

Overview of case studies

The following case studies provide detail and insight into the range of social service agencies that innovate around food in Toronto. The studies include:

1. A large and small drop-in centre
2. A drop-in centre with an issue-specific focus
3. A faith-based drop-in centre
4. Shelters with a newcomer focus
5. A large multi-service agency with numerous social enterprises
6. A community food system study for an example of integrated agencies that collaborate for solutions to food challenges.

These are drawn from the interviews for the *Finding Food: Community Food Procurement in the City of Toronto* report for Toronto Food Strategy/ Toronto Public Health. Support for this report was provided by the Healthy Communities Fund. Agencies have approved the use of this information in case studies, as well as the photos. Many thanks are due to Shannon Black and PARC for the excellent photos. The photo of the Church of the Redeemer is taken from the church's website.



Starting From Scratch: Case study for issue-focused drop-in centre

Welcome to the 519 Church Street Community Centre

Everything from scratch. Meals prepared by people from the programs. Over 31,000 meals provided every year to people in need. This is the 519 Church Street Community Centre. The two kitchen coordinators are “food animators”, preparing meals, purchasing ingredients, but most of all working with other program coordinators, volunteers, participants in programs and people who have been through the program to cook balanced and healthy meals from scratch, even down to homemade sauces.



History

519 has been around for 35 years, providing services for neighbours and the lesbian, gay, bi, trans and queer (LGBTQ) communities. They are right on Church Street, and provide services for LGBTQ communities including newcomers, families with children (they offer extensive drop-ins for kids and parenting workshops as well). They run Fabernak, a social enterprise restaurant designed to provide training for people facing employment barriers. 60% of the menu is sourced from local farmers and producers. Over 80 community groups meet regularly in the 519 space; altogether, they estimate they receive 160,000 visits each year from about 30,000 unique individuals. Their meal program is slightly below the average size for Toronto drop-in programs, making it a mid-size program.

Assets

The 519 kitchen has some budget, averaging about \$1.35/ meal (slightly below the average for drop-in programs' food budgets). They still have to look for the best prices first, but combine that with an insistence on healthy ingredients and balance in the food. They manage, despite the large number of meals, to meet a variety of specific dietary needs, including needs for people transitioning (less meat, more grains and legumes). They also work to offer well-balanced vegetarian options that meet nutritional needs. They count themselves lucky to have a walk-in refrigerator, walk-in freezer, a second refrigerator, and a room for dry storage.

Their biggest asset is the people who are nurtured through their services and participate in meal planning and preparation during or after their program participation. Their goal is to have all meals led by participants as much as possible. In the Sunday drop-in, they work to get as many people into the kitchen as they can. Some people are especially enthusiastic about cooking, and are asked to participate in other programs as well as their own. Some coordinators will have come through a program and return to offer their services. Staffing hours for the two food animators are only a little over full-



time for all the programs, one hot meal a day five days with two on Sunday—not counting all the snacks, which may be tantamount to a cold meal.

Food Procurement and Menu-planning

The food purchases are coordinated through the staff; menu planning is also coordinated. The animators will work with people to figure out the challenges in cooking entirely from scratch, as well as achieving well-balanced healthy meals. In addition to Gordon Food Service, they purchase from FoodShare, and from the local supermarket when they need something small or didn't receive something they ordered. They also receive donations from Second Harvest once a week. Their purchases are focused on meat, dairy and eggs, which are hard to get in the quantity and quality they need from the donations. Despite the limited budget and time, they have a commitment to local food solutions, as is evident in Fabernak's menu.

They have also worked closely with their main suppliers, after some road bumps that indicated a need for more communication. They had frequently received the wrong thing because the supplier (a national food service company) has so many items; ordering can be complex. One time they got a huge quantity of expensive compostable cutlery. Another time they had to try to persuade the other programs to use celery in their meals because the full case contained many more heads than one program needed. They now provide lots of clarity around exactly what they want, and work closely with their salespeople to do the orders (for large distributors, they find ordering by phone works best). They invited their sales representative to visit, and the orders got much easier after that; the meeting gave her a much better idea of what the 519 kitchen needs, and that it is different from the restaurant downstairs.

