
For Information

REPORT TITLE: Update on Brampton Food Banks Data Project 2022

FROM: Janice Sheehy, Commissioner of Human Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update of the results and recommendations of the Brampton Food Banks Data Project.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- On January 9, 2020 Regional Council requested that staff work with Brampton food providers, on a plan to enhance the collection of food bank usage data (Resolutions 2020-12 and 2020-13).
 - The Brampton Food Banks Data project commenced January 2021 with the creation of an advisory and research working group consisting of staff from the Region of Peel, City of Brampton and United Way Greater Toronto, and two representatives from local food banks.
 - The final report titled, “Brampton Food Providers Data Collection Project”, provides the methodology and results of the collection of data in four themes and includes three broad recommendations to build a stronger food sector in Brampton.
 - As a result of the ongoing impact of the pandemic placed on food banks to support vulnerable residents, Regional Council on December 2, 2021, moved a motion to provide \$2M of additional funding to food banks in each of 2022 and 2023 (Resolution Number RCB-2021-74).
 - A Food Security Fund will be initiated to allocate this funding and will provide an opportunity to address findings and recommendations from the Brampton Food Providers Data Collection Project report.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

At the January 9, 2020, Regional Council meeting, the findings of the “Who’s Hungry” report were presented, profiling food bank usage in the Greater Toronto Area. It was noted that Brampton food providers do not have a formal data collection strategy therefore, it is difficult to assess the reach of the system and to identify and address any potential gaps.

As a result, Regional Council requested staff work with the City of Brampton and food organizations on approaches to obtain data to provide a greater understanding of food bank usage in Brampton (Resolution 2020-13).

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The project was paused due to the pressures food banks faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, at the December 3, 2020, Regional Council meeting, a report from the Commissioner of Human Services titled, "Update on Brampton Food Banks Data Project" (Resolution Number 2020-1043) was received for information. That report included a proposed data collection plan as well as an Emergency Food Systems Map that illustrates the relationship between Brampton food bank organizations. At the meeting, it was suggested that future data collection could include questions to clients about their use of food banks and what supporting services they may require.

The project re-commenced January 2021 with the creation of an advisory and research working group consisting of Regional, City of Brampton and United Way Greater Toronto staff, SMD Consulting Inc., Taneja Consulting Inc. and two representatives from local food banks. This team provided strategic advice and direction for the project as well as co-created and conducted a point-in-time exercise. The consultants, funded by United Way Greater Toronto, worked together to provide project management, training and technical expertise including analysis of the survey results.

The Brampton Food Providers Data Collection Project Final Report can be found in Appendix I.

2. Process and Summary of Report Findings

To achieve the project objectives, the consultants utilized a few broad approaches:

- Key Informant Interviews – results of the key informant interviews provided information for the development of the capacity building assessment questionnaire and the point-in-time tools.
- Meetings/Consultations - two meetings were held with members of the Brampton Food Provider Table to learn about agencies, identify challenges they face and get support for the project.
- Point-in-Time Surveys - two point-in-time data collection tools including a survey for service providers to share their stories and experiences and one survey for clients/guests to share their stories and experiences and were open from July 5 to July 31, 2021.

a) COVID-19 Pandemic Challenges

The consultants noted that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the project, specifically, their ability to connect face-to-face with clients and agency staff, leverage existing community events, and visit service providers at their physical locations. The exclusive use of virtual platforms for interviews limited the number of respondents.

Despite the limitations, 18 of 29 service providers participated in key informant interviews and completed the point in time survey, while 1,284 food bank users responded to the client point in time survey. Overall, most service provider respondents felt it was important to share the positive impact they are having to addressing hunger in Brampton. In addition, through the key informant interviews, many providers expressed concerns with data collection due to capacity, limited time, and resources. Smaller providers who are mainly faith-based, only collect data to meet current demand as they are unable to increase their services. Below is a snapshot of agency and user responses.

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b) Snapshot of Providers & Food Bank Users

Snapshot: Food Providers Survey & Key Informant Interview Respondents	
86% work with partners to meet client needs	Greater than 50% require funding to provide services
50% work with partners outside of Brampton	75% received emergency COVID-19 relief funding
63% provide food services solely in Brampton	63% receive municipal funding
Most have been in operation more than 8 years	50% received funding through faith groups

Snapshot: Food Bank Users Survey & Key Informant Interview Respondents	
69% of clients have been accessing services for less than 2 years	43% indicated that better transportation options would improve their access to food
70% have increased their usage during the pandemic	48% of clients receive housing support
67% received services weekly	20% of clients receive employment services
Over 50% used personal vehicles to receive services, 33% public transit and 17% use other methods (rides from friends/family, rideshare, taxis, Transhelp, biking)	14% receive mental health supports

c) Themes

Several themes emerged from the key informant interviews and surveys. These include strong informal networks, food access, systems coordination, data collection and funding.

