

are prepared for the fall start up.<sup>25</sup> This is a practice that should definitely be continued with the leaders of the Spoon. Rather than arriving in September without being prepared or understanding the organization, having to take that time to train the Board before really getting to work, it would be better to arrive prepared and start the year off right.

Once the year is underway it may be beneficial to host or facilitate Board and staff meetings. Not all need to be formal and information based; some can be social and networking oriented. Numerous of the student employees interviewed identified this as a great opportunity to connect and share with other active members. There was one meeting like this held this past year, but staff would like to see more! Whether formal or informal these meetings could allow members to share their roles within the organization forming contacts with each other, sharing past experiences and advice with one another and essentially creating and continuing oral institutional memory that already exists.

Robyn mentioned that the Spoon does have a daily log book for those working in the café to record important notes in during the operating hours. While this log book may not provide long term institutional memory in itself, if consulted at the end of the term it could provide useful tidbits of information that could be compiled into a more succinct document for future reference. Also, the daily log book could provide insight for the Coordinator and Café Manager in planning training, scheduling, café operations, administrative operations, hiring and other day-to-day practices. Since these positions

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<sup>25</sup> Wilson, 18 March 2009.

provide overarching support to the staff and may not necessarily take note of everything happening in the café, encouraging the use of the log book would help provide them with that on the ground perspective that they may otherwise miss.

As previously mentioned it is important to have a dedicated space to store any items that are produced that reflect the years past. Items such as TCCBE projects, Board minutes, videos or DVDs, scrapbooks or photographs should be neatly organized in binders, photo boxes, cases or otherwise. While this is obviously time consuming to maintain items, collect things to be filed, properly label them and organize them in chronological order, this work could be outsourced from just one person to multiple staff job descriptions, volunteers, or TCCBE projects. If space cannot be made to accommodate all items posting some online could both spare space and increase accessibility for those interested.

Posting more items online was mentioned by Sylvia during her interview. She noted that the current webmaster has been maintaining and updating the website fairly regularly. Compared to the similar organizations previously discussed and other student organizations web pages in general, the Seasoned Spoon's is much more advanced. Not only does it have better quality information, it is logically organized, properly labeled, and the overall appearance is more professional than the wiki-sites or the blogs that other groups host their information on. The Spoon's website is by far one of their greatest tools to increasing and maintaining their level of institutional memory. It should definitely be made a priority in the future!

One benefit to having an eight month turnover each year is that it allows for reconsideration of staff positions, job descriptions, hiring procedure and training. As formerly mentioned some of these small tasks, like creating or maintaining a staff binder for each position, can be very time consuming for just one person to take on. Each spring the Board of Directors, the Coordinator and the Café Manager could collectively propose ways to work these tasks into the staff's hiring, as they would mention this as a new aspect to look forward to as staff; in terms of training they could have an open discussion to provide ideas of what could be documented throughout the year, how it could be documented, where to find the resources needed, etc.; and in their job description it could be included that they are required to submit a year-end report. Fitting within the open and fluid model of the Seasoned Spoon the final product could come in many forms, because as some interviewees suggested writing is not everyone's forte and perhaps they would like to create a video, do a photo diary, compile important documents like recipes or contact information. This year-end report would also allow individuals' voices to be heard and potentially seen! If the administrative representatives of the Spoon so wished, they could also hand out a small survey that would hopefully encourage staff to think about their own year-end report but could also provide feedback on each person's perception of the past year, strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for the future.

If individual reports seem like too much for staff to take on, perhaps this could be molded into a TCCBE project. A former student Holly Sullivan completed a project years



ago that thoroughly documented the first year of the Seasoned Spoon. Her report offered information on the bargaining done with the university and little known facts about the start up in Champlain College. Perhaps reports like this could become a yearly item on the TCCBE project list. This would fulfill the educational aspect of the tri-lateral agreement with the university but also provide an up to date history for the Seasoned Spoon! With such a diverse range of courses becoming available at Trent the TCCBE's could look to include students working with film or photography in Cultural Studies courses, creative writing projects from an English Literature course or perhaps a business portfolio from a Business Administration course. As was said, the Spoon's history does not necessarily have to come solely in written essay format and can be documented in a myriad of ways.

Finally, when members do depart from Trent and from the Spoon it could be asked that they keep in touch! The Alumni Association often asks students to submit their contact information and an update on what they are doing now post-grad. While the Spoon does not necessarily need to go to such thorough lengths, a simple gesture reminding those that have been so committed to the Spoon to keep in touch could potentially benefit them down the road. I was lucky enough to be directed to a few former members, faculty and students, that had been involved with the Spoon and have since been doing work elsewhere. They provided some great ideas for this project as they had been a part of the Spoon and now involved elsewhere, they were able to share new ideas and perspectives that they thought might work here too.

With so many students, faculty, staff and community members committed to not only the mandate of the Seasoned Spoon but to its continuation and improvement implementing and sustaining some of the suggestions made above and hopefully new ideas that arise in time as well should not be too difficult. The Spoon is at a crucial time in its history as it is becoming an establishment here at Trent and is not thought of as a passing student group that will fade away. To help ensure this idea of permanence within Trent the Spoon needs to now continue, improve and initiate practices that will document what they have done and provide themselves with a jumping off point for the year ahead.

## **Conclusion**

The suggestions made above are done in good faith and with hopes that they are implemented and helpful to the organization in the years to come. Having been a student that did not know much about the organization I am very glad that I participated in this project and was able to uncover a lot about the organization that I, and likely other students, are unaware of. After more than five years in business it is encouraging to see the Spoon becoming incorporated and taking steps, such as this, to investigate and ensure that the Spoon is kept alive and well!

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## **Part Two**

# **How Student Driven Food Service Providers Address Food Security in their Communities:**

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**Case Study of the Seasoned Spoon, Trent University**

**By: Rebecca Anderson**

**For: Professor Struthers**

**Seasoned Spoon**

**TCCBE**

**Course: CAST 477**

**Date: April 10, 2009**

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## **Preface**

This project began in the late Fall of 2008 as part of my course research for the Canadian Studies 477: Canadian Social Policy course with Professor Jim Struthers. It has been entered into in conjunction with the Trent Centre for Community Based Education and the Seasoned Spoon Café. This report will discuss the food security aspect of the Seasoned Spoon Café, methods of research, findings from both academic and primary research and suggestions for future endeavors. It has been created in hopes that other students or interested parties, from Trent or elsewhere, are able to gain a general understanding of how the Seasoned Spoon operates and how it addresses the issues of food security within the community by reading this report.

## **Introduction**

The Seasoned Spoon (the Spoon) is a student-run, co-operatively structured, not-for-profit café that strives to serve fair trade, organic, locally grown and affordable meals to the students, staff, faculty and community of Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario. Resources about the Spoon in particular are very limited. However, the issues that the Spoon addresses through its values, its structure, and the work it does can be easily seen within the local context.

Food security has a plentiful base of academic sources. The research that has been conducted has thus far proven that there is a wide array of secondary and primary sources available on food security that ranges from the local, national and global level

of focus. Documents from the United Nations and the Canadian government, peer reviewed journal articles, newspapers, non-government organization (NGO) publications, interviews and more have all been used thus far. The area of study for this project has been narrowed down to Canada, and when possible Ontario. Government and United Nations documents have been helpful in securing a working definition of food security. Reports, like Canada's Action Plan for Food Security, have also laid out specific initiatives that the government is taking on but also provides a measure of what they have, have not and could be doing thus far. Documents, publications and reports used provide the theoretical framework for this project. Whereas newspaper articles, NGO information, and interviews provide the perspective and insight into what is really happening at the local level in terms of how organizations are addressing food security.