Conclusion

519 offers an excellent example of a successful and high quality meal program that is well-rooted in the community. Despite the size, they rely on participation from service users at every point, delivering a food program that not only fills bellies but can also build new skills and self-esteem. They have not had to compromise in ingredients to do this; in fact, their report shows one of the meal programs that adheres most carefully to food guidelines, and shapes their meals to fit their clients. Their model demonstrates that dedication to community engagement does not necessarily result in a more expensive program, nor in compromises around nutrition.



“Food makes it all happen”: Faith-based drop-in meal program case study

Welcome to the Church of the Redeemer



Mobilizing hundreds of volunteer hours every week to shop, plan meals, prepare and serve, the Church of the Redeemer in the Toronto core feeds over 100 people every day of the week. They report that “food is part of everything we do”. The daily meal program offers a substantial hot breakfast and lunch; there is a community kitchen that cooks two meals and focuses on healthy meal preparation in the kind of facilities common to the marginally housed. All programs have food of some kind. All the programs except the community kitchen are drop-in.

Food Philosophy

They see food as vital: “Food helps make things special...It really does bring people together in a really beautiful way...It nourishes us and gives us something in common: we’re all eating the same food, we’re all in the same room”. They have a social justice and advocacy approach at the Church. The website states “as Jim Wallis (preacher, founded Sojourners”) once said, ‘You can’t just pull bodies out of the river and not send somebody upstream to see what or who is throwing them in’.” They work to help people as individuals but also work for systemic change, recognizing that emergency food isn’t enough when social assistance levels are too low for people to buy food.

Assets

They have worked hard to break down the division between volunteers preparing food and those who are eating. They are getting people “off the floor” and into the kitchen to help. They see food as a powerful tool to reduce the ethos of “us and them”. Each “kitchen day” is completely volunteer run, with anywhere from 6-12 volunteers making it happen. In addition, specific volunteers go to a store in their neighbourhood and shop for the program once each week. They get an e-mail from the coordinator the night before with a list of what is needed (based on what is in storage and what came on the truck). Altogether they estimate they get about 200 volunteer hours per week in the meal program.

Food Procurement

Like many faith communities they have a broad network of donations and volunteers. Numerous organizations provide food through their partnerships, including Second Harvest, Daily Bread, Starbucks, All The Best, Rabba Foods, Whole Foods, a nearby cupcake shop, and one place they can call on when they are short of meat. With a budget of only about .52/ meal, they work to find the best prices and still achieve a healthy meal. But supply can vary; one week everything was vegetarian. Their meals are 80-100% made from raw

“Food makes it all happen. Food brings people together. It creates a neutral space; people might not feel they can go to other spaces. Food is the heart and soul of everything we do.”

ingredients (they report that only the yogurt at breakfast is not made from scratch, as that would be quite an undertaking). They are rich in desserts, however, as many of the donations they receive are sweets, but their goals are as much healthy food as possible on a limited budget. As with almost every program in Toronto, they wish they had more space, like a walk in freezer: “space would be a beautiful thing...”.

Conclusion

The faith-based network of supply and volunteer labour is a key asset. Other faith-based organizations relied on similar networks to carry out their food programs. In addition, Church of the Redeemer has a clear understanding of food as a place for change for people and community. They have committed to change through food; their model shows the power of faith-based solutions to mobilize people to act, and to engage people in systemic change in the midst of urgent primary needs.



Social Enterprise Incubation and Solution: Case study for large multi-service agency

Welcome to the Learning Enrichment Foundation (LEF)



A passer-by would see the outside is nondescript, a warehouse or perhaps an old school. But once inside, the walls open into a colourful space that is both vast and welcoming. LEF is bright and light, with a variety of colours and murals. The walls are minimal, not necessarily reaching the ceiling, and set in many cases with full-length glass. High windows in the old industrial space give the community centre an unusually airy feeling, full of natural light.

There is a large multi-purpose commercial kitchen on one side, with meal service for 17 childcare centres and other groups, a Cook's Training program, and a cafeteria for people working and visiting LEF. The number of organizations and social enterprises housed here is impressive: food and nutrition projects, childcare, a bike repair shop that takes care of the fleet of police bikes and refurbishes donated bikes for people who need them, other employment projects, settlement support, a variety of youth programs (Spoken Word with Urban Arts, Boys Club, Dance Group, Zumba with Urban Arts, Community Kitchen, and Biz Camp, to name a few). One has the sense here that one is surrounded by projects with social purpose and a wealth of innovative ideas that make society a better place for all.

