



Hamilton

INFORMATION REPORT

TO: Mayor and Members Board of Health	WARD(S) AFFECTED: CITY WIDE
COMMITTEE DATE: October 21, 2013	
SUBJECT/REPORT NO: Progress Update on Good 2 Go Food Box Pilot Project (BOH13039) (City Wide)	
SUBMITTED BY: Elizabeth Richardson, MD, MHSc, FRCPC Medical Officer of Health Public Health Services Department	PREPARED BY: Mary Ellen Prange (905) 546-2424 Ext. 7336
SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

The Board of Health, at its meeting of October 15, 2012, approved the following:

- (a) That the Easy Food Box one year pilot project, to provide fresh food to 500 single Ontario Works recipients be supported and funded to an amount of \$65,000 to cover the pilot project, administrative costs, public education pamphlet, evaluation, and be funded as follows:
 - (i) \$55,000 from the Social Services Initiatives Reserve, and;
 - (ii) \$10,000 from the Hamilton Poverty Roundtable;
- (b) That the pilot project evaluation be conducted by Public Health Services;
- (c) That the pilot project be carried out through Environment Hamilton and Environment Hamilton be authorized to report back;
- (d) That the City assist in investigating whether the Easy Food Box project can be assisted through the use of City arenas, facilities and through local Food Banks.

OUR Vision: To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities.

OUR Mission: WE provide quality public service that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Values: Accountability, Cost Consciousness, Equity, Excellence, Honesty, Innovation, Leadership, Respect and Teamwork.

Information:

This report provides an update on the progress of the Good 2 Go Food Box (G2GFB), formerly known as the Easy Food Box, pilot project through the first six months of implementation. Challenges experienced and modifications for the remainder of the pilot are presented and discussed. Strengths of the program which have emerged from the evaluation are also identified.

Description of the Program

The G2GFB pilot program began in March 2013 and continues through February 2014. A Service Agreement between the City of Hamilton (represented by Community and Emergency Services) and a service provider (Environment Hamilton) stipulates the terms and conditions for the provision of the food boxes. Schedule A of the Service Agreement specifies that each food box will contain six to eight types of produce that will be worth at least \$15.00, although the cost to the City is \$10.00. Schedule B specifies a breakdown of the budget allocated to the project, which is as follows:

Food for boxes	\$60,000
Administrative costs	\$ 5,000

Vouchers for G2GFBs are distributed to single Ontario Works (OW) clients at the beginning of the month by the OW case managers and redeemed for food boxes by participants at various pick-up locations across the city on the third or fourth Wednesday of that month. Enrolment in the program began with 100 in each of the first three months and is scheduled to progressively increase to 600 by the end of the pilot.

PHS has also developed a public education resource (Appendix), clearly identifying that single OW recipients are most challenged in their ability to purchase healthy food. This resource will be widely disseminated to agencies, service providers and interested individuals across Hamilton.

Evaluation Results of the Pilot Program – The First Six Months

Through the first six months of the pilot, challenges with program implementation have emerged but there have also been successes identified in data collected for the evaluation.

Enrollment and Pick-up Rates

Table 1 presents the total number of participants enrolled in the program in each of the first six months of the pilot and the number and rate of G2GFB picked up each month. The average rate of pick-up in the first six months of the pilot was 52%.

As specified in the service agreement, enrollment in the program for the first three months of the pilot (March, April and May) was 100 participants. For June, July and August planned enrollment was 200. As per the service agreement, enrollment was increased to 200 participants in June, but for July and August it was reduced to 150 participants given pick-up rates remained lower than expected and there were logistical challenges with transferring the unclaimed G2GFBs to food banks.

The number and location of pick-up sites has varied slightly from month-to-month, with a range of 16 to 20 locations in the central/downtown core, north and east end of the city, on the mountain and in Waterdown and Dundas.

Table 1: Enrolment and pick-up rate of G2GFB in first six months of pilot

Month	# participants enrolled	# participants who picked-up food box/ pick-up rate (%)
March	102	46 (45%)
April	98	37 (33%)
May	102	52 (51%)
June	200	110 (55%)
July	151	93 (62%)
August	150	76 (51%)
Total	803	414 (52%)

A telephone survey conducted in August with a sample of participants enrolled in the G2GFB program in June or July revealed that the main reasons for not picking up food boxes (n=40) were: health issues (25%); forgot, lost track of time or went on the wrong day (20%); family issues (17.5%), or did not have, or could not afford transportation to the pick-up location (12.5%).