Interviews with Seasoned Spoon staff members and volunteers have also proven useful in establishing the Spoon's and community's ideas of food security. A set of questions were established and the interviews were conducted throughout March 2009. The results from these conversations have provided insight into the Seasoned Spoon that is not available otherwise.

Food security is an issue that has become increasingly important in the recent decades in light of the changing economic and political landscape of the world and of Canada in particular. In order for the Seasoned Spoon to effectively fulfill their mandate, some changes may need to be considered in terms of accessibility, the concept of a fair price, level of institutional memory, pricing products and menus, etc.



## **Methodology and Definitions**

Research has been two fold for this report. Secondary research was conducted to gain an understanding of academic arguments within the realm of food issues, best practices across the province and across Canada, and to establish a definition of food security that would best fit the operation of the Seasoned Spoon Café. Primary research was conducted with student staff and volunteers, members of the Board of Directors, and full time staff members as well. These interviews will help to provide specific details about the Seasoned Spoons objectives and work within the community.

The primary research undertaken has employed qualitative research methods for the project. This will take on the form of a standardized set of questions that have been formulated, reviewed and finalized with the assistance of my supervisor at the Seasoned Spoon, Sylvia Dick, my supervisor through the Trent Center for Community Based Education, Barb Woolner, and Professor Struthers. They have been formatted to include an introduction, instructions, definitions and a conclusion that includes contact information. The final questions can be found in the following section entitled, "Research Questions."

All standard procedures were completed prior to commencing research. Once input had been received and the questionnaire updated, the questionnaire, a template of the Informed Consent Form and the accompanying forms were submitted to the Canadian Studies Department and the Research Ethics Board at Trent University. Once

the Ethical Review and all other necessary steps were taken to ensure the quality of the questions and consent of participants, preparations for the interviews began.

The participants for these interviews have been drafted from a number of areas. Participants from the Seasoned Spoon are either previously known or have volunteered to complete the questionnaire. Those that were previously known to me, who I have worked with throughout the duration of this project thus far, were initially recruited to complete the survey. Staff and volunteers of the Spoon were contacted via email asking them if they were interested in voluntarily completing the questionnaire, which secured additional participants.

The questionnaire will be delivered through individual interviews with those living in the Peterborough area. Due to the busy time of year and waiting on response from others, simply booking interviews is a timely process. Some exceptions have been made for participants willing to provide information, but unable to schedule an interview in person. Some participants completed the questionnaire electronically. The project was thoroughly explained to all participants, with opportunity for questions to be answered before beginning the questionnaire, whether they opted for the in-person or electronic means of completion.

For the purpose of this project approximately 10 people were expected to be interviewed. In total there were seven participants from the Seasoned Spoon. Four were employees of the Seasoned Spoon, two were members of the Board and another was a previous faculty member that had helped with the initial construct of the Seasoned

Spoon. Within these participants, four were students and one was a current faculty member, while the others were not students or faculty at Trent.

As previously noted, secondary research helped to establish a definition of food security for this report. Using both peer reviewed journals and national and international reports, such as Canada's Action Plan for Food Security, a definition of food security has been compiled for the purposes of this project. This definition was included in the questionnaire instructions that participants read before they began the interview. The definition is as follows:

Food Security is the access, both physically and economically, to an available and reliable supply of adequate, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

While there are many definitions available from various sources like La Via Campesina, a worldwide peasant movement that advocates for food sovereignty, or the Food and Agriculture Organization that is a subsidiary of the United Nations. It should be noted however that most definitions have a bias toward their goals; some focus on the political aspects of food security while others may focus on the economic or accessibility aspects of it.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions were presented to participants in the form of a questionnaire. This questionnaire was used to gain insight about both food security and

institutional memory, which is the focus of a supplementary report produced for the Seasoned Spoon. While not all questions directly ask about food security, the entire questionnaire allowed for responses that had a significant amount of overlap, therefore all questions are being included. The questions were divided into three categories, as can be seen below; one for all to answer, one for just people connected to the Seasoned Spoon and another for people from other universities.

### **Overall Research Questions**

- How does your organization address food security issues within your community? How does your organization address nutritional and hunger needs of the community?
- How does your organization fit within the local and more global context of food security?
- What educational programs does your organization offer that address issues of food security? Do they offer practical advice that the attendees can put to use or more theoretical and informative sessions?
- How does your organization fit into the bigger picture in terms of the government's role in addressing food security? It has been suggested that food banks, although in high demand, actually enable the government to rely on them for temporary relief rather than actually working to solve the problem of food security.
- Do you see a correlation between maintaining institutional memory of the organization and upholding the values of it as well? How important is having a clear structure to maintain the mission of the organization?
- Approximately what percentage of food or ingredients used is local, organic and/or fair trade?
- Where is your organization located? How does the location affect business and uphold the values of the organization? (i.e. the Spoon is located in a residential College, but is not accessible)
- How has your organization dealt with the impact of the first generation that was involved with the initial creation of the organization leaving, and newer generations coming in? What has been done to help ensure that students, staff, faculty and the community still see your organization as a necessity?

- What sources of funding does your organization receive? (i.e. levies, community support, donations, profit, etc.)

### **Questions for Seasoned Spoon Insiders**

- What aspects of the running of the Seasoned Spoon Café affect the quality of our institutional memory?

- How do you feel about the current level of institutional memory at the Seasoned Spoon?

- What processes are currently in place to address the institutional memory of the Seasoned Spoon café, board of directors, etc.?

- How can the institutional memory of the Seasoned Spoon be improved?

### **Questions for Insiders of Cafés at other Universities**

- How does your organization deal with instability, high staff turnover, operating costs, etc? In particular how do you cope with the regular closing and reopening of the organization (i.e. closing for holidays, reading breaks, summer session, etc.)

- Are there any academic connections with other organizations and academic programs at your university with your organization? What academic programs are involved? When did these connections start?

- How long has your program been operating at your university? How has the program evolved since its inception?

- What is the structure of your organization? Is there a governing board? What is the staff structure? How do these organizational structures address institutional memory?

### **A Brief History of the Seasoned Spoon**

The Seasoned Spoon grew out of another student initiative at Trent called The Stone Soup Project (Stone Soup). With close connections to Peterborough's branch of the Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) and the Food Issues Action

Group, Stone Soup took off in September of 2001.<sup>1</sup> Originally Stone Soup was meant to tackle the food monopoly held by Aramark Canada Ltd. (Aramark) on the Trent University campus. Once obtaining permission to sell soup and bread by donation on campus the project took off! This soup kitchen style of operation went on for just a short time. In 2002, when the University was renegotiating its contract with Aramark more leeway was given to the project and allowed it to open more regularly.<sup>2</sup> By December of 2002 those working on this food initiative were starting to come together more formally and by this time had elected a Board of Directors.

During this time the Stone Soup Project had shifted names and became the Seasoned Spoon Café. The Spoon sought out space in one of the campus pubs, finally deciding on the Cat's Ass Pub in Otonabee College. It operated out of this space for about one year until having to move once again because of a combination of the universities potential need for the space and the Spoon's growing needs in terms of kitchen equipment.<sup>3</sup> With the help of Champlain College and the Champlain College Cabinet, the Spoon set up in the former Junior Common Room (JCR) as what has since been its permanent home. Alongside negotiations of their tri-lateral agreement with the University and Aramark, the Spoon developed into a very unique student-driven organization as it incorporated a wider variety of food, had the opportunity for leadership within it and had close connections to departments and academics with the Trent Center for Community Based Education (TCCBE) projects.