History

The Learning Enrichment Foundation began in the late 1970's as a response to economic crisis in the city of York. It was started by a group of community members, and began with a multi-cultural theatre for children. The centre rapidly diversified. They are currently an important model for community economic development, built on the needs and opportunities in the local community. People can go to LEF for training and certification in a range of topics, including food, warehouse skills, business management, bicycle assembly and repair, and babysitting.

Goals of the program

Their goals are not just to offer services, but to provide integrated training in all programs to facilitate future employment and enterprise development for participants.

Food program

In the childcare and before and after school programming, they provide 1000 meals per day. The cafeteria provides



about 100 meals each day for staff, volunteers and visitors to the centre. Through their Second Harvest kitchen they provide a Cook's Training program that provides 500 meals a day to various homeless shelters. They also house a successful Good Food Market, which attracts about 65 people each week. The market provides affordable produce from FoodShare, and also food from local enterprises. The food service has four full-time workers and various part-time staff and interns/ students. At any one time there will be at least ten students in training in the program. Their only limitation to expanding or offering incubation for food businesses is that the kitchen is rarely unused.

Food procurement system

They rely on Sysco as well as a variety of other suppliers: FoodShare (for the market), William Eakin, Tatangelo's, Reliable, Mr. Dairy and Second Harvest (who supplies the ingredients for the Harvest Kitchen). These relations are long-standing and do not tend to change. They are however reviewing suppliers to find local and sustainable options and to look at options for social procurement.



Menu-planning and Service

The food is planned in advance with input from a dietician; regular menus are on a monthly rotation, and reviewed every six months to a year. They increased the health value of the menu five years ago. They have not changed the menu entirely, but switched to healthier versions of favorite items. For instance, they still have pizza, but they make it themselves and put vegetables on it, and real cheese. It sells out. New recipes that are more flavourful seem to get positive responses, although changing the menu takes time that they do not always have.

Assets

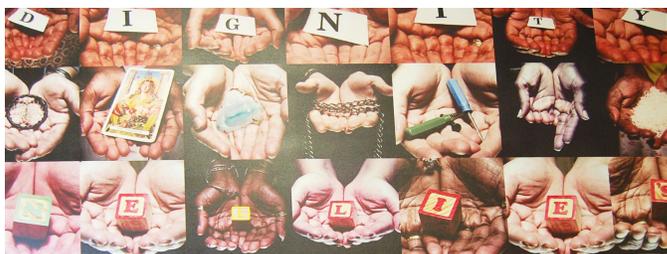
LEF has a rich array of assets as well as an organizational practice that ensures, through training and mentoring, that the asset pool is stable and always renewing. Where some agencies struggle with losing key workers once they have been trained, the more formal training at LEF is integrated into the cost of the service; as one person moves on to full employment, there are others ready to take their place. The LEF food programming is diversified, and includes many peer workshops around nutrition and health as well as the hands-on training program. In general, their food is provided for a fee. The budget, while still meager, gives them a wider range of opportunity (more staff, more choice in food purchasing) than organizations that rely on donations and grants. LEF also now houses Social Enterprise Toronto, which works with important food social enterprises in the city such as Delightfully Yours, Raging Spoon and Paintbox Bistro in Regent Park.

Conclusion

A tour of LEF is an inspiration for what can be done with food. A model for community economic development arose here from economic crisis. It can plant the seeds for similarly robust responses elsewhere in the city.

Producing more with less: Case study for small drop-in centres

Welcome to Nellie's



Nellie's Community Support and Outreach Program is a drop-in service, connected but separate from Nellie's shelter service. It is an excellent example of the determination and challenges of a relatively small program; the program's experience is typical of programs throughout the city. The space is very small, and produces an astonishing variety of supports with very limited infrastructure.

History

Nellie's is a multi-service agency providing support and service for women and children experiencing violence of all kinds: physical, emotional, mental, social and economic. Approximately 50% of their clients are seniors, 40% young or middle-aged, and 10% are teens and children. They have been on the forefront of fighting domestic violence; in 2013, they celebrated their 40th birthday. The 36 bed shelter is over 100 years old. They are currently raising money for a new shelter with more beds as the current location is in physical disrepair.