As stipulated in the service agreement, five or more unclaimed G2GFB at any of the pick-up locations are to be redistributed by the Service Provider to a local food bank. There have been four pick-up locations identified where this requirement has not been met.

Food Box Contents

The contents of the G2GFBs have been consistent from month to month and provide 28 to 32 servings of vegetables and fruit as defined in Canada's Food Guide (see Table 2). This translates into approximately four days' worth of vegetables and fruit for adults.

Typical contents of the G2GFB include: a cucumber, 340g bag of baby carrots, pint of grape tomatoes, 340g bag of iceberg lettuce/ shredded red cabbage/shredded carrots salad mix, 6 bananas, 2-3 oranges, 2-3 apples or nectarines or peaches.

Beginning in September, bagged baby carrots and salad mix were replaced with whole, unpeeled carrots and a head of Romaine lettuce. This has served to alleviate concern with excess packaging and need for refrigeration, provides additional servings of vegetables, and responds to feedback from participants about not liking bagged items.

Food Box Cost

The pilot program aims to provide food boxes with a retail value of \$15 per box.

Average retail costs, as priced in a minimum of three grocery stores, of the contents of the G2GFB in each of the first six months are shown in Table 2. Over the first six months of the pilot project, the retail cost of the G2GFB averages approximately \$11 or \$0.38 per food guide serving of Vegetables and Fruit.

The service provider has identified a challenge with providing the G2GFB for the agreed contracted rate of \$10 per box (wholesale cost) for \$15 worth of fresh produce (retail cost) within the \$5,000 annual administration fee.

The original cost reflected in the service agreement was based on the service provider's experience with the Good Food Box. Additional administrative costs associated with providing the G2GFB have arisen, including communication, mileage/transportation, postage, additional liability insurance and administrative time that the service provider is unable to cover within the approved administration allotment. In order to cover the additional overhead costs, the content of the G2GFB has been reduced in value in order to retain \$1.50 food box. For the first six months, an additional \$1200 has been retained to cover unanticipated administrative costs.

The service provider has reported to the Community and Emergency Services that they are unable to continue with the pilot if they adhere to the \$10 cost per box.

Table 2: Estimated Food Guide Servings (FGS) of Vegetables and Fruit, Average Retail Cost and Average Cost per FGS of G2GFB contents first six months of pilot

Month	FGS Estimate	Average Cost	Average cost per FGS
March	32	\$12.71	\$0.40
April	28	\$11.41	\$0.41
May	29	\$12.06	\$0.42
June-A*	28	\$9.39	\$0.34
June-B*	30	\$10.22	\$0.34
July	30	\$10.08	\$0.34
Aug	30	\$11.35	\$0.38
Average	30	\$11.03	\$0.38

*contents varied between the two weeks of distribution in June.

Client Satisfaction – Program and Food Box Contents

The telephone survey questioned participants about things they liked and did not like about the vegetables and fruit included in the G2GFB. Of those who had picked-up a G2GFB (n=55), 92.7% indicated that there were things that they liked about the G2GFB. Forty percent of participants who had picked up a G2GFB indicated that there were things that they did not like about the G2GFB. Table 3 identifies the top likes and dislikes identified by participants.

Although the sample size was small, the telephone survey conducted with participants (n=80) provides some evidence that the program is having a positive impact on participants. Of those respondents who had picked-up a G2GFB, over half of the respondents (n=29, 52.7%) reported changes as a result of receiving the G2GFB; these included: eating more vegetables and fruit; not needing to buy, or get food, that is not affordable or is not available at food banks; and eating or feeling healthier. Just under half (47.3%) reported that if they did not get the G2GFB, they would have no other way to obtain vegetables and fruit.

Table 3: Aspects about the vegetables and fruit included in the G2GFB that participants liked and did not like

What do you like about the vegetables and fruit in the G2GFB? [reflects responses from those who indicated there was something they liked (n=51)]	What don't you like about the vegetables and fruit in the G2GFB? [reflects responses from those who indicated there was something they did not like (n=22)]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh & good vegetables & fruit (45.1%) • Familiar foods (15.7%) • Contents (13.7%) • Variety of vegetables & fruit (11.8%) • Ready to eat (7.8%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough food (54.5%) • Bagged items (13.6%) • Do not like/allergic to contents (13.6%)

Administrative challenges

Program enrolment is managed by a designated OW case manager (Program Lead) and requires an in-kind contribution of 8 to 12 hours per month. The Program Lead is removed from regular duties in order to manage the G2GFB program administration.