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<sup>1</sup> Holly Sullivan, "Back in the Day: Humble Beginnings of the Seasoned Spoon Café," 2.

<sup>2</sup> Sullivan 4.

<sup>3</sup> Sullivan 11.

While the overall aim of this report is not to provide a detailed description of the Seasoned Spoon, it is integral to understanding the work of the Spoon to have some concept of its roots. There have been TCCBE projects completed in the past that offer more succinct histories of the organization and its operations.

## **A Review of Primary and Academic Sources on Food Security**

Research was completed to gain an academic premise of food security, actions that have, or have not, been taken by the government and non-government organizations, theories and philosophies of hunger and security and the connections that food and hunger have with poverty, environment, social policy, and more. With a bounty of information available on food security some boundaries needed to be set to narrow the search. Some research was undertaken to gain an understanding of what other projects similar to the Seasoned Spoon are available at universities within Ontario and elsewhere. Due to the international nature of many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the primary research offers a more worldwide perspective on food security. However, secondary sources were narrowed down to Canada, and, when possible, Ontario as the focus area as they are the main source of information.

The Seasoned Spoon is primarily a student co-operative organization. While researching the Spoon it is apparent that it is a unique organization compared to other Ontario Universities. The closest comparison to the Spoon is the University of Waterloo's Eco-Café that is in its inaugural year. "With a focus on a healthy body and a healthy environment, the café will offer up wholesome food produced with seasonably available local ingredients, some organic food, fresh smoothies, soup, fruit, and fair

trade products," the Eco-Café resembles the Spoon.<sup>4</sup> However Eco-Café is run by University of Waterloo Food Services; it is not a student run co-operative like the Spoon. There is hope for more collaboration between Food Services, the students and community members to address the issue of food security within the context of food on campus, but the Eco-Café is just a starting point for the University of Waterloo.

Similarly University of Toronto's Hot Yam! started in the fall of 2007 by students to offer ecologically conscious and environmentally friendly vegetarian food.<sup>5</sup> Hot Yam! although student run works on a collective kitchen model which involves a group of people coming together, each with a few items and create large quantities of better food than they likely would have been able to make on their own, which again is not the same as the levy subsidized Seasoned Spoon.

Carleton University's The Garden Spot operates as a, "pay what you can vegan soup kitchen designed to serve healthy, affordable meals to all member of the Carleton community... 100% waste free."<sup>6</sup> Operated by the Carleton Food Collective the Garden Spot is a non-profit, consensus based organization like the Spoon. They also strive to be as environmentally friendly as possible by asking students to bring their own dishes and not using any disposable items. Again however, this does not fully align itself with the model of the Seasoned Spoon; the food is mainly acquired through donations from local grocers, does not have a governing board and does not appear to have paid staff. All of the aforementioned food operations show similarities to the Seasoned Spoon but

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<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Gwun-Yeen Lennon. "The New Green Routine." *University of Waterloo Student Newspaper: Imprint*. 2 May 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Tao-Ming Lao. "Hot damn! Look what they're cooking up at the Hot Yam!" *University of Toronto: The Strand*, 2 January 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The Garden Spot Wiki "The G-Spot FAQ," 3 September 2005, < <http://www.opirg-carleton.org/gspot/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/HomePage>> (last accessed 29 November 2008)



also display its unique composition and structure but more significantly each highlights the need for affordable, healthy food; they all emphasize food insecurity within Ontario and post-secondary settings and the need for change. Unfortunately since many of these locations are recent in their existence, are run by non-profit student groups and receive little funding, the only information available stems from student newspaper articles and independently hosted websites. It does not appear that there is much reliable and up to date information widely available about the structure, governance, operations or history of these organizations, which speaks to the need of institutional memory for student run organizations overall.

Although considered to be primary sources it is still imperative to recognize that policies addressing food security have been developed and accepted, and to examine the implementation of such policies. Canada agreed to The United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on 19 August 1976. Under Part II Article 11 the treaty outlines everyone's right to an adequate standard of living that includes food, the fundamental right to be free from hunger, providing education on nutrition, reforming agrarian systems and accounting for distribution.<sup>7</sup> Almost two decades later in 1998 Canada's Action Plan for Food Security was published. Its contents looked to give a better understanding of food security and what actions were being taken domestically and internationally. The plan sets out with a goal of reducing by half the number of undernourished people by the year 2015.<sup>8</sup> It offers a definition of food security followed by a breakdown of ten steps that will assist Canada in reaching

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. 16 December 1966. United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 993, p. 3. Online UNHCR Refworld, available at:

<<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b35c0.html>> (last accessed 29 November 2008)

<sup>8</sup> Canada. Joint Consultative Group. *Canada's Action Plan for Food Security*. (October 1998) : 5.

their goal and actions of how these steps will be followed. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) also offers insight into social policy surrounding food security. An article by Don Kossick in the Saskatchewan Notes publication from the CCPA's Saskatchewan office, discusses the concept and implementation of food charters. Focusing on Saskatoon and Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and Toronto, Ontario as cities that have created food charters to engage public institutions to develop good food practices within their communities and have been successfully adopted and implemented in these locations.<sup>9</sup> It is also in this article that Kossick challenges the implementation of these treaties and action plans by the Canadian and provincial governments by stating that, "there is little evidence that these declarations are manifested in Canadian communities across Canada, especially when we see the continual rising use of food banks."<sup>10</sup>

Sources like these are used by scholars worldwide, off which they base their critiques and suggestions for food provisions within specific areas. With a background in social work Graham Riches is a prime scholar to offer a critique of food banks and their role in the government's lack of achieving food security for all as they had promised in the above noted conventions. In his article, "Food Banks and Food Security: Welfare Reform, Human Rights and Social Policy. Lessons from Canada?" Riches explores the growth of food banks in Canada and their role in advancing the human right to food, its effectiveness in achieving food security and its contribution, positive or negative, to

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<sup>9</sup> Don Kossick. "Building a Citizens' Good Food Policy" *Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives: Saskatchewan Notes*. Vol. 3 Issue 3. (April 2004) <[http://www.policyalternatives.ca/documents/Saskatchewan\\_Pubs/sasknotes3\\_3.pdf](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/documents/Saskatchewan_Pubs/sasknotes3_3.pdf)>

<sup>10</sup> Kossick, 2.

welfare reform policies.<sup>11</sup> Riches argues that the food banks in the past twenty years have proven to be an inadequate response to food poverty, all the while enabling governments to neglect hunger and nutritional health.<sup>12</sup> Providing some details on the origins of food banks in the early 1980's as emergency relief programs, Riches moves through to the late 1990's early 2000's and discusses how these food banks are operating now. He provides data on the amount of food, in tones or pounds, that food banks distribute but also offers direct quotes from patrons of various food banks. Using Toronto Daily Bread and Greater Vancouver Food Bank as examples of long standing operations in urban areas that serve a variety of people on a daily basis, Riches makes note of the fact that not all charitable food organizations involve picking up a bushel of food; soup kitchens, community kitchens, collective kitchens, or school meal programs are also examples of these charity based food suppliers.<sup>13</sup> While recognizing that corporate partnerships, desire for a strong network and connection to the government as their charitable partner were factors that led to the institutionalization of food banks as well as identifying key turning points in these processes, Riches continuously reverts back to the question of the relationship between food banks and the improvement of food poverty, promotion of adequate nutrition and achievement of food security.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly enough, when discussing the usage of food banks Riches makes special mention of adult students, who comprise 9.6 per cent of households accessing

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<sup>11</sup> Graham Riches. "Food Banks and Food Security: Welfare Reform, Human Rights and Social Policy. Lessons from Canada?" *Social Policy and Administration* Vol. 36 No. 6 (December 2006): 648.