Food program and Food procurement system

The Community Support program serves approximately 80 people each week at the drop-in on a budget of \$100/ week. Snacks are provided through various programs as well. The Community program has been unable to install a full-fledged kitchen; it would be cost-prohibitive to install an exhaust system that would achieve permitting approvals (it would have to vent to the roof from the first floor). Meals are dependent on various small appliances (toaster oven, etc.). Despite the small size, they encourage the involvement of clients and consult with them on the development of the menu. Food is generally donated, and some arrives frozen, only needing reheating. They are not able to work with fresh food much given the constraints and permits of the kitchen area. They emphasize the importance of the program however; they find the need is increasing. The community presumption that there is not actually a need for food provision is a systemic issue for them, affecting everything from community perception to the availability of funding. They say they "need people to see how big the issue is".

Donations come from FoodShare, Front Door Organics and local vendors. All food is delivered or available within walking distance. Volunteers and the program coordinator prepare the food, although they encourage client participation as well.

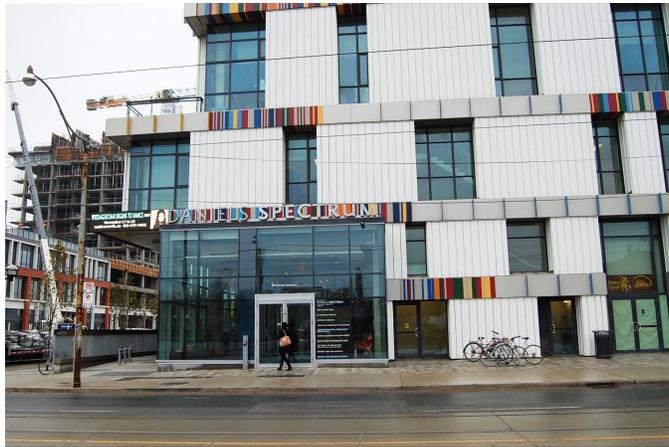
Assets

Although Nellie's has identified a key community need and provides a service to meet it, their main assets are determination and compassion. Infrastructural assets are few beyond the key human resources, the generosity of the donors and the small budget for programming and food that comes from United Way. Despite these challenges, however, Nellie's has persisted for forty years (and longer for the shelter); a testament both to the local need for the program and the commitment of the organization.

Innovation in Networks: Case study of a community food system

Welcome to the Regent Park Food Partnership

Regent Park is home to a web of interacting and complementary food programs. Here you have, for instance, the new building that houses ArtHeart, a long-lived arts organization that provides food to the hungry; the building is gaily assembled as if from blocks; here on the western corner blooms the Paintbox Bistro, a new social enterprise café. Down the street and south stands Dixon Hall, a well-established and vibrant settlement



centre that is committed to food programs as part of the success of their housing programs. The Toronto Christian Resource Centre (TCRC) occupies another central location, combining meals and drop-in services with a housing project in a beautiful new building full of art, light and wood. Other agencies are in the area as well.

As the Regent Park revitalization got under way, a coalition was convened to provide input and guidance for the developers. A community benefit clause for permit approval meant the developer (Daniels) had helped to catalyze food enterprises and food-based development; they have been a willing partner for community

innovation around food. From this plethora of services and partners, a significant new collaboration has arisen in form of the Regent Park Food Partnership (RFPF), a group which includes TCRC, Dixon Hall, Salvation Army Gateway, Regent Park Community Health Centre, and a representative from Daniels as well as a public health nurse from the City.

History

From the TCRC website: “Regent Park is Canada’s largest and oldest social housing community. Built in 1949 it was home to 2083 households, with more than 8300 residents. 90 different languages are spoken; 73% of the adult residents are underemployed; 12% are university educated in Canada and more than 63% have university educations from outside of Canada. 100% however, live in poverty, including more than 5000 youth and children”. The revitalization has meant a commitment from the city, with Toronto Community Housing, to rebuild the aging units. The plan is to create a better layout with mixed income and new retail businesses while retaining all the rent geared to income units in Regent Park or nearby.

Many organizations in Regent Park have a significant and long history. TCRC was launched in 1964. ArtHeart is 22 years old. Dixon Hall began operations in 1929, starting out as a soup kitchen. Other active agencies nearby (South Riverdale and Moss Park areas) include Nellie’s, Woodgreen, the Regent Park Community Health Centre, Ralph Thornton Centre and Mustard Seed (Sisters of St. Joseph). St. John’s Bakery, a





long-standing social enterprise project of St. John the Compassionate Mission straddles the area between South Riverdale and Regent Park. The Salvation Army Gateway has been a leader in what one person calls the new “food ecosystem” in Regent Park. A large Out of the Cold program operates out of St. Patrick’s church, offering 450 meals every Sunday and 75 overnight beds, supported by Dixon Hall. Dixon Hall has recently integrated its services with the large Mid-Toronto Community Services agency north of Regent Park. Dixon Hall also operates a large housing unit at Dixon Neighbourhood Homes. As one staffperson remarked, “moving people into housing is one thing; having them stay there and feel like we’re supporting them in creating a home is another thing. And food is really central to that”.