All case managers who enroll clients in the program incur extra administrative work in the registration process, making follow-up phone calls to remind their clients to pick-up the food box and in addressing inquiries and complaints from clients.

Additional administrative demands have been placed on an OW Program Manager and the Director of Employment and Income Support to ensure the terms of the service agreement are being met by the service provider and in responding to operational problems that have arisen from month to month.

The service provider has also identified challenges with operating the program primarily with volunteers. Packing and delivery of food boxes, administration for site coordinators related to pick-up and the transfer of unclaimed food are all functions on which the service provider relies on volunteers. The service provider has reported that they are unable to assign volunteers to collect the G2GFBs from pick-up locations where there are five or more unclaimed.

Strengths of the program

While there have been some challenges encountered during the first six months of the pilot, there have been noteworthy strengths associated with the project to date which have emerged from the program evaluation.

Findings from key informant interviews indicate a strong sense that one of the project's greatest assets is the high level of commitment from key stakeholders (i.e., OW staff, PHS staff, Environment Hamilton, Nutritious Food Plan Committee members, G2GFB site coordinators) both in the operation of the program, and in finding solutions to challenges. Other strengths include the existing infrastructure of OW, and their relationship with their clients, and the structure already in place for Environment Hamilton's Good Food Box Program.

Modifications for Improving the G2GFB Pilot Program

Improving Enrollment and Pick-up Rates and Unclaimed Boxes

To address the issue of low pick-up rates, OW has begun, in October, to over-enroll participants in pick-up locations where there have been consistently high rates of unclaimed food boxes over the first six months. In doing so, pick up rates in those locations can be maximized.

Beginning in October, Community and Emergency Services is working with the Helping Hands program to ensure that the unclaimed food boxes in pick-up locations where are more than five unclaimed food boxes are being transferred to a food bank each month.

Food Box Contents and Cost

Community and Emergency Services wishes to continue the G2GFB pilot project to the end of the term specified in the service agreement (February 2014). Therefore, the service agreement will be amended to reflect the content and cost of food boxes that the service provider has been able to deliver through the first six months of the pilot.

Administrative Challenges

To date, the monthly enrollment/administration process has been onerous on OW staff and volunteer site coordinators. To reduce the administrative burden, OW staff have begun in October, to approve three months of vouchers at one time per eligible participant.

Information sheets for each pick-up location that include pick-up hours, site coordinator contact name and a map have been created and will be distributed along with vouchers to program participants. It is anticipated these will help ease some of the administrative burden for site coordinators and will also serve as a reminder to participants to pick-up their food box.

Summary

The G2GFB pilot project is a response to the lack of adequate income among single OW clients to purchase healthy food, as highlighted in the public education resource (Appendix A). Mid-year reflection on the progress of this pilot project has identified challenges and strengths in process and outcome. Modifications aimed at improving the uptake and satisfaction among participants, streamlining administration and volunteer contributions are being implemented for the second half of the pilot. A full report on the evaluation of the G2GFB pilot project will be completed by mid-2014 and will be the subject of a subsequent Board of Health report.

Appendix

Appendix A – Is Healthy Food Affordable for Everyone in Hamilton?

Is Healthy Food Affordable for Everyone in Hamilton?



What is the cost of healthy food?

Every year, registered dietitians from City of Hamilton Public Health Services conduct the Nutritious Food Basket Survey. In May 2013, the 67 food items that make up the Nutritious Food Basket were priced in seven grocery stores across Hamilton. Together, these 67 food items can be used to prepare a whole week's worth of healthy meals and snacks that fit with recommendations in [Canada's Food Guide](#)¹.

The lowest priced option for each food item in each store was averaged across the seven stores and then totaled to estimate the cost of one week's worth of groceries for people living in Hamilton.

The Nutritious Food Basket does not include convenience foods or non-food items such as dish detergent or toilet paper. It also assumes that people have the time, skills, storage space and equipment needed to prepare and cook low-cost meals. The weekly food cost does not include meals eaten away from home or inviting guests for meals.

In 2013, the weekly cost of a Nutritious Food Basket for a reference family of four (man and woman ages 31-50, boy age 14 and girl age 8) is \$171.21.

¹Health Canada. 2007. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>

Why does the cost of food matter?

The results of the Nutritious Food Basket Survey show what it costs to eat a healthy diet. While food is reasonably priced in Hamilton relative to what people pay in other areas of Ontario and Canada and in other countries, not all Hamiltonians can afford a basic, healthy diet. This is not because food prices are too high, but because people with low incomes do not have enough money to buy healthy food.