<sup>12</sup> Riches, 661.

<sup>13</sup> Riches, 665.

<sup>14</sup> Riches, 654.

these resources.<sup>15</sup> He also notes that between 1 and 3 per cent of the total number of university student population uses food banks.<sup>16</sup> When examining the necessity for an establishment like the Spoon that strives to provide affordable healthy and socially conscious food, it is evident that an establishment such as this would serve the tangible needs of students but also provide advocacy and education through their advertising and programs. Otherwise these students may alternatively turn to food banks, most of which, as Riches points out, are forced to ration supplies and are not able to effectively advocate for welfare reforms to remove pressure from food banks and adequately provide for citizens.<sup>17</sup>

Another article that Riches published in 2002, "The Human Right to Food: Engaging in the Debate About Globalization, Employment and the Quality of Life," examines first world hunger in terms of the politics of welfare and food security.<sup>18</sup> By stating, "food security and the human right to food have remained largely unconsidered as being essential both to the eradication of hunger and to the advancement of social and economic rights," Riches is again pointing to the neglect of the governments to wholly implement the resolutions they have agreed to at the international level. This is referred to as the 'depoliticisation of hunger' throughout the article.<sup>19</sup> He uses this article to discuss the political aspect of food as a human right; "to deny access to the means of

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<sup>15</sup> Riches, 654.

<sup>16</sup> Riches, 654.

<sup>17</sup> Riches, 655 – 657.

<sup>18</sup> Graham Riches. "The Human Right to Food: Engaging in the Debate About Globalization, Employment and the Quality of Life" *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Virtual Library: Policy Section*. (2003) <<http://www.fao.org/righttofood/KC/downloads/vl/en/details/213064.htm>> (last accessed 29 November 2008)

<sup>19</sup> Riches, 4.

life is also to deny community and democracy.”<sup>20</sup> Riches provides thoughts on the residual welfare state wherein one’s access to some form of social assistance is based on the value of their labour in the market place.<sup>21</sup> This in turn affects one’s food security and jeopardizes their potential of an enriched quality of life because of inadequate assistance. In economic terms food is referred to as a commodity, but an intimate one that has social and cultural connects to a person’s human existence.<sup>22</sup> Riches also introduces the concept of the decommodification of social rights.<sup>23</sup> This phrase essentially implies that each person is entitled to their social rights, that there should not be a price on them, as well as recognition of people’s needs such as food and nutrition. He argues that people have a right to control their food systems locally and nationally.<sup>24</sup> Again there is connection to the organizational values of the Seasoned Spoon of working with local farmers to acquire products grown in the region. This encourages and upholds people’s control of their local food systems while contributing to the local economy but also providing patrons of the Spoon with fresh ingredients of the meals produced at the café. Also the Spoon provides job opportunities with wages that allow for an adequate standard of living; the wages at the Spoon are among the highest part time student hourly wage at Trent University.

Valerie Tarasuk is another noted scholar with numerous articles on a variety of subtopics in the field of food security and social policy. One such article, “A Critical Examination of Community Based Responses to Household Food Insecurity in

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<sup>20</sup> Riches, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Riches, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Riches, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Riches, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Riches, 4.

Canada.” discusses the emergence of food banks and the alternative community kitchens, and the correlation with growing food insecurity and health issues. Much of the discussion is similar to that of Graham Riches article on food banks and food security however she concludes that more work needs to be done to find viable solutions to inadequate access to food. Ideally for Tarasuk that solution would be to lessen people’s economic constraints allowing them to improve their quality of life.<sup>25</sup> Tarasuk is frequently cited in other works examining food security and has worked in conjunction with her peers to develop new works. The household and food banks within the context of food security are her main concerns and will be further explored to ensure that a variety of texts are incorporated into the project.

Rachel Engler-Stringer and Shawna Berenbaum explore food security in collective kitchens in Saskatoon, Toronto and Montreal in 2000. Using qualitative methods this article is much different than the other articles thus far employed. The major inquiry of the study was, “How do collective kitchens address food security issues for their participants?”<sup>26</sup> Their findings revealed that the reason that most participants became involved in collective kitchens was largely based on their meager financial situation.<sup>27</sup> Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum breakdown their findings to examine four elements of food security: quantity, quality, dignity and acceptability.<sup>28</sup> The participants of collective kitchens and this study do have at least a perceived increase in their overall food security, but like the other authors noted previous, Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum

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<sup>25</sup> Valerie Tarasuk. “A Critical Examination of Community Based Responses to Household Food Insecurity in Canada.” *Health Education and Behavior* Vol. 28 (2001): 496.

<sup>26</sup> Shawna Berenbaum and Rachel Engler-Stringer. “Exploring Food Security with Collective Kitchen Participants in Three Canadian Cities.” *Qualitative Health Research* Vol. 17 No. 1 (January 2007): 76.

<sup>27</sup> Berenbaum and Engler-Stringer, 79.

<sup>28</sup> Berenbaum and Engler-Stringer, 79.

stress that something long term needs to be implemented.<sup>29</sup> Although collective kitchens do not fit the exact model of the Spoon there are some similarities in so far as it is a group of people, both paid and volunteer, that come together to cook nutritious meals, however collective kitchens benefit only those directly involved in the preparation of the meals. Collectives are not usually charities; they are comprised of people bringing a few items to make more and better meals than they could have on their own and not food distribution sites or soup kitchens. Also, the authors do stress that best practices should be shared between collectives and other groups which leads to the information sharing and institutional memory aspect of this project.

These Canadian scholars all make note of the fact that there is little work produced about the initiatives taking place on the ground to encourage food security, such as the Seasoned Spoon. The authors each mention that programs that offer more than just inexpensive food are part of the key to food security for communities and individuals. The integration of advocacy and education with food service that offers an outlet for students and community to consume a healthy and socially and environmentally conscious meal in the same place they can help to cook, learn about community gardens and participate in social justice campaigns is what makes the Seasoned Spoon café so unique. The academic evidence helps to support the Spoon's overall mandate and goals, however it is imperative that the actual operation of the Spoon be examined to help determine the reality of the Spoon's endeavors and possible ways to assist in more closely adhering to their mandate

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<sup>29</sup> Berenbaum and Engler-Stinger, 83.

## How the Seasoned Spoon Addresses Food Security

The Seasoned Spoon Café is a relatively small organization that has quite a big mandate! While not all points of their mandate are directly linked to food, there is a great deal of overlap between each of the statements that together lend towards increasing food security within the community. Interviews with a number of staff and volunteers, students and faculty from both past and present have provided a great deal of information about what the Spoon provides and have even uncovered some areas that could be improved upon to ultimately help maximize the level of food security within the community and for some individuals.

Firstly a number of interviewees identified what the community was that the Seasoned Spoon serves. The location of the Seasoned Spoon is on the main campus of Trent University, within the main building of Champlain College, in other words, "its kind of hard to find!"<sup>30</sup> Seeing as the university's main campus is located north of the city center of Peterborough, accessible only by car or public transit, it is not very convenient for the greater community to access the café. This therefore leaves those that frequent or attend Trent University as the main clientele of the Spoon. With that said, for the purpose of this report, the community referred to will be Trent University's students, staff, faculty and anyone else that frequents.

