

Neighbour to Neighbour's Hamilton Community Food Centre
Case for Support – submitted December 2020

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Program Description

The Hamilton Community Food Centre (CFC) is currently operating in its 5th year in the Rolston neighbourhood. Through a partnership between Neighbour to Neighbour, Community Food Centres Canada, the City of Hamilton's Public health and various funding supporters, the CFC has been able to tackle the complex layers of poverty, food insecurity, poor health, and social isolation. Programs bring people together to grow, cook, share and advocate for good food while building a healthier community.

What We Know

(Beyond Hunger report, CFCC, 2020; PROOF, Tarasuk et. al, 2020; Code Red report Hamilton, Steve Buist, Patrick DeLuca 2010 & 2015)

Those who experience food insecurity report the following negative impacts:

- Compromised physical and mental health
 - Barriers to employment
 - Increased social isolation – strains personal relationships
 - Impedes one's ability to celebrate culture
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- Black and racialized households are 5 times more likely to experience food insecurity.
 - In "code red" neighbourhoods in Hamilton, 1 in 5 children experiences food insecurity.
 - Those who live in low income neighbourhoods live, on average, 21 fewer years than residents in wealthier neighbourhoods.
 - The Community Food Centre engages with a culturally diverse array of residents. The majority of participants were born outside of Canada, representing 21 different countries of origin.

Community Safety and Well-Being

- The City of Hamilton's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan aims to ensure that all residents in the community feel safe, have a sense of belonging and can meet their needs for education, healthcare, food, housing, income and social and cultural expression. N2N's Community Food Centre is situated in Rolston and is one of few community gathering places for people in the heart of this neighbourhood. The CFC is committed to continue creating spaces of safety

and belonging for residents. Our annual impact reports indicate how we are contributing to achieve outcomes that align with this City Plan.

Rationale: Why a Community Food Centre is needed in Hamilton?

An alarming number of our neighbours live in a state of food insecurity. Indeed, 1 in 6 Hamiltonians live this way, every day of their lives. Those who are struggling to make ends meet on a low-income face multiple challenges, including not having a place at discussion tables. The Community Food Centre model believes that change happens through identifying the inequities in our system that create poverty, and in engaging those community members to be a voice for change. We use food as a tool to engage with people and believes everyone deserves a right to good food. Hunger and food insecurity are intimately connected to poverty, inequality, racism, health, the environment, and social relationships.

These past 4 years have demonstrated that community members are interested in engaging in CFC programming. We have seen an increase in activity year after year and heard stories of people making a new friend, finding meaningful work, feeling healthier and happier because of their connection to the Hamilton Community Food Centre.

The purpose of bringing people together to engage in programming:

- Increase access to healthy food
- Increase food skills and knowledge
- Increase social connection
- Increase self-reported physical and mental well-being
- Increase community engagement and empowerment
- Offering leadership and skill development
- Have opportunities to learn from each other and celebrate diverse cultures
- Increase community safety and well-being

Similar to a hospital needing an emergency room as well as rehabilitation services, Neighbour to Neighbour's Community Food Centre focuses on prevention and wellness while continuing to offer the emergency food bank to assist with people's immediate needs.

In addition, the CFC continues to leverage national funding support, bringing millions of dollars into Hamilton through our partnership with Community Food Centres Canada and our own fundraising efforts.

What We are Doing at the Hamilton CFC

Through a dignified and welcoming space, the CFC offers innovative programming for seniors, newcomers, children & youth, families, and individuals. Programs focus on three areas:

- (1) Healthy Food Access - nourishing meals and affordable produce markets
- (2) Food Skills - intercultural community kitchens, workshops, child and youth kitchens, gardens & growing food
- (3) Education and Engagement - community action training, advocacy office (systems navigation), civic and community engagement, workshops examining race, poverty, food justice and empowerment.