Income is one of the best predictors of health. People living on low incomes are more likely to experience depression and disease. Individuals, communities and governments must recognize and deal with the impacts of poverty.

For one month, the estimated cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in 2013 for a reference family of four in Hamilton is **\$741.34**.

To find out how much healthy eating costs for you, go to: www.hamilton.ca/nutrition. Click on 'Healthy Eating Factsheets' and then click on, 'How Much Does Healthy Eating Cost?'



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www.hamilton.ca/nutrition

Adapted with permission from the Huron County Health Unit.








Why can't some people afford healthy food?

People earning minimum wage or receiving Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) often do not have enough money for all of their basic needs. After paying rent, they still have to pay for heat and hydro (if not included in monthly rent), food, transportation, telephone, clothing, laundry, personal care and household items.

When there isn't enough money to cover all of their needs, people are forced to use their food budget to pay for fixed living expenses such as rent, heat, hydro and transportation. Little or no money may be left for buying healthy food. They may skip meals, eat fewer vegetables and fruit, drink less milk, and fill up on cheaper, less nutritious food and beverages. Often, people go hungry. Eating this unhealthy diet increases the risk of chronic illness and poor growth and development in children.

Who can't afford healthy food?

Consider these real-life situations for people living in Hamilton:

	Households with Children				Single Person Households		
	 Ontario Works	 Minimum Wage Earner	 Median Ontario Income	 Ontario Works	 Ontario Works	 ODSP	 Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement
Monthly Income							
Total Monthly Income*	\$2112	\$2711	\$6852	\$1927	\$688	\$1167	\$1499
Monthly Expenses							
Housing** (may or may not include utilities)	\$988 (3 bdrm apt)	\$988 (3 bdrm apt)	\$988 (3 bdrm apt)	\$820 (2 bdrm apt)	\$543 (bachelor apt)	\$694 (1 bdrm apt)	\$694 (1 bdrm apt)
Healthy Food***	\$741	\$741	\$741	\$560	\$249	\$249	\$181
Monthly Income Remaining for Other Expenses	\$383	\$982	\$5123	\$547	-\$104	\$224	\$624
% Income for Housing	47%	36%	14%	43%	79%	59%	46%
% Income for Healthy Food	35%	27%	11%	29%	36%	21%	12%

* 2013 Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) Income Scenarios spreadsheet, North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, July 2013.

** Data received from City of Hamilton Community Services Department, Housing Services Division, July 2013.

*** Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket priced in Hamilton, May 2013.

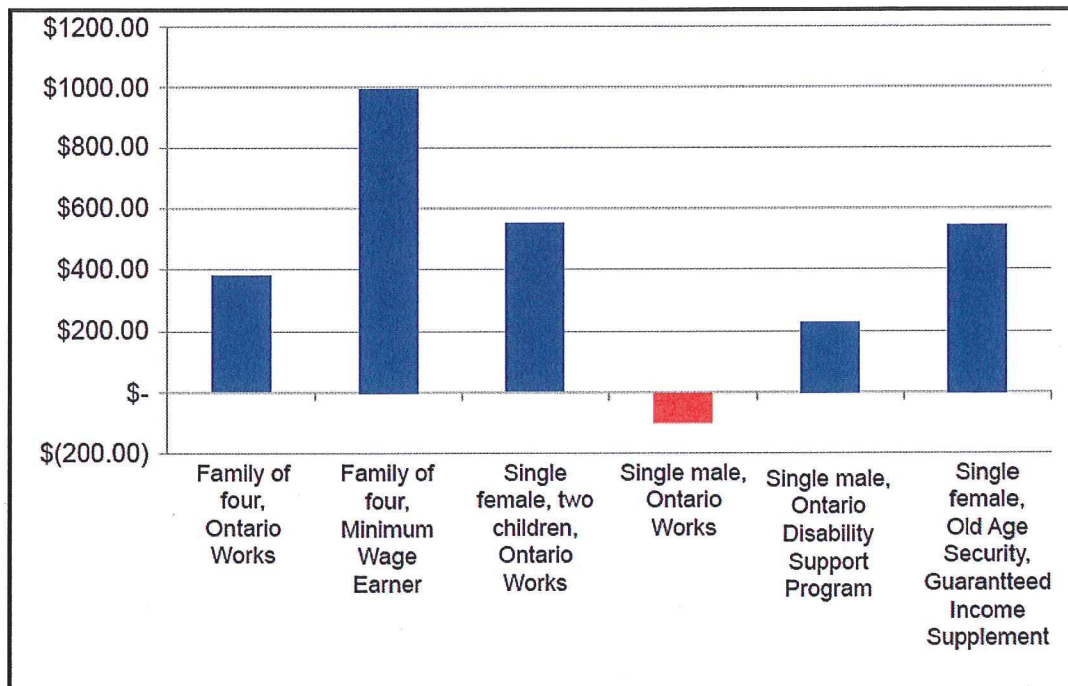
Family of Four = 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50) and 2 children (girl age 8 and boy age 14)