"To serve healthy, organic, locally grown, affordable food," is the first listed goal, and arguably the premise, of the Seasoned Spoon.<sup>31</sup> As a vegetarian restaurant on campus its purpose is to serve meals that include ingredients that are, as much as

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<sup>30</sup> Robyn Smith, "Spoon Survey," email to the author, 5 March 2009

<sup>31</sup> "About Us" *The Seasoned Spoon*, 12 January 2009. <<http://www.trentu.ca/stuorg/seasonedspoon/about.html>>



possible, locally sourced and organic, and when necessary fair trade certified.

Therefore, with much more wholesome ingredients, the food is more nutritional vis-à-vis the options offered by larger corporations on campus. When asked how the Seasoned Spoon addresses food security within the community, most participants referred back to this idea of healthy and nutritional food offered at a comparable price to that available elsewhere in the community. Having the café established provides a venue for consistently healthy and delicious food, Spoon staff member and long time supporter Robyn Smith notes.<sup>32</sup> While the humble beginnings of the Spoon with the Stone Soup Project offered just soup intermittently throughout the year, it is safe to say that having a permanent home with set hours for the organizations greatly increases the level of food security of the community in so far as accessibility and availability.

While the goals of the Seasoned Spoon do not explicitly state that they are aiming to be available to all members of the community, and anyone else that would like to join, but there is a general consensus amongst the members that their work does not only extend to a few. With that said, physical accessibility was often identified by interviewees as an area of concern in terms of fulfilling their mandate. When asked to define where the Seasoned Spoon was located, they each mentioned the numerous stairs involved in actually getting to the café. Being located on the upper floor of Champlain College in the former Junior Common Room, the stairs are numbered and narrow making it difficult to spot and to maneuver. While discussion accessibility with the Café Manager however, she noted that there was in fact an elevator attached to the café but that it was connected to the back corner of the kitchen not into the general

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<sup>32</sup> Smith, "Spoon Survey."

dining area. Other interviewees also pointed out the previously unknown elevator but one also added that, "If I was the person in a wheel chair I would feel very uncomfortable going through that kitchen."<sup>33</sup> Even if there is the means to access a space, such as the Seasoned Spoon, it is not very welcoming or in line with their mandate to operate like this.

The discussion of location however is closely linked to that of finances. Seeing at the Seasoned Spoon operates with only a levy as their real source of income this forces them to be reliant on what is available and given to them. The current space they are operating out of was donated by the College and is rent free and does not charge for utilities, which frees up a great deal of money in and of itself. There have been talks in the past, according to some of those that have been involved long term, to expand. Sylvia Dick, the current Educational Outreach Coordinator, said that there have been talks to open a second location elsewhere, on campus or perhaps downtown at Traill College, but she and others have a number of concerns with a satellite location. There has also been talks according to one longstanding member to one day take over the current Senior Common Room as well because it would be donated from the College, it is on the ground floor of the building and would offer a more welcoming atmosphere to attract potential clientele. A move like this would help to solve accessibility problems as well. It should be noted however, that with the friendly nature of all employees it would be unlikely that any potential patron would be left aside; within the interviews they assured that if approached they would find a way to serve the patron.

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<sup>33</sup> Annie Whitty, Personal Interview, 19 March 2009.

Affordability has been an issue of contention with the Seasoned Spoon as well. While some have brushed aside the issue of pricing, others have begun to push for it to be at the forefront of the organizations business operations. Karen Sutherland, the current Co-Treasurer on the Board and a co-founder of the Spoon, discussed a former TCCBE project that had priced out different soup recipes by the pot even detailing the average cost of each ingredient. She gives the example that the student found that a pot of cream of mushroom soup was nearly three times the cost of a pot of lentil soup.<sup>34</sup> With a business background Karen notes that this should be central to the operation of any business, profit or not for profit.<sup>35</sup> This connects to food security in so far as it would assist the Spoon in coming up with a more standard pricing system to potentially increase their gross margin on items. While they are a not for profit they could allocate these funds towards different initiatives like a free meal day or being able to host workshops for free. Also it would ensure that patrons of the café are getting the lowest price for nutritional food because the Spoon could pick and choose a variety of meals that are still healthy but cost a little less to make than others.

Pricing is also an area of discussion when examining how the Seasoned Spoon compares to the universities food service provider. Aramark Canada Ltd. is the food service provider at Trent University, with a cafeteria in each College, a Tim Hortons location and a few other snack bars, it holds the monopoly on campus. Aramark's prices are widely seen as too high for food that is greatly lacking nutritional value. However, Aramark explains these costs in so far as having one of the highest paid staff in Ontario

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<sup>34</sup> Karen Sutherland, Personal Interview, 26 March 2009

<sup>35</sup> Sutherland, Interview.

(compared to other universities food service staff) and operating four separate kitchens. The Seasoned Spoon boasts that the costs are “affordable” for their healthy and nutritious meals, but as Sylvia mentioned in her interview, “saying something is affordable is tricky because some people think ‘it’s not for me!’”<sup>36</sup> Many of the interviewees stressed that although the Spoon’s costs may have slightly risen over the past year, the nutritional value, the time put into preparation and overhead costs of the meal far outweigh what is offered by Aramark for a similar price. An argument could be made that with the meals having a set price and not on a sliding scale, by donation or even free, it increases the gap between those that need nutritious food and their ability to get it.

However, with that said it is important to also recognize a few initiatives that the Seasoned Spoon has carried on throughout its years. Karen Sutherland pointed out that when they were the Stone Soup Project they would purchase Stickling’s bread, as it is made at a local bakery with local ingredients, and offer it by donation.<sup>37</sup> This tradition carries on today, and as Karen said, “Someone could take 3 or 4 pieces of bread and no one would bat an eye and not put any money into the donation box and somebody might put two dollars in and take a couple of pieces, it seems to balance out.”<sup>38</sup> Another initiative that isn’t as widely known is that for volunteering for two hours entitles the volunteer to a meal free of charge. While Karen points out that this does not necessarily equate to a proper wage of any kind, it is something that may help someone if they have some time but not a lot of money.

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<sup>36</sup> Sylvia Dick, Personal Interview, 10 March 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Sutherland, Interview.

<sup>38</sup> Sutherland, Interview.

As some academics describe there should be an academic or learning component to successful food justice endeavors. The Spoon offers variety of learning experiences in a variety of contexts. The Educational Outreach Coordinator, a position currently held by Sylvia Dick, works closely to coordinate different programs, workshops and projects that both help the Spoon and those that participate. This year alone they have offered a local pie making, sprouting and herbology workshop that were open to anyone to join. In each they used local products when required, but more importantly these workshops and others that have been offered instruct participants how to grow, prepare and even dispose of food in a sustainable and ethical manner. This puts the power into the people's hands to use the knowledge that is conveyed to them to through these workshops, therefore heightening their likelihood of experiencing food security.

Coordinator Annie Whitty stresses the important role that local farmers and local products have on food security. As Sylvia notes as well, purchasing from local farmers assists in their food security as well by providing them with a sufficient income.<sup>39</sup> The Seasoned Spoon often chooses to use local over organic products but it is a gentle balancing act that has to be undertaken for each item. The roof top gardens and the few acres that Trent uses to grow a variety of crops contribute to the local and organic produce that is used in the Seasoned Spoon. These areas are also an academic and community link to the Seasoned Spoon as a number of courses, faculty and volunteers participate in a variety of capacities to ultimately produce crops for the café. Purchasing locally and even growing produce on a small scale helps with the general local

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<sup>39</sup> Dick, Interview.

economy, moves away from the industrial food model of prepared or frozen foods and encourages sustainability.