i. Strong Informal Networks

Key informant interviews identified that food providers have developed a strong informal system of maintaining partnerships, sharing resources, and supporting each other. Partnerships and support from Knight's Table and Regeneration Outreach Community among others, allow the providers to collaborate quickly and are based upon a foundation of committed volunteers. However, providers also indicated that they would like more opportunities to connect and network with each other informally but require support in convening people.

ii. Access to Food

Providers emphasized the need for centralized storage and distribution to better support food procurement, especially for smaller organizations. Securing healthy and culturally appropriate food can also be a challenge, especially when they reported receiving disproportionate donations of less nutritious, high caloric foods.

Food insecurity increased during COVID-19, resulting in higher demand by regular food bank users and new clients. This increased demand was met by other not-for-profit agencies that received emergency funding; however, it is unclear whether these agencies will continue to provide food post-pandemic.

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Food bank users also reported that food security has been a challenge throughout the pandemic. Most respondents reported accessing food bank services for less than three years and identified transportation, access to culturally appropriate and fresh food, and stigma as issues they face when accessing food banks.

iii. System Coordination and Data Collection

As mentioned previously, food providers have a strong informal system for ensuring they have enough food to meet current client needs. However, beyond their general understanding of the need in current catchment areas, most of the respondents do not understand if, or where, there is additional need or gaps in service because they do not collect or formally monitor trends.

iv. Funding

Survey respondents emphasized the need for continued or improved funding. With increased demand due to the social and economic impacts resulting from the pandemic, both clients and providers reported they could experience negative consequences when emergency funding ends. Providers specifically noted they anticipate challenges in securing enough healthy food to meet increased demand. Due to the large number of faith-based providers in Brampton, respondents noted that eligibility requirements may limit their ability to access funding, hence the need for continued centralized distribution of food through Knight's Table and Regeneration Community Outreach.

d) Recommendations

The Brampton emergency food provider sector has worked diligently to address hunger and respond to increased food insecurity resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Providers have responded creatively with new approaches to address the increased need, for example, starting door-to-door delivery for isolated clients.

Using informal partnerships, organized mainly around Knight's Table and Regeneration Outreach Community, the sector appears to meet the needs of their existing clients. However, as Brampton has increased in population, it is possible that there has not been a corresponding increase by some providers to keep pace with that need. In addition, residents experiencing food insecurity may not be aware of available services due to barriers including distance to services, transportation, stigma and discomfort attending food banks from a different faith. Further, while providers know their clients and are responsive to them, they may not have mechanisms in place to monitor social and economic trends that could impact demand for emergency food services.

For several reasons, including capacity, resistance, and lack of resources, not all providers see the value of data collection, beyond basic service usage data. As a result, the recommendations can be summarized into the following categories:

i. Funding & Resources

- a. Funding for food programs must work to reinforce the need to collect demographic data and report on usage, service gaps and emerging trends that may signal changes in food security.
- b. Provide sustainable funding for community infrastructure (refrigeration and storage) that allows smaller grassroots agencies to store perishable and nonperishable food.

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ii. Capacity Building

- a. Assist agencies to access training to increase understanding and uptake of data collection.
- b. Co-design public education campaigns to create awareness of food banks including the types of donations they need.
- c. Provide education around best before versus expiry dates for clients and organizations.

iii. Strengthening the System

- a. Given the significant role Knights Table and Regeneration Outreach Community plays in Brampton's emergency food sector, explore opportunities to formalize their role as system leaders.
- b. Funders and policymakers should work with Knights Table and Regeneration Outreach to identify the supports they require to continue supporting and influencing their smaller food provider partners.

NEXT STEPS

On December 2, 2021, Regional Council moved a motion to provide additional financial support of up to \$4 million for food banks in Peel over 2 years (Resolution Number RCB-2021-74). This funding, to be administered through the Community Investment Program, will assist Peel food providers through 2022/23 with their capital and operational requirements to better serve those in need in Peel Region. It also provides an opportunity to address the findings and recommendations from the Brampton Food Providers Data Collection Project report. At the time of writing this report, eligibility criteria and the process for application were being drafted. It is anticipated that the Food Security Fund will be released before the end of Q1 2022.

Staff will continue working with the Brampton food banks to address the findings in the report. This includes identifying opportunities for collaboration and funding that builds the collective capacity of the sector. In addition, staff will work with United Way Greater Toronto to strengthen the emergency food sector in Brampton, focused on responding to increasing demand for food programs over the short and long-term.

APPENDICES

Appendix I – Brampton Food Providers Data Collection Project Final Report

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