

Root causes of local hunger made obvious by pandemic - Lindsay Advocate

By Lindsay Advocate

Echoes provincial pattern



The most common reason given for visiting local food banks is the high cost of housing. Following close behind are medical expenses, unemployment, low wages, not enough working hours, and the high cost of food.

The pandemic has compounded these issues, according to a media release from Kawartha Lakes Food Source, but income insecurity has been on the rise and food bank use has been increasing since 2017. That's according to the newest Feed Ontario's Hunger Report, just released.

Kawartha Lakes Food Source's findings are similar and, like the Hunger Report, their data show that 70 per cent of Kawartha Lakes food bank visitors cite social assistance, including Ontario Disability Support Program, Ontario Works, or Old Age Security, as their primary source of income.

Feed Ontario recommends building a stronger social safety net by investing in social programs, aligning Ontario's social assistance rates with the poverty line of the recipient's community, and adjusting rates annually with inflation.

There is a clear need for social change when nearly two in three Ontario food bank

visitors have less than \$100/month left after paying for housing and utilities.

When it comes to housing, 75 per cent of local food bank visitors are rental or social housing tenants and nearly 70 per cent are single parent or single adult households. The cost of shelter, let alone food, is hard to sustain on one income. Feed Ontario recommends investing in affordable and supportive housing by expanding the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit.

To help address employment-related factors contributing to food insecurity, Feed Ontario recommends connecting people to quality employment by improving labour laws and supports for workers, including increasing the number of sick days, promoting access to employment rights and benefits programs regardless of work type, and reinstating the right to refuse last-minute work requests.

Employment in the rural setting of Kawartha Lakes comes with added transportation challenges and sparse childcare options.

KLFS endorses the 2021 Hunger Report's call to action to bring lived experience to the centre of policy and program design and recommends passing Bill 60, the *Ministry of Community and Social Services Amendment Act (Social Assistance Research Commission)*, 2018.

The food insecurity crisis is worsening, says Food Source, and requests that readers help bring anti-poverty platforms to the forefront of the 2022 provincial and municipal elections. They recommend advocating for policy changes by contacting your MP, MPP, and municipal representatives by email, phone, or social media.

Kawartha Lakes Food Source will continue to support short-term challenges while advocating for long term policy changes.