From its humble beginnings as the Stone Soup Project to today's well established café the Seasoned Spoon has continuously initiated new projects that offer more and better means for the community to achieve greater food security. While there are still some gaps that could be filled in the organizations operation, it is important to recognize the achievements of the Spoon. From being allowed to be open only two days a week to now operating 8 months of the year, five days a week and even offering catering services, the Spoon has broadened their menu, improved their access, and in turn assisted more members of the community. Although the Seasoned Spoon does not wholly solve issues of food security within the Trent Community it has without a doubt helped to address them and provide a better option to what is otherwise offered.

### **Suggestions for the Seasoned Spoon**

While it is clear to see that the Spoon has already begun to address different aspects of food security there is always room for improvement in any organization. Some of the suggestions for the Seasoned Spoon are concentrated more on the business aspects of the organization while others provide some suggestions and starting points for new initiatives that the organization could consider. All suggestions are made with the hope that they in some way will help the Seasoned Spoon continue to be a leader amongst other university's student organizations and to continue to increase their efforts of helping students, staff, faculty and other community members achieve a fair and consistent level of food security.

With the hiring of a new bookkeeper and having been formally incorporated in December 2008 the Seasoned Spoon is taking more steps to operate as a business instead of just a working group. They have also created some new positions such as the Café Manager to help with continuity and operating the café itself. Hopefully the Spoon is able to continue on this track and establish a more formalized pricing and purchasing process. If this step does occur it could potentially lead to a higher gross margin that would allow the Seasoned Spoon to provide special events like meals by donation, free meals or workshops without a cover charge. The intent would be to maintain the prices that the Spoon currently charges but to better manage the finances to allow for more activities to be carried out. Also, additional funds could help the Spoon address their longstanding efforts of environmentalism by purchasing energy efficient appliances or even just different more sustainable and eco-friendly products, something they do not currently have funds for.

If possible, as there are many factors that need to be considered to determine the feasibility of some projects, it would be beneficial not only to the image and mission of the Seasoned Spoon but also really reach out to those in need by offering different meal options. As previously mentioned, a day or so a month that was simply by donation or determined on a sliding scale would be a great move for the Spoon. Using the pricing information on soup that has previously been provided to the Seasoned Spoon and other knowledge of approximate costs could be utilized to plan a meal that is still just as nutritious and delicious as any other, but simply less expensive therefore minimizing the costs to the Spoon. Also if available a volunteer could serve portions to ensure that as many people as possible are able to eat what is being served. If planned,

advertised and executed properly, an event like this could garner a lot of new patrons for the future and encourage traffic into the Spoon. One might even be surprised at the generosity of the community when people are simply asked to donate what they can for a meal that has some very good intentions behind it!

Advertising of the meal for volunteering system or even formalizing it could be beneficial to the Spoon. All interviewees expressed how great it was to have fresh faces each year join the Seasoned Spoons volunteers, staff or Board of Directors. This would be another way to bring people into the Seasoned Spoon, alleviate some stress of trying to find enough volunteers and also if needed cut back on paid staff hours.<sup>40</sup> This endeavor would be mutually beneficial as the Spoon would have a new member and the volunteer would have a good meal.

Although the Seasoned Spoon already has workshops set up, I think that it is an area that has great potential for growth and change. As mentioned already helping to subsidize the costs of workshops so that they are free or as inexpensive as possible would be a great start to encouraging participation. Karen mentioned in her interview that with a new Educational Outreach Coordinator each year, the focus of what will be offered changes, which is great.<sup>41</sup> However, it may be beneficial to establish something that carries over each year. While the Seasoned Spoon provides healthy, affordable food it would be great if they could actually teach members of the community how to make that food for themselves, where to get local and organic ingredients, how to

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<sup>40</sup> The Seasoned Spoon only receives a lump sum amount of funding from the Ontario Work Study Program and the Trent International Program pays the wages of one position. This suggestion is not to be made with the intention of cutting the pay of staff members, as that would undoubtedly affect the staff's food security, but rather to help subsidize it with volunteer hours.

<sup>41</sup> Sutherland, Interview.



preserve items, etc. This would not only send people home with an actual meal but would provide them with the knowledge of purchasing, preparing and storing food and in effect heightening their chances of food security.

These suggestions are made simply from my experience volunteering at the Seasoned Spoon and interviewing some members that are truly committed to the work undertaken there each year. A new set of eyes and ears would likely provide a whole new and equally valuable set of suggestions, but it is with great hope that the Spoon considers some suggestions made and continues to grow and prosper as it has over the last five years at Trent University.

## **Conclusion**

This report provides both primary and secondary resources that allow the reader to put the Seasoned Spoon café into both a practical and theoretical context. It is clear to see that while operations like the Seasoned Spoon in a sense allow corporations to continue to serve food that is under par and overpriced, it has provided a very necessary service to many members of the community whose dietary needs were not being sufficiently met by the current food service provider of the University. The Seasoned Spoon definitely helps address the issue of food security amongst students, staff and faculty that visit the café each year.

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## **Part Three**

## **Research Journal**

The following is a journal of my experience researching, interviewing and documenting the Seasoned Spoon, similar organizations, food security and institutional memory. It is listed in chronological order starting from the very beginning of the project through to completion of the report. Entries were made each time a new step was taken or something new was uncovered. This journal is intended to show the progression of the project over the past few months and hopefully provide some insight to my findings and thoughts throughout.

### **October 9, 2008**

I met with Barb Woolner, Trent Center for Community Based Education (TCCBE), and Annie Whitty and Sylvia Dick, Seasoned Spoon Café, at the Seasoned Spoon to discuss the Project Agreement and expectations of the project. During this meeting we also negotiated the receivables from the Seasoned Spoon. It was agreed that the Seasoned Spoon would provide a photocopy card with 150 copies on it, the remainder of which would be returned at the end of the project, reimbursement for one black ink cartridge, and long distance phone calls from the Seasoned Spoon Office.

### **October 10, 2008**

I began work on the Project Agreement. I adapted some information from the original proposal from the Seasoned Spoon for a TCCBE project to fit within the guidelines of the Agreement. I also used the course syllabus from CAST 477 to fill in sections of the Agreement including dates, items to hand in, etc.

**October 12, 2008**

After reworking and rewriting the Project Agreement, I have submitted the initial draft to Annie Whitty and Sylvia Dick, at the Seasoned Spoon, Barb Woolner at the (TCCBE), and Professor Jim Struthers for editing. I have asked them to submit it back to me by the end of the week so I have enough time to make adjustments and submit the final version to start the project off!

**October 13, 2008**

I met with Meri Kim Oliver, Director of Student Affairs, and asked if she could contact other universities Student Affairs departments regarding food service providers at other universities within Ontario. She was going to a meeting with representatives from all of the other universities, and was the perfect timing to get some of this information! I have begun to receive responses back from these representatives and Meri Kim, and have begun to compile them.

**October 14, 2008**

I have started to look for some information on institutional memory but have already hit a wall, so to speak. In searches for articles, in a variety of databases and journals, nothing that seems even remotely applicable turns up. Even though I tried about a dozen different keywords none seemed to fit quite right. I went to the library today as well to try to talk to a research librarian and hopefully get some assistance but that didn't go as I thought either. Rather than helping me with key words or finding sources

they tried to talk me through how to use TOPCAT and index searches. Going to keep looking!