Program Summary			
	2017	2018	2019
Total Number of Visits to the CFC	12,041	20,022	23,276
Healthy Meals Served & Sent Home	7,336	11,937	15,031
Healthy Snacks Served	1,424	1,880	1,540
Kids Club & Youth Programs - Total number of engaged children and youth	31	36	133
Community Kitchens - Total participant contacts	942	1,843	1,899
Community Advocacy Office - Total Visits, workshops, trainings, and systems navigation visits	2,363	3,845	3,080
Wellness and Fitness Sessions - Total Participant Contacts (primarily older adults)	697	2,033	4,916

Hamilton Community Garden Network - Program of N2N				
	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total Number of Garden Locations Supported Annually in the City of Hamilton	101	99	94	63*
Number of Garden Coordinators	50	50	50	50
Number of Community Members in Gardens	1140	1285	1729	958**
Total Gardener Contacts; Consults and Inquiries	n/a	353	513	523
Type of Gardens Across the City of Hamilton				
Plot Garden	26	23	21	19
Youth/School	13	14	13	0
Donation	3	8	9	9
Victory	17	10	8	6
Communal	8	6	4	4
City Housing + Tenant	34	36	37	23
Other	0	2	2	2

*2020 reduced numbers mainly due to school gardens (temporary) & city housing closures during pandemic.

**55% of previous year due to pandemic restrictions including only one family member tending to plot, not to bring children with you to garden, no events or programming held in gardens.

Special Events and Presentations			
	2017	2018	2019
Total Number of Participant Visits at Special Events and Presentations	1094	1238	1412

Impacts (from our Annual Program Survey Report, 2019 & 2020)

- 99% report feeling that they belong to a community at the CFC
- 91% say that the CFC provides them with an important source of healthy food.
- 75%+ say that their physical and/or mental health has improved as a result of engaging in CFC programs
- 60% report being more involved in the Hamilton community
- 78% of participants surveyed said they have kept in touch with friends made at the CFC during the pandemic.

"I came to meet other people and improve my English and learn other cultures"

"My favourite thing to do is chop tomatoes"

"It's fun and I get to learn a lot of stuff" - kids club participants

"As a stay at home mom, coming here to talk to people definitely makes me mentally healthier than staying at home alone"

"I like coming here because the people here are very nice. The chef is very good and I've met a couple of new friends"

"Connecting with N2N staff has been very helpful. As a new garden it is helpful to be put in touch with resources and others that may have advice for us"

Partnerships

A key aspect of our success is the partners with whom we work:

- City of Hamilton's Public Health - *Welcome Baby, Language Exchange, Immigrant Quit smoking Clinics, Flu Clinics, Cancer Screening Bus, Food Handler Certification Tests*
- John Howard Society - *Achieves youth program*
- YWCA - *Fitness & Wellness sessions for older adults*
- Wesley Urban Ministries - *Kids in the Kitchen*
- McMaster University - *Catalyst Grants and Community Engagement Projects*

- Dundas Valley School of Art – *Children’s Art Expression Sessions*
- Hamilton Community Legal Clinic – *Free Legal Clinics*
- Righting Relations – *Events and Education Sessions*
- Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg – *Events and Education Sessions*

Research for 2020 – 2022

- The Hamilton Community Food Centre is currently implementing a research project “Market Greens” in partnership with Community Food Centres Canada, Good Roots Consulting and Terrapin Social Finance.
- This project engages Hamilton residents who have been identified by their health provider as having cardiometabolic risk factors to determine whether the intervention of having access to free fresh produce improves health outcomes. We look forward to sharing results with the City of Hamilton as we determine impact.

Funding

- \$1.5 million to date from Community Food Centres Canada, with another 5 year commitment for 2021-2026
- \$1.4 million has been raised by N2N’s own fundraising
- During COVID, an additional \$85,000 in grocery gift cards have been distributed to residents through the CFC’s contribution to emergency food
- \$1 million to date from the City
- We are seeking matching funds from the City for another 5 years, for 2021-2026