Food programs

The strength of the RFPF partnership may come partly from a history of working together, as well as from the expertise of communities that have historically met hardship with food innovation. The community has had community gardens for years; ArtHeart operated one on the grounds of Forty Oak (TCRC’s community housing and hub). TCRC has coordinated three of the five community gardens in the area. A

Farmers’ Market started last year through various partners. Paintbox Bistro has provided food for ArtHeart events. Dixon Hall Employment Centre is also the source for the café’s staff. They are receiving support and expert input for the new bake oven project from St. John’s Bakery (a social enterprise founded in 2001).

Organizations also work with the Regent Park CHC to do education around diabetes and to review the menus for nutrient levels and health impact. The Regent Park CHC rents the kitchen at TCRC every couple of weeks for a diabetes prevention program. They also provide training at ArtHeart. The breakfast program at Dixon Hall is integrated with health and nutrition workshops as well as other topics. Dixon Hall has a Food Ambassadors program. The Ambassadors help in the kitchen and get food handling certification. They also provide outreach to help people in the community find out about the food programs and opportunities in Regent Park. The United Church has provided substantial support in Regent Park through TCRC, and provides the land for the agency’s Forty Oak housing, hub and the next door TCRC building.

When the opportunity to catalyze more activity around food came up, the group was ready. Daniels was required to provide green space for community garden activities in exchange for approval to develop lots that had been used for community gardens in the past. The large park beside the Aquatic Centre is now the future home of a large community garden led by TCRC, a greenhouse project led by Green Thumbs Growing Kids and a bake oven project led by Paintbox Bistro and Dixon Hall. These projects were a result of an RFP offered by the Regent Park Food Partnership.

TCRC has also recently begun to expand into a community food centre with the help of Community Food Centres Canada (a project of the founders of The STOP Community Food Centre). This has increased their capacity, beginning with the hiring of a trained chef to relieve the drop-in coordinator from cooking meals and managing the drop-in at the same time. There is also an edible canopy plan for Regent Park, with green rooftops and fruit trees. One new rooftop garden project hopes to engage ArtHeart to provide the art for the garden in exchange for fresh

“We need more structural change, not just entrenching the system more and more, [with] the food bank and the emergency meal program provision; it’s tricky, where should we most put our efforts?”



produce. Local hiring clauses require new Regent Park businesses to hire locally; so FreshCo, as one person describes it, is now Regent Park throughout.

TCRC has conducted a community consultation as part of the development of the new Community Food Centre. They wanted to identify the food programming people wanted, and also to identify existing programs in order not to duplicate services. A seniors' group from a nearby Toronto Community Housing is eager to have access to a facility for a community kitchen; housing support workers are looking for education around basic healthy eating for the residents; and there will be more programs for families.

Food procurement system



Agencies in the area rely largely on donations. These come from Second Harvest and Daily Bread, but also from local supporters; ArtHeart gets bread donated from Ace Bakery, and receives donations from the Hilton's breakfast buffet as well. Their food is oriented to health, with a strong showing of vegetarian and vegan options. TCRC has had its own van for purchasing at the terminal in the past, though they no longer do that. In recent years they have relied on grocery stores. The new chef has a number of existing contacts for supply that he has brought with him; he uses Wholesale Club, Costco, and a cash and carry. The expertise in purchasing has meant their dollars are stretching farther. Dixon Hall's shelter

relies on a local Ethiopian catering company for their meal services. The food is cooked at the shelter rather than brought in for reheating, so there is the opportunity for engagement with the shelter staff and residents even though the meals are not prepared by staff or residents. While the agencies may have low budgets for food, their impact and ability to innovate to address systemic challenges has been astounding.

Although each agency has developed its own approach to procurement, collaboration has made the farmers' market, shared urban garden, bake oven and greenhouse projects possible. In Regent Park, from the new and old social enterprises to the small market store on TCH property that sells ethnocultural foods from the terminal, entrepreneurship, collaboration and innovation are everywhere.