### **October 17, 2008**

Today I handed in my Research Proposal to Prof. Struthers. Because of time constraints with getting feedback from all, I was only able to hand in the most recent version of the Project Agreement. In the proposal I outlined that I intended to look at institutional memory for the Seasoned Spoon and food security for CAST 477, and hopefully find some overlap throughout my research. I discussed the sources I intended to use, some of which I had already examined thoroughly, others which needed close investigation, and a few that had been recommended to me as well. I also outlined how I will rely on informational interviews to gather first hand experiences in order to formulate recommendations and observations for the project. This initial proposal also allowed me to do some preliminary research on

### **October 26, 2008**

After some delays I have received feedback from all parties involved and have been able to draft the final version of the Project Agreement. I have also set times to meet with each of the signatories to complete the document. I have now contacted Sylvia for information on coming in to complete volunteer hours

## **November 7, 2008**

I contacted Katherine (Kat) Lapointe from the Seasoned Spoon to arrange a suitable time for me to come and volunteer. I went in today and worked with Sylvia in the kitchen doing some baking from 9:30 am – 11:30 am. The main kitchen is adjacent to the Seasoned Spoon Café, however Alumni House allows the Spoon to use their kitchen Monday, Wednesday and Fridays to do preparation and baking as well as storage for supplies. This has been a long standing relationship from what Sylvia tells me, but not a formal one. From my experience within the University many of the other space arrangements have been made more formal with written agreements. I also worked in the kitchen this day with Aviva and Robyn; I helped with dishes and preparation. From our conversations there, I learn that the Spoon orders bulk non perishable food staples, like spices, lentils, or flour and stores them, whereas the fresh ingredients are bought as needed and when they are in season. So the menu is consistently changing, although they do have a menu binder that contains most of their traditional recipes.

## **November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

After back and forth contact with Kat Lapointe, we arranged another shift for me which I did early this morning. Kat's position coordinates the volunteer schedule for the Spoon. She has a long list of volunteers, as well as some students that are completing TCCBE projects, all of whom need to be evenly spread out throughout the week. So it took a little while to find a time in the Spoon's volunteer schedule and mine! This day I worked with Robyn in the kitchen preparing food for the day. She worked on the soup as I prepared the tofu wraps and sauce for them. It was nice because it gave me a chance



to talk with a long term employee and patron of the Spoon, get time to look around the kitchen which is the hub of the Spoon, and see how the Spoon functions before the doors open.

### **December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008**

Today I handed in my Literature Review for my course component of the TCCBE project. Since I am doing a TCCBE project, the components I hand in have to be slightly adapted to make sense. For the literature review I discussed not just the secondary sources I had begun to seek out but the primary sources as well. So, for this entry I am doing some catch up as well because I have not documented in this journal my research and writing the literature review.

When I began research I yet again tried to find academic information on institutional memory, as that is the language used in the project agreement. I also tried search words like "institutional knowledge," "best practice," "student organization practices," and others hoping to find something on student run services, co-operatives or alternative food service providers and the importance or usefulness of institutional memory. Again I found nothing that was appropriate, which was really quite shocking to me. I used Scholars Portal, JSTOR, Business, Canadian and Political studies databases, specific journals, but nothing turned up. This left me very frustrated as I felt this was a very important part of the project. In this time I had a meeting with Barb Woolner from TCCBE and discussed this situation. She recommended talking to the Spoon supervisors, but thought that I should just note that from my extensive searches I

was unable to find anything and with this project, I was, more or less, creating the Spoon's own resource.

After talking to Barb I decided to focus more on the food security aspect of the project. I began by researching Canadian specific document on food security. Starting with gathering some information on the Canada's participation at the World Food Summit of 1996 in Rome I was directed to Canada's Action Plan for Food Security, a government document outlining their plan to address issues of food security. This helped me put the Seasoned Spoon, and organizations similar to it, into the broader context of food security in Canada. There are also national and provincial organizations that help to address food security; some in terms of publications others by actually providing food and nutritional knowledge like the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives.

From there I also found plenty of journal articles, most discussing Canada specifically. Graham Riches, a professor at University of British Columbia, has written numerous articles on food security and food banks in particular. His point is one that I have personally never thought about as an average person; food banks, which were originally meant to provide temporary relief, now relieve the government from having to provide those services at all. I found this a very intriguing argument, as it makes sense but just isn't something that had ever really crossed my mind before. There are also other articles that I discuss that look at food banks, collective kitchens, and government policies, but Graham Riches articles still stands out as something very applicable to this research.

**December 11, 2008**

Finally heard back from Barb! The TCCBE has been having technical issues as they are switching their emails, so I spent some time to update Barb on where I was on the project and ask some questions too. I forwarded her copies of my assignments from my course and also began to set up appointments with Barb every three weeks in the new semester. This way we have some face to face time to talk about the project.

Throughout this whole process too I have spent a fair amount of time emailing my contacts at the Seasoned Spoon to arrange volunteer times, ask questions, coordinate meetings, and more. I haven't been recording each time I email in this journal as it would take far too long and be pointless, but felt at this halfway point it was necessary to mention that I had been spending time on this as well.

**December 2008**

Over the holidays I took time to compile contact information on all of the other organizations that I planned on contacting to discuss their work. Thus far I have information for various members of the Seasoned Spoon, Hot Yam (U of T), The Garden Spot (Carleton), People's Potato (Concordia), and the Tea Room (Queen's). I am focusing on these few places as they have the most information available on them thus far, have clear contact information, and most of all have similar values and operations to the Seasoned Spoon.

### **January 15, 2009**

Today I completed my last shift at the Seasoned Spoon. I asked that the three shifts I complete be at different times, on different days, and doing different tasks so that I could get a well rounded experience at the Spoon. As I mentioned before, I already did some baking and cleaning, and food preparation, so today I asked if I could work at the front in the café. I don't have any cash training so Kat did that, but I help restock the food and beverages, clear tables, chat with customers, and more. As the café quieted down I took a few minutes to sit and talk with Annie about the project, as I hadn't had a chance to speak with her recently. We discussed what questions Annie would like answers to from this project and she passed on some other information to me that might be helpful. It was nice to be at the front of the Seasoned Spoon, talking with Annie, because it gave me a chance to really get a sense of the atmosphere of the Café.

### **January 22, 2009**

I attended the meeting of the Seasoned Spoon Board this morning at the café. In attendance were Karen Sutherland, Annie Whitty, Sylvia Dick, Kim Wilson, Kat Lapointe, and a few other Board members. Minutes were taken, and votes seemed to be taken by consensus. Compared to many of the meetings I have attended for other organizations within the University this one was a lot less structured, perhaps because of there were just a few people or maybe it spoke to the way the Spoon itself is also run, with a fairly open and laid back approach. After the staff reports the meeting seemed to disband, although some carried on to finish other business of the Board.

Before this I have asked Kim Wilson, a Board member, numerous times for any documents about the structure and operations of the Board. I have been assured that she would get them to me but still haven't heard anything. I have contacted others about this as well hoping maybe someone else can pass something along to me as well! I guess this is just one of the joys of research – the fact that so much of it really relies on other people!

#### **February 4, 2009**

Sylvia and I met downtown this evening to just go over the progress of the assignment so far and get some more tips and information that will be useful. She shared with me some of the things she learned at the conference she recently attended for the Seasoned Spoon and offered to put out a notice of my research to Spoon employees and volunteers so I can get some feedback from them as well. We also discussed what she would like to see the final report look like. I provided my ideas and she gave me some helpful hints from what she has seen in past projects that they liked or noticed that it could be improved, which was very helpful.