Single Mother (age 31-50) and 2 children (girl age 8 and boy age 14)

Single Male (age 31-50)

Senior Female (age 70+)

The graph below shows the amount of monthly income left after paying for rent and healthy food.



A single male living on Ontario Works in Hamilton would need an additional \$104 a month just to cover the cost of rent and healthy food.

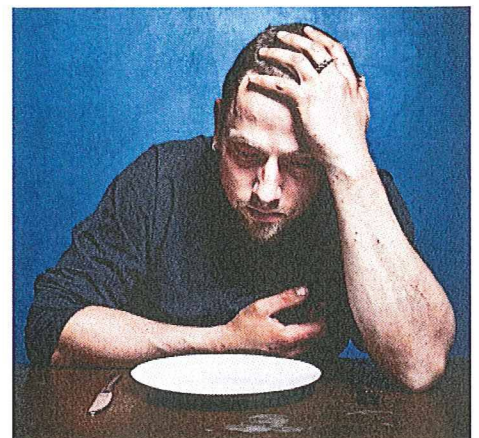
All of the bars on the graph show situations where the individuals and families are living on low incomes.

The worst situation is a single male living on Ontario Works. He would need to spend \$543 (79%) of his monthly income of \$688 on the average rent for a bachelor apartment. Only \$145 remains for all other expenses, including food. The cost of healthy food for a month is \$249, so **there would be a shortage of \$104 and no money for any other expenses.**

The situation is not much better for a single male living on the Ontario Disability Support Program. Eighty per cent (80%) of his monthly income is needed for rent and healthy food, with only \$224 left for all other expenses.

The family of four receiving Ontario Works would only have \$383 for all other expenses including transportation, telephone, clothing, laundry, personal care, household items and school-related expenses.

A family of four with a full-time minimum wage earner appears to be well off in comparison to the family of four receiving Ontario Works, but still has only \$982 remaining each month for all other expenses beyond rent and food.



What are the solutions?

Programs such as community gardens, good food boxes, student nutrition programs, community kitchens and community food centres can support healthy eating and also provide social, psychological and community benefits.

But, these programs alone will not solve the problem of low-income households not being able to afford healthy food. **The social safety net must be improved to reduce poverty.**

Actions could include:

- Provincial and federal government investment in building affordable housing
- Establishing a living wage rather than minimum wage
- Increasing social assistance rates
- Offering a healthy food supplement to people receiving Ontario Works
- Increasing employment insurance coverage and benefits
- Providing accessible and affordable child care.

What can individuals and communities do?

All Hamiltonians should have access to sufficient healthy food. And, each of us has a role to play to ensure it. Start by educating yourself about the causes of poverty and then take action.

- Participate in coalitions that advocate for policies to reduce poverty and create a stronger social safety net for Canadians and Ontarians.
- Get involved in programs such as the good food box, food co-operatives, community food centres, student nutrition programs, community gardens and community kitchens.

Want more Information?

Here are some places to go for more information on poverty, food security and community food programs.

Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction <http://hamiltonpoverty.ca/>

Living Wage Hamilton <http://livingwagehamilton.ca/wp/>

25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction <http://25in5.ca/>

Campaign 2000 – End Child and Family Poverty in Canada www.campaign2000.ca/

The Mustard Seed – Hamilton's Cooperative Grocery Store <http://mustardseed.coop/>

Hamilton Community Garden Network <http://hcgcn.ca/>

Hamilton Tastebuds Student Nutrition Collaborative <http://www.tastebudshamilton.ca/>

Food Secure Canada <http://foodsecurecanada.org/>

Community Food Centres Canada <http://www.cfccanada.ca/>

Charity is NOT the answer...

Charitable food programs such as food banks are not a long-term solution. Many people who cannot afford to feed their families will not go to food banks.

More sustainable solutions are needed to change the underlying problem of inadequate income to obtain food in socially acceptable and dignified ways.

The focus must be on eliminating poverty.