"The drop ins are doing so much for so little. Any kind of investment would go a really long way towards bringing more healthy food into these spaces."

Assets and Conclusion

The greatest asset in the area seems to be this well-knit network of expertise, innovation and interchanges. When TCRC's building was under construction, they were able to operate out of a number of other spaces to maintain their large food program. The bake oven program may start at Paintbox Bistro, but can access the park bake oven in the summer, and the TCRC kitchens as well if needed. The context of repeated and expanding collaborations means that the community has a strong and flexible understanding of shared projects built on experience rather than theory. The partnerships have engaged every level of stakeholder, from local residents to the city to private, non-profit and charitable organizations. With few local financial resources they have been able to accomplish as much or more than neighbourhoods with more local wealth and less co-operation.



Your First Home in Canada: Refugee shelter case study

Welcome to “your first home in Canada”



“We serve the best food in Toronto, compared to other shelters, because most people are newcomers”. This case study combines program information from more than one refugee shelter in Toronto. The names are removed to protect confidentiality. Other general shelters also may house many newcomers.

In the case of refugee focused-organizations, the food becomes an important point of gathering and familiarity. Some studies have shown a pattern of reduced health in newcomers over the first few years, indicating that their home diets were probably more healthy than the standard Canadian diet (see *The Global City* from Toronto Public Health and Access Alliance 2011). Various agencies report a high demand for fresh and healthy food specifically from newcomer populations. Almost 30% of the agencies of all kinds reported a need for access to more ethnocultural food.

History

Refugee shelters are a fairly new phenomenon, though refugees have probably sought temporary emergency shelter in the past. The oldest ones in Toronto were established in 1989. As the claim process has become longer, the length of people’s stay has also been extended. The refugee centres, in addition to three meals and two snacks each day, will offer a variety of services for settlement and other issues.

Food program

One centre reports variations in their menus over the years that are in tune with the historical patterns of refugee claims. The ability to adapt to Canadian diets varies; one shelter reported the rapid exodus of North Korean refugees and suspects that dislike of the food was a key factor. Right now, people from East and West Africa predominate in at least one shelter. One shelter for women reported that the people from East Africa preferred to take ingredients from the kitchen and cook their own recipes in the residents’ kitchen. Shelters of all kinds will sometimes set aside time for residents to cook for themselves and each other. This provides engagement from residents in the operations of the house, as well as giving the people a chance to eat more familiar food. In some cases, as many agencies report, they will provide food, with or without a fee, to ex-residents and clients; once people pay for housing, there is nothing left for food. One staffperson at a refugee shelter says “we are not denying food, no matter what...”.

Food procurement system

As shelters, they can be independent, city-run, or city-funded but independent in food purchasing. Budgets tend to be reasonable though not lavish. Procurement practices vary widely; one buys the majority of the food from Sysco, accepts donations from Daily Bread, and offers a fairly straight-forward Canadian menu. Another refugee agency purchases ingredients from the Ontario Food Terminal, accepts donations from Second Harvest, and cooks everything from scratch. This organization would also like to be able to offer a community kitchen to train people to cook and to budget for food. They see the lack of cooking skills as a barrier to settlement. The only common denominator seems to be the need for halal

meat; in general shelters, staff struggles with the concern of residents that the halal meat has been mixed with other meat. Some organizations solve this by offering only halal meat; the price seems to be similar if purchased from dedicated distributors.

Assets

Refugee and newcomer-focused shelters, like other shelters, tend to have fairly stable funding. They may recognize the wealth of expertise among their clients, and sometimes mobilize this expertise to make the kitchen program more effective. Shelters are unlikely to permit residents in the kitchen for food safety and other reasons, but many of them seek to provide cooking opportunities in secondary kitchens or on weekends. It is clear from interviews that newcomers bring an important commitment to advocacy for better food; often they are more accustomed to high vegetable and fibre diets, and demand that from their first home in Canada.

Conclusion

The refugee shelters and shelters with a preponderance of newcomers have an important asset for the community food sector in their knowledge, expertise and advocacy for fresh and healthy food. Their determination to eat well can lead to taking charge of meal provision themselves, and demanding better food from the central kitchen. The newcomer communities are a source of affordable and healthy solutions for food that can improve the diets and health of all Canadians.