#### **February 6, 2009**

An email was sent to the Spoon staff asking them to participate in the questionnaire. Hopefully some members respond so that I can have a full list of participants ready for when the questionnaire is complete.

### **February 10, 2009**

After trying to wait for information that I was hoping to use to formulate my questions, I decided to move forward without it. On January 29<sup>th</sup> I sent out the questions to Sylvia, Annie and Barb to review and provide feedback on them. Sylvia and Barb both replied with some great advice which I used to fine tune the questionnaire. After meeting with Prof. Struthers today to go over my version of the Ethical Review forms, I will fix up these as well and hopefully get through this process quickly so I can start my interviews!

### **February 25, 2009**

I received the Spoon's bylaws and I am not entirely sure if this is the most current version or if it is the formal edition either as they seem informal, ill formatted, and have some notes throughout. Having been on different levels of student government for the past four years I am well aware of what by laws and constitutions and policies look like, or should look like. Perhaps because the Spoon is only a few years old they do not have many established regulations, but for the sake of the Board as they carry a lot of responsibility in the organization I would think they would want fairly set rules about their roles and responsibilities within the organization.

### **March 5, 2009**

I received back my first response to the questionnaire. A staff member of the Spoon opted to complete it electronically. An email was sent out to all staff and volunteers of the Spoon asking them to volunteer to complete the questionnaire, and have received some initial response.

I have also compiled the contact list of other organizations like the People's Potato, Hot Yam, Tea Room, etc. I will contact them in the coming week to find volunteers to complete this survey.

### **March 10, 2009**

I have completed a few in-person interviews, one with the Café Manager and one with the Educational Outreach Coordinator. I am starting to realize how much time it takes just to schedule a meeting for an hour! Even though I am able to respond within a few hours to each email, it is waiting on the other person to respond that is the problem and time consuming aspects of interviews. Reflecting back I wish I had started interviews earlier in the semester, but this was the first time I have ever done interviews or primary research even!

By this time as well I have not heard back from my initial outreach to other organizations outside of Trent. All but two of the organizations were only able to be contacted via email, so I have to play the waiting game with them as well. I will be sending another email shortly requesting again because some of the other cafes have group emails which may affect the speed of reply.

### **March 22, 2009**

Almost all of my Seasoned Spoon interviews are complete! I had a good number of responses overall, with a fairly broad range that included young and old, new and veterans, students, staff and faculty. I was even able to get a hold of Jennifer Clapp, a

former Trent professor and Spoon supporter, and am trying to set something up with Linda Swanston, a former Trent student and Spoon supporter.

I have also since received a response from 4 people from the Tea Room and Hot Yam in Toronto. I immediately responded with the questionnaire and consent form as well as some times of availability for telephone interviews, online chats, or even in person for those in Toronto. Here's hoping that I can squeeze in some interviews to work into the project!

### **March 30, 2009**

The end of the semester is near and much of the project is complete – I am waiting, and growing somewhat impatient and flustered, for response from other organizations. I have, in total, sent 3 emails to the groups or individuals that replied and even placed calls to those that I have phone numbers for, but still no response. I have consulted with Barb Woolner as to what to do next and made Sylvia aware of the situation too. The information I have gained from the interviews at the Seasoned Spoon is invaluable. Talking to more senior members like Karen Sutherland and Annie Whitty have provided me with a very different perspective than that of a student and are able to shed light on the start up of the café and the more business aspect of things.

### **April 5, 2009**

I've emailed Prof. Struthers and been granted an extension to try to get in touch with the members of other organizations one last time. If all else fails I will move forward with the report with the information I have. Barb has suggested for me to compile a list of



contacts to include in the project so that if someone from the Spoon or TCCBE wanted to get in touch with them next year. I am very disappointed that I was not able to get a hold of anyone yet, as I was quite hopeful getting a few responses initially.

As I have been reviewing the interviews so far, I have noticed that there is quite a bit of overlap in answers between questions and between participants answers overall. Many people identified the same areas that needed to be focused on in terms of institutional memory and they often agreed on how the Spoon addressed food security for Trent. It has been interesting how the answers also differ from the participants simply because of their own personalities, but also their position in the organization, their age, etc.

Unfortunately I only had female participants from the Seasoned Spoon pool, so I wonder if a male participant's answers would have been much different. The reports thus far are shaping up to be much, much longer than I had originally anticipated! I feel like I have learned a lot from this experience about the Seasoned Spoon, food security, institutional memory, other organizations, etc. Since I have never done a project like this or primary research for that matter it would have been beneficial to have some experience in earlier courses. I have had a lot of support from all those involved (TCCBE, Prof Struthers and the Spoon). I wish I had been able to start this a little earlier in the year however because I feel like there is still a lot more I could do especially in terms of the institutional memory. It would be great to actually demonstrate some of my suggestions or to be able to see them in action. Hopefully this report is everything that both Prof. Struthers and the Spoon were looking for and that they are in some way beneficial.

## **Part Four**

## **Institutional Memory: What it Means and Why its Useful**

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Institutional memory is often thought of as, but not limited to, a collective set of facts, concepts, experiences and know-how held by a group of people that are effectively translated into useful knowledge and wisdom to help preserve a group's ideology, way of work, etc.

While there is little academic information available about the value or effect of institutional memory on student organizations, those with personal experience can attest to its necessity.

This pamphlet provides an overview of what a student organization usually looks like as well as some of the problems they face in terms of maintaining institutional memory. There is also a list of suggestions that student organizations can use to help implement strategies to ensure better quality and more frequent documentation of their specific group. Much of this information was taken from research interviews with students and volunteers from Trent University in the Winter of 2009.

**Created by: Rebecca Anderson**

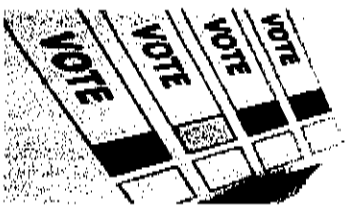
Contact: [rebeccaanderson@trintu.ca](mailto:rebeccaanderson@trintu.ca)

Created for the Seasoned Spoon Cafe and Trent University Student Clubs and Groups in Collaboration with the Trent Center for Community Based Education

## Characteristics

### of Student Organizations

- Offer a variety of services to students that range from food production to health benefits to social events



- Run primarily by students but often have a full or part time staff member that is not a student
- No or few permanent student staff members
- Experience frequent interruptions in service during exams, reading weeks, summer, etc.
- Lack formal management or business skills in terms of accounting and structure
- Students are elected or appointed into positions, have equal membership as part of a co-op or include specific students based on program, enrollment, interest, culture, etc.

## Issues Encountered

### by Student Organizations

- High staff turnover rates affect current levels of institutional memory
- Orientating staff members as they join throughout the year
- Maintaining a suitable level of accurate institutional memory in a variety of mediums (i.e. electronic, written, oral, visual, etc.)



- Making resources about the organization available to members and general public
- Commitment of non-paid or under-paid staff and affect on quality and quantity of resources produced

## Solutions

### for Student Organization

- Provide orientation days in the fall and winter for new and old members
- Create and provide an orientation hand-out for all incoming members that outline key aspects of the organization, roles of members, contact information, etc.
- Request that members, particularly staff and volunteers that are key players in the operation of the organization, submit year end reports with a synopsis of their role, helpful information and suggestions
- Obtain additional or allocate funds to provide extra paid hours for staff members to document and compile the current and prior history or the organization
- Coordinate with the ICGBE to offer a project that addresses institutional memory and documenting it

